

# CORD

## School Lunch Program: Feeding Lawns, Not Kids?

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*WEEKLY WASTE REPORT for August 3, 2015*

**School Lunch Program: Feeding Lawns, Not Kids?**

According to the California Senate Office of Oversight and Outcomes (CSOOO), over at least a six year period, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) **diverted more than \$158 million of federal School Lunch Program funding to other uses including buying lawn sprinklers and paying the salaries at the district's television station.**<sup>1</sup>

One tactic used was to reduce lunch periods to as little as 20 minutes in some schools, so students (whose lunch was already paid for with federal funds) would be unable to receive food.<sup>2</sup>

But this did not stop LAUSD from crying foul about school lunch funding. In January 2009 (while funds were being misappropriated) a LAUSD press release carried the headline, **"Cafeteria fund cash flow may leave neediest LAUSD students hungry,"** advocating for increased funds. The release notes that, "Superintendent Cortines has directed a **comprehensive legislative and media initiative to ensure state decision makers and the public understand the consequences of a compromised meal program would have on our students ability to learn.**"<sup>3</sup>

The 2013 CSOOO report found **several other California districts mismanage or illegally reappropriated the Federal School Lunch funds**, and implied it was a general practice. What should concern federal taxpayers is that generally, once the money is in state hands, the state is responsible for oversight. In the case of California, the average state auditor is keeping tabs on (or trying to) federal (and state) funds going to a whopping 51 school districts. At approximately \$2 billion annually, California is the largest recipient of federal funds from the School Lunch Program.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, upon assuming office late last year, **California Senate President, Keven de Leon, who represents portions of Los Angeles, discontinued CSOOO.**

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<sup>1</sup> Sweeny, Jim; *Food Fight: Small team of state examiners no match for schools that divert student meal funds*; California Senate Office of Oversight and Outcomes; Sacramento, CA. February 2013

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> *Cafeteria Fund Cash Flow May Leave Neediest LAUSD Students Hungry*, Office of Communication, Los Angeles Unified School District; Los Angeles. January 2009

<sup>4</sup> Sweeny, Jim; *Food Fight: Small team of state examiners no match for schools that divert student meal funds*; California Senate Office of Oversight and Outcomes; Sacramento, CA. February 2013