

# Bill would require 'breakfast after the bell' at more schools

Mar 3, 2015 | By [Jane Meredith Adams](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Taking aim at the effect of hunger on students' ability to learn, two California legislators announced Tuesday a bill that would require more schools to provide breakfast after the start of school.

The proposed legislation would revamp the way many schools operate the federal [School Breakfast Program](#), widely regarded as an underutilized source of nutrition for hungry students. Districts are also aware that under-enrollment in the school breakfast program has left millions of dollars on the table in federal meal reimbursements for low-income students.



*Credit: No Kid Hungry Campaign*

Nationwide, about half the number of students who receive free and reduced-price lunches eat school breakfast, and researchers say the main obstacle is that students must arrive 30 minutes or more early to eat breakfast in the cafeteria.

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“The highest participation rates are in schools where students are allowed to eat breakfast in the classroom,” said Jim Weill, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Food Research and Action Center, a national organization working to eradicate hunger in the U.S., which released two reports in February: [School Breakfast Scorecard 2013-2014](#) and [School Breakfast: Making it Work in Large School Districts](#).

The legislation, [Assembly Bill 1240](#), co-authored by Assemblyman Rob Bonta, D-Oakland, and Assemblyman Tony Thurmond, D-Richmond, would align California with a nationwide push to feed breakfast to more children by serving it after the bell, either in the classroom, as a grab-and-go meal from a cart or as a second-chance breakfast during a mid-morning classroom break. In August, the California School Board Association and the Oakland-based nonprofit organization California Food Policy Advocates promoted the benefits of school breakfast, including an increase in test scores, in a governance brief, [Starting a Breakf After the Bell Program](#).

In a national survey released Tuesday of 1,000 teachers, principals and staff, three out of four public school teachers said students regularly come to school hungry and 84 percent of principals said students are hungry because they don’t have enough to eat at home, according to a [Hunger in Our Schools](#) report by [Kid Hungry](#), a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group.

“One morning [a student] came in late, and was grabbing at his stomach,” said Alex Perez, a Los Angeles elementary school teacher who is quoted in the Hunger in Our Schools report. “He couldn’t concentrate. Because he hadn’t eaten; there was nothing at home. And he had to walk to school alone. It’s not the child’s fault.”

The stress of being hungry at school is intense. “Hungry kids struggle to learn,” Thurman said.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
POLICY	School must offer breakfast	School must offer breakfast after the school day begins	School must offer breakfast after the school day begins and at no cost to all students
If 40–60% of a School's Students are in Need			
If 60–80% of a School's Students are in Need			
If 80–100% of a School's Students are in Need			

*The three-year rollout proposed in A.B. 1240 would involve different requirements based on the percentage of students in need at schools.  
Credit: Graphic by California Food Policy Advocates.*

Research has found that school breakfast programs improve students’ test scores, attendance, concentration and behavior, according to [48 research studies and papers](#) identified by California Food Policy Advocates, which is sponsoring the bill.

The proposed legislation provides a three-year phase-in of breakfast changes, beginning in 2016-17, and affects only schools where at least 40 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

- If 40 to 60 percent of students are from low-income families, the school must offer breakfast. The requirement would bring about 250 schools into the school breakfast program.
- If 60 to 80 percent of students are from low-income families, the school must offer breakfast in 2016-17 and must offer breakfast after the school day begins starting in 2017-18.
- If 80 to 100 percent of students are from low-income families, the school in 2016-17 must offer breakfast, in 2017-18 must offer breakfast after the school day begins and in 2018-19 must offer universal free breakfast.

The shift in schedule and venue – serving breakfast more than a half an hour later and moving it out of the cafeteria – has been shown to dramatically increase the number of students eating breakfast. In the Angeles Unified School District, participation in the school breakfast program rose from 29 percent to 81 percent of students over three years. The increase came as the district phased in an extensive breakfast-in-the-classroom program. That program generated consternation among some teachers, who said breakfast would use up precious instructional time and attract rodents to the classroom.

Laura Benavidez, co-director of Food Services for Los Angeles Unified, said that she and her staff try to make the meal easy to serve and clean up. When a kindergarten teacher said that oranges take too long for her students to peel, the cafeteria staff provided orange slices. When a teacher said she'd like a spray bottle of cleaning fluid and paper towels, instead of a cleaning cloth, the change was made.

## GOING DEEPER

- [Starting a Breakfast After the Bell Program, California School Boards Association and California Food Policy Advocates, August 2014](#)

Each classroom is provided with a rolling trash can to be used only for the breakfast program, and the can is rolled out of the classroom after breakfast.

And when a teacher said that breakfast was taking more than 15 minutes, Benavidez visited the classroom and talked about how other teachers have made the most of a 10- or 12-minute breakfast by reading to students or having students read to themselves. Others use the time to take attendance and collect homework.

- [Improving Student Nutrition and Academic Achievement Through School Breakfast Programs, a statement from State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, April 2012](#)

"The upside is you have a child who is focused and ready to learn," Benavidez said. "These were children we knew weren't eating before."