

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is expected to sign a bill that would require California schools to provide free drinking water to students at lunch. An online survey showed 40 percent of all state school districts do not require free water to be provided.

*Photo: Photo by Han Myung-Gu/Getty Images*

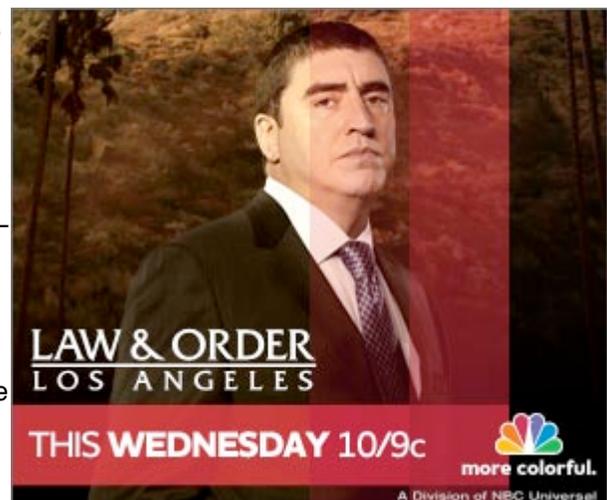
## Bill would require free drinking water to be added to California school menus

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By **Amanda Getchel**, San Bernardino County Democrat Examiner

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is expected to sign a bill requiring California schools to add free drinking water to their lunch menus.

State Sen. Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) introduced the [legislation](#) and if Schwarzenegger ends up signing the bill – which he has until Sept. 30 to do and is expected to sign because he sponsored it – schools would have until next July to make fresh drinking water available to students at lunch. Under the legislation, schools also must now provide a drinking fountain for the first 150 students and then one for every 300 students over that.



“As we all know, young people are constantly bombarded by advertisements and pressure from their peers to consume junk beverages that are high in calories and sugar,” Leno said while promoting his bill. “Yet many students do not have access to free, fresh drinking water at lunchtime.”

All four Republican San Bernardino County senators [voted](#) against the legislation while the lone Democratic state senator voted for it. Only one Republican San Bernardino County assemblywoman joined the two

Democratic assemblypersons in voting for the bill. The other five Republicans voted against it.

While school districts would not receive funding to implement the change and could argue they cannot afford the costs of providing water to comply with the law, advocates have said the solutions could be inexpensive and as simple as schools putting water pitchers and cups on lunch tables.

David Binkle, deputy director of food services, said most schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District did not have free water in eating areas. [San Bernardino County](#) has 33 school districts and more than 530 schools that would now be required to provide the free water if they do not already.

According to the [California Food Policy Advocates](#), an Oakland-based organization that supported the legislation, at least 40 percent of school districts that responded to an online survey said their students had no access to free drinking water in areas where meals were served.

“You just don’t imagine in our country in 2010 that there isn’t free water to drink while you are having a meal,” Kenneth Hecht, executive director of California Food Policy Advocates, said. “But there isn’t.”

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