

## Recommendations on Child Nutrition

### California Working Families Policy Summit January 12, 2011

#### INTRODUCTION

The year 2010 was a banner year for child nutrition policy. California enacted two far-reaching nutrition statutes, and Congress reauthorized – and revitalized -- the federal Child Nutrition Act. All three policy developments reflect a broad consensus that children need healthy food and beverages in order to thrive and to succeed in child care, in school, and in other settings. These new statutes are a major step forward, but additional legislation is called for, and these three new laws need vigorous implementation if they are to make a difference.

California's children, like those in most states, are caught up in the obesity epidemic even while many continue to live in homes that struggle to put food on the table, particularly during this period of prolonged unemployment and foreclosure. One in seven children lives in a food insecure family, and an even greater number are obese or overweight. The burden of these life-altering conditions falls most heavily on low-income children, jeopardizing their health, their success in school, and their opportunity to enjoy a productive life; and the unacceptable health care costs associated with hunger and obesity are borne by everyone.

The federal child nutrition programs, including the school breakfast and lunch programs and the childcare food program, provide an excellent strategic resource to prevent both obesity and hunger. Participation in these programs is associated with better nutrition, better health, and improved academic achievement. Children who eat breakfast at school, for example, have healthier diets, perform better in school, and are less likely to be overweight or obese.

Unfortunately, the nutrition programs are severely underutilized, so that large numbers of fully entitled and needy children miss out on their benefits. For example, more than one million low-income students in California attend either schools that do not offer the federally funded School Breakfast Program (SBP) or schools that operate the program in a manner that predictably fails to reach most of the students it is designed to serve. All schools are allowed to operate SBP, but none are required to do so. Currently, over 750 public schools in California, which enroll over 54,000 low-income students, do not offer breakfast. Schools can improve student health, bolster academic achievement, and capitalize on available federal funds by putting breakfast first.

In addition to expanded access to school breakfast, aggressive implementation of the three new statutes identified above will help improve nutrition and beverage standards. One new state law establishes comprehensive nutrition standards for all beverages served in licensed child care including restricting sweetened beverages and promoting

water consumption while another new state law require that schools make free, fresh drinking water available to students during meals. At the same time, the newly reauthorized federal Child Nutrition Act contains a myriad of strategies to expand participation and improve nutrition quality in all the child nutritional programs. All three laws require immediate and comprehensive implementation if their potential is to be realized.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #1**

**The Legislature and the Governor should enact state legislation to increase access and expand participation in the School Breakfast Program.**

### ***Background***

Of California's 8,438 schools, 754 (or 9 percent) still do not offer the School Breakfast Program (SBP). This means that more than one million eligible low-income students have no access at their schools to the most important meal of the academic day. Also, in the large majority of schools that do operate the program, participation is so low (reaching less than half the low-income students) that there is virtually no breakfast service there either.

SBP is entirely federally and state funded, so there is little reason for local school districts not to operate a program that contributes to the prevention of food insecurity and obesity while stretching families' tight budgets and injecting federal funds into community economies. Untraditional breakfast-service strategies, currently implemented in many California school districts, succeed in attracting most students to SBP, and there is special state funding to support program expansion. While school breakfast mandates may not be feasible in the current fiscal environment, visibility (sunshine laws) and reporting requirements will stimulate significant action.

### ***Recommended Actions***

The Legislature should pass and the Governor should sign a bill that:

- A. Requires school districts deciding not to operate a breakfast program in any one of its schools annually to receive, consider and approve, in an open, noticed school board meeting, a report that provides the financial or other reasons to support such a decision.
- B. Requires school districts with very low SBP participation annually to receive, consider and approve, in an open, noticed school board meeting, a report that documents the financial or other reasons why alternatives times, locations and payment options have not been implemented.
- C. Requires school districts described in item 1 or 2 above to submit reports annually of these board actions to the California Department of Education's Nutrition Services Division.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #2**

**Local school districts, CDE's Nutrition Services Division and the BreakfastFirst Campaign should partner to expand school breakfast participation by promoting classroom breakfast and other alternative models of school breakfast.**

### ***Background***

Participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) is extremely low. Over 1 million low-income children, including well over half of those who eat lunch at school, miss out on school breakfast. The BreakfastFirst Campaign promotes classroom breakfast, second chance breakfast (served in the nutrition break, after the first period) and other service options that dramatically expand participation. School districts that have adopted these service models help their children be ready to learn, improve academic achievement and health, and shore up their cafeteria department's bottom line with revenues from a robust SBP.

### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. No later than School Year 2011-2012, school districts should develop and implement breakfast options, including classroom breakfast, second chance breakfast, and other service models, that consistently achieve a high levels of participation.
- B. School districts, district parents and other community members should enlist the BreakfastFirst Campaign, with its webinars, materials, mentor network, and other resources and expertise, to support and promote local advocacy to monitor and assist their district's effort to implement the most effective SBP models and thereby boost school breakfast participation.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #3**

**The California Departments of Education and Social Services should move aggressively to implement two new state nutrition laws and the recently reauthorized Child Nutrition Act.**

### ***Background***

California enacted two new and important child nutrition laws in 2010 that need immediate and thorough implementation. SB 1413 requires school districts by July 1, 2011, to provide their students with free, fresh drinking water while they eat meals at school. Some schools already do this, but a survey found that 40 percent of responding districts did not. AB 2084 establishes new nutrition standards for beverages served in all licensed childcare centers and homes that take effect on January 1, 2012. The law requires ready access to water, eliminates all sugar-sweetened beverages (including flavored milk), limits juice and allows only 1% and nonfat milk for children 2 and older. And the new federal child nutrition reauthorization dramatically improves access to free school meals at the same time that it improves nutrition standards for school meals and other (competitive) foods and beverages served on the school campus.

### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. The California Department of Education should promptly issue a management bulletin to implement SB 1413, train school food service personnel, and provide technical assistance to assure ready access to free, fresh drinking water in the cafeteria and other areas where students eat meals at school.
- B. The California Department of Social Services should promptly issue regulations to implement AB 2084, train childcare sponsors and providers and provide technical assistance to assure a strong, speedy implementation.
- C. The California Department of Education should promptly train and provide technical assistance to childcare providers and school food service personnel on those improvements, contained in child nutrition reauthorization, to the child nutrition programs that can be implemented immediately and prepare for speedy implementation of those provisions that require federal regulations and guidance.
- D. The California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness should conduct a hearing in the Capitol to familiarize legislators and administrators of the opportunities and requirements of the new federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act.