

**SB 474****Relating to nutrition and health programs  
for public school children**

I am here representing the Center for Public Policy Priorities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, research organization that works on behalf of low and moderate-income Texans, to testify in support of SB 474. While the Center supports all of the provisions in this bill, my testimony focuses on the sections relating to expanding, supporting, and maintaining participation in the School Breakfast Program.

The link between school breakfast and improved academic performance creates a clear incentive for Texas to keep expanding its school breakfast program.

**Research on the Benefits of School Breakfast**

- Research shows that eating a good breakfast is critical to classroom success. Missing breakfast can impair learning and lead to emotional and behavioral problems, while eating breakfast leads to higher standardized test scores, better grades in math and reading, and fewer discipline problems.
- While a healthy breakfast is important for all children, many low-income children arrive at school not ready to learn and unable to concentrate, because their families do not have the resources to always provide a good breakfast. Research also correlates poor academic achievement with low family income. In Texas, school districts with higher percentages of low-income children are more likely to have lower rankings in the state's accountability system.

**Facts about the School Breakfast Program in Texas:**

- 84 percent of the children who eat school breakfast are from low-income families. Over 1.7 million children in Texas qualify for free or reduced-price school meals (which means their family income is below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level), yet only 921,399 participated in the school breakfast program last year, although breakfast is almost always available to them.
- Only 53% of the low-income children who participated in the school lunch program ate school breakfast.

**Eligibility for “Free” or “Reduced Price” School Breakfast**

- Under federal regulations, children from families below 130 percent of FPL eat meals for free, while those between 130 and 185 percent of FPL pay a reduced-price. Children from higher-income families pay the full cost.
- USDA reimburses states the full cost of meals served to children in the “free” category, with a lesser reimbursement for the two higher income categories.

The following income eligibility guidelines are effective through June 30,2003.

Household size	Reduced Price Meals - 185%		Free Meals - 130%	
	Annual	Monthly	Annual	Monthly
1	16,391	1,366	11,518	960
2	22,089	1,841	15,522	1,294
3	27,787	2,316	19,526	1,628
4	33,485	2,791	23,530	1,961
5	39,183	3,266	27,534	2,295
For each add'l family member add	+5,698	+475	+4,004	+334

Reimbursement rates are effective July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003.

	Non-severe Need	Severe Need
Paid	\$0.22	\$0.22
Reduced Price	\$0.87	\$1.10
Free	\$1.17	\$1.40

**Why participation is low and how SB 474 can improve participation**

- Participation is much lower in the school breakfast program than the school lunch program as a result of logistical barriers, such as children not making it to school on time, as well as perceived barriers, such as the stigma that school breakfast is for poor kids only.
- SB 474 provides a way for Texas school districts to overcome these barriers by providing school districts with funds to increase participation in their breakfast programs.

**Highlights of initial findings of the Universal Free Breakfast Program Pilot Project**

Congress mandated the School Breakfast Program Pilot Project in 1998 as a three-year pilot demonstration of what would happen if Universal-free School Breakfast were made available to all elementary school children, including both low and higher income families. The first-year findings of this project were released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in mid-November 2002.

- Universal School Breakfast greatly increases school breakfast participation; breakfast in the classroom increases school breakfast participation even more.
- Universal School Breakfast reduces breakfast skipping.

- Most of the children who increase their school breakfast participation (and presumably their overall breakfast eating) are low-income students.
- Universal School Breakfast significantly improves student nutrition.
- Universal School Breakfast is easy to implement and very popular among parents and students.
- Universal School Breakfast reduces the cost of serving school breakfast.
- Universal School Breakfasts are nutritious.
- Principals in Universal School Breakfast schools are significantly more likely to report decreased tardiness, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems.