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Prime Sponsor: Sen. P. Sandoval, D-Denver

Bill Status: Sen. Health & Human Serv.

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**Title: Concerning the Smart Start Nutrition Program,
and Making an Appropriation Therefor.**

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. It will make it more affordable for low-income students to participate in the school breakfast program. Research has consistently found that students who participate in the program have more nutritious diets, do better academically and have fewer behavioral problems. Initial data shows that eliminating the co-pay for reduced price breakfasts has proven effective at expanding access to school breakfasts in Washington state.

income at 185 percent of the poverty level totals \$30,710 annually for a family of three or \$37,000 for a family of four.

The bill also makes an appropriation of \$700,000 for FY 2007-08 and directs the General Assembly to appropriate no less than \$700,000 and no more than \$1.5 million in future years.

One of the goals of this bill is to increase the number of students who eat a nutritious breakfast every day they attend school.

Summary of Legislation

Background

The bill creates the Smart Start nutrition program and fund to pay the costs of eliminating the co-payment for those students who currently qualify for reduced-price breakfasts under the school breakfast program. The state will reimburse school districts for the costs of providing free breakfasts to those students who otherwise would pay a reduced price for breakfast.

According to the Food Research and Action Center, a Washington, D.C.-based organization working to eradicate domestic hunger and under-nutrition, 84,652 Colorado students participated in the school breakfast program in school year 2005-06. Of that total, 58,348 or 69 percent qualified for free breakfasts, 18,344 or 22 percent paid full price and 7,960 or 9 percent paid a reduced price.¹

Under federal law, there are three payment levels depending on a student's family's income. Students from families with incomes up to 130 percent of the federal poverty line are eligible for free breakfasts, those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent qualify for reduced-price breakfasts and those above 185 percent pay the full price. The maximum amount that schools can charge for the reduced-price breakfast is 30 cents per meal.

To judge participation rates in the school breakfast programs nationwide, the center compares the ratio of students participating in the free and reduced breakfast program to those participating in the free and reduced school lunch program. Historically, more students participate in the school lunch program than the school breakfast program, but the gap is narrowing.

For school year 2006-2007, 130 percent of the federal poverty line equals \$21,580 annually for a family of three or \$26,000 for a family of four. Family

According to the center's 2006 School Breakfast Scorecard, 44.6 students participated in the free and reduced breakfast program for every 100 that participated in the school lunch program nationwide. The 10 states with the highest participation rates

The Bell Policy Center believes a top priority of the General Assembly should be to expand opportunities for Coloradans to achieve the American Dream. In that spirit, we offer Opportunity Notes on selected bills. Similar to Fiscal Notes, Opportunity Notes reflect our best analysis of whether a bill, if implemented, will expand opportunities for Coloradans.

A POSITIVE analysis means our research suggests a bill will expand opportunity in a cost effective manner.

A NEGATIVE analysis means our research suggests the measure will restrict opportunities or will not cost-effectively achieve its goals.

have between 53 and 58 students in the school breakfast program for every 100 in the free and reduced school lunch program.

Although the number of students eating free and reduced breakfasts grew by 12 percent in Colorado during school year 2005-06, we are still one of 10 states with the lowest participation rates, ranking Colorado at 45th. In school year 2005-06, 185,012 Colorado students participated in the free and reduced school lunch program compared to 66,308 who participated in the free and reduced school breakfast program, for a ratio of 35.8 per 100.

For school year 2006-07, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will reimburse schools for each breakfast served in the following amounts:²

Free breakfasts	\$1.31
Reduced-price breakfasts	\$1.01
Student-paid breakfasts	\$0.24

Research and Evidence of Effectiveness

Research shows that students who participate in school breakfast programs have more nutritious diets, do better academically and suffer fewer behavioral problems. A 2000 study found that increasing participation in the school breakfast program in 16 Boston elementary schools was associated with reduced hunger and increased nutrition, and with better school attendance, emotional functioning and math grades.³

A study of the school breakfast program in one Philadelphia public school and two Baltimore public schools found that students who increased their participation had improved math grades, lower absentee rates and fewer psychosocial problems.⁴

A national study of the school breakfast program found that students who participated have better overall diets, consume a lower percentage of calories from fat, are less likely to have a low intake of magnesium and are less likely to have low serum levels of vitamin C and foliate. These effects were most consistently observed in children from families with incomes between 130 to 185 percent of poverty and above, which are those who qualify for reduced price and full price breakfasts.⁵

One way to increase participation in school breakfast programs is to eliminate the co-pay for reduced price breakfasts. Washington state began doing this in fiscal year 2006-07, and the number of

breakfasts served to low-income students in September and October 2006 increased by 217,000, or 37 percent, over the same months in 2005.⁶

Elizabeth Burmaster, Wisconsin’s state superintendent of education, is proposing eliminating the co-pay for reduced price breakfasts in her fiscal year 2008 budget as one strategy for improving student performance and closing the achievement gap.⁷

Estimates of Impact and Benefits

If Colorado has a similar experience as Washington state, 37 percent more low-income students — an additional 24,534 children — will eat breakfast at school. Based on research, this morning boost will help them learn and make their overall diet more nutritious.

End notes

Note: Underscored titles indicate links to the documents online. To get an electronic version of this Opportunity Note with active hyperlinks, please visit our website, www.thebell.org.

- ¹ [School Breakfast Scorecard 2006](#), Table 3: Total Student Participation in School Breakfast Program (SBP), School Year 2005-2006, Food Research and Action Center, Washington, D.C., December 2006.
- ² [The School Breakfast Program](#), Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture, September 2006.
- ³ [Best Practices: Boston School Breakfast Program Key to Student Performance](#), Thomas M. Menino, Mayor of Boston, U.S. Mayor Articles, U.S. Conference of Mayors, May 26, 2003.
- ⁴ [The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning](#), *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 152 No.9, September 1998.
- ⁵ [Evaluating the Impact of School Nutrition Programs: Final Report](#), Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 2004.
- ⁶ [Invest \\$10 million in the 2007-09 biennium to eliminate the 40-cent “co-pay” for reduced-price school lunches](#), Washington Children’s Alliance, 2007.
- ⁷ State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster, Budget Communications Memo, [Improving Student Achievement / Closing the Achievement Gap](#), September 2006.