

## Everyday but Thanksgiving: Breakfast most important meal for learning

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The School Breakfast Program reaches only one in three California students who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. That means 2.2 million of our most vulnerable students miss out on the health and academic benefits of school breakfast each day, making it even harder for them to reach their full potential.

Dozens of studies have shown that breakfast is linked to better school attendance, improved academic performance, reduced tardiness and decreased disruptive behavior.

Most schools serve breakfast only in the cafeteria and only before class begins, sometimes as early as 7 a.m. Students who can't get to school early can't eat. Bus schedules, parents' work schedules, and other pressing factors can make early arrival at school, as well as in-home breakfast, an enormous challenge for families.

What's more, eating a nutritious breakfast at home may not even be an option for the 1 in 5 kids in households struggling with hunger, whose parents often have to choose between food and other essentials like housing, medicine and transportation.

The reach of the School Breakfast Program falls chronically short, not because funding isn't available but because breakfast isn't served when or where kids can eat. Children deserve access to resources that are essential for health and learning. When schools serve breakfast after the first bell rings, they reach more students in need and make better use of existing federal dollars.

Educators are often on the front lines of hunger in our schools. A Share Our Strength survey shows that, nationally, three quarters of teachers regularly see hungry kids in their classrooms. Teachers point to breakfast as a solution, saying that serving breakfast after the bell results in more focused students, better attendance, and fewer discipline problems.

For a small state investment of just 22 cents per school breakfast, California can trigger a substantial boost in federal funds for our schools. More than half of this state cost would be recaptured through an increase in taxable economic activity generated by the expenditure of incoming federal dollars.

So, as you sit down to dinner this Thanksgiving, take a moment to think about breakfast. Think about those struggling students whose chances of success in school and life would be increased with the powerful benefits of school breakfast.

And think about the simple 22-cent solution that state policymakers should pursue to create a win-win-win for students, schools, and the economy.

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