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# Kids Need Safe Water to Drink at School

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An estimated 25 percent of schools in California do not provide free, fresh drinking water to students at meal times every day; despite state and federal laws that require it. Even worse, according to the most recent state survey 384 small community water systems and schools haven't supplied safe drinking water to their communities and schoolchildren for years, or even decades. We know these numbers underestimate the problem, because no state agency regularly maps this data.

Adequate water consumption is critical to basic health. If children and youth do not drink water, they often drink sugary beverages, which can lead to diseases like type-2 diabetes and childhood obesity. There also is a strong correlation between educational achievement and hydration. Without water, learning is impaired. However, if the available water is contaminated, children should not drink it. Contaminated water is associated with cancer, impaired development, cardiovascular disease, neurotoxicity and diabetes. California's drought makes the need for access to safe drinking water even more urgent.

We can do something about this. With a \$7 million state budget allocation we can install safe, inviting water fountains and water bottle filling stations in schools in California, providing an ongoing source of safe drinking water for hundreds of thousands of children and youth. Delivering fresh water in school, combined with education to dispel negative tap water perceptions can help increase overall water consumption and improve student health.

State and federal laws require that schools provide access to drinking water at school during meal times. But schools that are just beginning to recover from the past few years' dire funding circumstances don't have the resources to install fountains or water bottle filling stations to deliver reliable water to students.



Instead many are struggling to meet this important mandate by providing stopgap measures such as bottled water to students only during lunch time. Students drink less, schools spend more and it adds to our overburdened waste streams.

## Solution

A \$7 million commitment in funding administered by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to fund water filling stations could help provide safe drinking water to an estimated 200,000 schoolchildren in California's neediest schools. A portion of this funding would also be directed to support a comprehensive study to identify areas in California where the Human Right to Water is not being met, including schools and daycare centers, so that we can further understand the scope of the crisis.

