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Prime Sponsors: Sen. P. Sandoval, D-Denver
Rep. Madden, D-Boulder

Bill Status: House Education

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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.

Background

According to the Fiscal Note on SB 07-59, during the current school year an average of 8,009 students eat a reduced price breakfast each school day. This represents 18 percent of the 44,036 students approved to receive a reduced price breakfast.¹

According to the Food Research and Action Center, a Washington, D.C.-based organization working to eradicate domestic hunger and under-nutrition, one way to judge the participation rates in school breakfast programs is to compare them to participation rates in school lunch programs. Historically, more students participate in the school lunch program than the school breakfast program, but the gap is narrowing.

According to the center's 2006 School Breakfast Scorecard,² 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 have between 53 and 58 students in the school breakfast program for every 100 in the free and reduced school lunch program.

Summary of Legislation

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.

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.

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

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.

Based on the center’s data, Colorado was one of 10 states with the lowest participation rates, ranking 45th for school year 2005-06. The center reports that 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:³

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.⁴

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.⁵

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.⁶

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 2005.⁷

Estimates of Impact and Benefits

Removing the fee from the reduced price breakfast will likely increase the number of kids who participate in the school breakfast program. Based on Washington’s preliminary experience, it is possible that an additional 2,963 Colorado students would participate, resulting in an increase of 518,525 breakfasts served in a 175-day school year. This total represents a 37 percent increase over the 8,009 Colorado students who currently eat a reduced price breakfast on average each day.⁸ Based on research, this morning boost will help students 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 Colorado Legislative Council Staff [Fiscal Note on SB 07-59](#), April 19, 2007.
- ² [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.
- ³ [The School Breakfast Program](#), Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture, September 2006.
- ⁴ [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.
- ⁵ [The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning](#), *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 152 No.9, September 1998.
- ⁶ [Evaluating the Impact of School Nutrition Programs: Final Report](#), Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 2004.
- ⁷ [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.
- ⁸ Bell calculations based on information on current participation in reduced meal programs contained in the April 19, 2007, Fiscal Note on SB 07-59.