

Frequently Asked Questions:

AB 839 – Putting Breakfast First

AB 839 is designed to put students and breakfast first by bringing much-needed and much-deserved attention to the health, academic, and fiscal benefits of the School Breakfast Program.

Have questions? Please contact Tia Shimada at 510-433-1122 x 109 or tia@cfpa.net

How will AB 839 help improve school breakfast programs?

AB 839 is not a mandate requiring that any schools operate school breakfast or implement specific practices for serving school breakfast. Instead, AB 839 will focus much-needed and much-deserved attention on the benefits of the federal School Breakfast Program by:

1. Including public, data-driven discussions about school breakfast in the school-board approval process for the Consolidated Application.
2. Linking these discussions with school board affirmations to change school breakfast practices or maintain the status quo.
3. Enabling school districts to share their affirmations and related information with the California Department of Education via the Consolidated Application.

Research shows that school breakfast programs can positively affect student health, nutrition, and academic achievement, as well as district finances. Consequently, all district stakeholders from parents to teachers to school board members should have an opportunity to participate in decisions affecting these programs.

What is the Consolidated Application?

The Consolidated Application (ConApp) is an electronic document required of districts that elect to apply for certain state and federal categorical funds, including Title 1 funds. Districts that choose to submit the ConApp must have the document approved by their local governing school board. Through this approval process, many school districts meet annually to consider the low-income students they serve. This presents an excellent opportunity for districts to discuss the School Breakfast Program and its potential to support low-income students. At the same time, integrating these discussions about breakfast programs into the ConApp approval process will not undermine or delay school districts' access to ConApp-related funds.

Can school boards afford to comply with AB 839 in this difficult fiscal climate?

AB 839 builds on three existing systems: (1) ongoing public school board meetings; (2) schools' current collection of data about student income and school meal participation; and (3) the Consolidated Application. Integrating these existing systems into AB 839 is intended to

address concerns about local costs by streamlining meeting and reporting requirements.

As a result of the discussions generated by AB 839, school districts opting to implement strategies that increase school breakfast participation will draw down additional federal funds in the form of per meal reimbursements. In this way, AB 839 can have a positive fiscal impact on school district funding.

What state costs are associated with AB 839?

To mitigate costs associated with AB 839, the bill was amended during the Assembly Appropriations process. The amendments tie discussions and reporting about school breakfast to the existing Consolidated Application process.

As amended, AB 839 will trigger changes to the Consolidated Application itself. There are two key indications that these changes are technologically and fiscally feasible. First, the Consolidated Application is frequently modified. Second, the modifications are executed by personnel within California Department of Education, not an outside contractor.

Which schools will be discussed under AB 839?

AB 839 applies to school districts that elect to submit a Consolidated Application, which is required to access certain types of state and federal categorical funding for education. More specifically, for districts submitting the Consolidated Application, the bill applies to non-charter, public schools that do not operate the School Breakfast Program or that have very low student participation in the program. Schools will be identified as having “very low participation” in the School Breakfast Program if:

- 20 percent or fewer of the site’s low-income students who participate in school lunch also participate in school breakfast and/or
- 15 percent or fewer of the site’s enrolled low-income students participate in school breakfast.

These percentages fall far below state averages.

How does AB 839 relate to improving academic achievement, closing the achievement gap, and similar priorities in public education?

AB 839 is directly related to the California Department of Education’s priorities of supporting continuous improvement in student achievement and closing the achievement gap. Research shows that eating breakfast is associated with improved grades, test scores, and cognitive performance. Research also shows that effective school breakfast programs can decrease tardiness, absenteeism, student disciplinary issues, and trips to the school nurse for hunger-related symptoms, all of which increase the amount of time students spend in class engaging in instruction.

AB 839 helps connect the dots with serving the academic, health, and nutritional needs of low-income students:

- The Consolidated Application allows school districts to access state and federal categorical funds, including funds intended to provide low-income students with equal opportunities to reach their full potential.
- The School breakfast Program is designed to meet the nutritional needs of all students, particularly low-income students who may not otherwise have access to a healthy breakfast.
- Linking these two systems will help provide comprehensive support to students in need.

2.3 million of California's low-income, public school students miss out on the benefits of school breakfast each day. Unfortunately, many students do not eat a nutritious breakfast at home or elsewhere outside of school. Research and common sense identify hunger as a barrier to learning and academic achievement.

The federally funded School Breakfast Program is a critical defense against hunger, particularly for the growing number of low-income families that are struggling to meet their basic needs during this period of persistent unemployment and economic crisis in California. Through AB 839, school districts can give due consideration to the School Breakfast Program as a tool for improving academic achievement and bridging the achievement gap.

How does AB 839 relate to the California Department of Education's current efforts to improve school breakfast?

AB 839 complements the ongoing efforts of the California Department of Education to promote and improve school breakfast. State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson, serves as the Honorary Chair of the BreakfastFirst Campaign, a three-year initiative to improve access, participation, and nutritional quality in school breakfast programs throughout California. Through this role and his leadership of public education in California, Superintendent Torlakson is generating discussions about school breakfast across the state.

The Department's focus on school breakfast, the work of the BreakfastFirst Campaign, and AB 839, all serve to stimulate much-needed attention to school breakfast. This consideration will help move school districts toward effective breakfast programs that better serve the needs of California's students.

How does AB 839 support the work of district nutrition services departments?

AB 839 provides a new opportunity for district nutrition services departments to inform school board decisions related to the benefits and challenges of improving school breakfast programs. Through AB 839, nutrition services administrators and staff can share their

expertise with the entire school community in district-wide forums.

As a result of the discussions generated by AB 839, school districts opting to implement strategies that increase school breakfast participation will draw down additional federal funds in the form of per meal reimbursements. In this way, AB 839 can have a positive fiscal impact on school district funding.

How will AB 839 affect small school districts?

AB 839 does not target any school or school district based on size. Rather, AB 839 applies to school districts that elect to submit a Consolidated Application, which is required to access certain types of state and federal categorical funding for education. More specifically, for districts that submit the Consolidated Application, the bill applies to non-charter, public schools that do not operate the School Breakfast Program or that demonstrate very low program participation (based on percentages, not raw numbers, of students served). Among the school districts affected by the bill, AB 839 will likely apply to fewer schools in smaller districts than in larger districts, given the number of sites under their respective purviews.

The service models and other school breakfast practices that will be considered through AB 839 can and have been effectively implemented in small districts. These models and practices can help ensure that the School Breakfast Program is fiscally feasible for smaller school districts.

What happens if school boards opt not to make changes to school breakfast?

AB 839 does not require school boards to make any specific changes to school breakfast. The bill purposely protects the autonomy of local school boards while also allowing all district stakeholders to engage in the decisions affecting students through school breakfast programs.

AB 839 does require school boards to affirm whether or not changes will be made to school breakfast. Requiring school boards to make this decision will increase the likelihood of school districts taking action to improve school breakfast.

Does AB 839 promote a specific breakfast model or specific breakfast practices?

No. AB 839 integrates data-driven discourse about school breakfast into the school board decision-making process, but does not mandate the use of any one model or practice for operating school breakfast. AB 839 does acknowledge that service models like Classroom Breakfast, Second Chance Breakfast, and Grab n' Go, and payment structures like Provision 2, can dramatically increase school breakfast participation.

How does AB 839 address nutritional quality in school breakfast programs?

AB 839 does not specifically address the nutritional quality of school breakfasts beyond the

nutritional standards required of all meals served through the School Breakfast Program. However, AB 839 does not prevent or discourage school boards or other district stakeholders from making changes that exceed the federal nutrition standards. In fact, AB 839 creates a new opportunity for district stakeholders to initiate discussions about nutritional quality within overarching discussions of school breakfast.

Increasing school breakfast access and participation can be the first step in improving nutritional quality as increased federal revenue from increased participation can offset the expense of nutritious foods that might otherwise be cost-prohibitive, such as fresh fruit and vegetables. Contrary to common perception, breakfasts served at school are often more nutritious than those served at home or elsewhere. For instance, breakfasts served at school contain more milk, fruit, and less added sugar than breakfast served outside of school.

For more information about AB 839, please contact Tia Shimada (tia@cfpa.net or 510.433.1122 x 109) or visit <http://cfpa.net/2011leg/index.html>
