

Free Breakfasts: Another Destructive Progressive Idea

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) announced last week that it will discontinue the free school breakfast plan it initiated last year.

Called "Food for Thought," the plan provides school breakfasts to about 200,000 students.

It was funded by the LAUSD and the nonprofit Los Angeles Fund for Public Education, whose goal is to raise the number who participate to about 450,000 students (out of a total of 645,000 in the entire district).

If you go to the fund's website (lafund.org), you are greeted with these messages: "Learn to dream" (in English and in Spanish) and "Imagine your life without limits." These are essentially meaningless messages. But, as we shall see, the fund's breakfast program is not only meaningless; it is quite destructive.

The reasons for the announced cancellation were that the program had drawn rodents and insects into classrooms, and that classroom learning time was being wasted by students eating for long periods in class.

But the rodents, insects and disruption of class learning time are nothing in terms of destructiveness compared to the free breakfast itself.

First, the program was created to solve a problem that does not exist.

It is inconceivable that there are five, let alone 200,000 or the projected 450,000, homes in Los Angeles that cannot afford breakfast for their child. A nutritious breakfast can be had

for less than a dollar. For examples, go to webmd.com/food-recipes/features/breakfast-ideas-for-a-buck, which lists five "Breakfast Ideas for a Buck."

Second, it both enables and encourages irresponsible, disinterested and incompetent parenting. Given how inexpensive breakfast can be (not to mention the myriad public and private programs that provide food for poor households), any home that cannot provide its child with breakfast demands a visit from child protective services. Any parent who cannot give a child breakfast is not too poor; he or she is too incapable of being, or too irresponsible to be, a competent parent.

Third, even where decent parents are involved, free breakfasts at school weaken the parent-child bond. Hundreds of thousands of parents who are able and happy to provide their child with breakfast have accepted the offer – because anything free is too enticing for an increasing number of Americans. But what they have done is made the proverbial deal with the devil. They have traded in one of the most fundamental definitions of parenthood – providing one's children with food – for a dollar and for a little less work as a parent. As a result, these parents become less of a parent to their children.

And fourth, the free breakfast profoundly weakens young people's character. When you grow up learning to depend on the state, you will almost inevitably – even understandably – assume that the state will take care of you. And you will grow up also assuming – as do Europeans, who give far less charity than Americans for this very reason – that the state will take care of your fellow citizens, including your own children.

These are the ways in which the left has damaged children and families through free school breakfasts.

But it gets worse. "Canceling" the program does not mean ending it.

Remember, the program is not being canceled because of its

destructive effects on students and family life. The reasons it is being canceled are that rodents and insects infest classrooms, and that classroom learning time is wasted while the children stretch out breakfast eating time.

Therefore, the program is being shifted to the schools' cafeterias. The public employee unions, which govern the state of California and the city of Los Angeles, have demanded that the program be shifted from the classroom to the school cafeterias so as to employ more cafeteria workers.

Virtually everything the left touches is either immediately or eventually harmed. The free breakfast program is only one, albeit a particularly dramatic, example.

Why, then, do progressives advocate it? Because it meets three essential characteristics of the left wing: It strengthens the state; it has governmental authority replace parental authority; and perhaps most importantly, it makes progressives feel good about themselves. The overriding concern of the left is not whether a program does good. It is whether it feels good.

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