

School Meal Access & Participation

California Statewide Summary | 2015-16



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3 in 5 California public school students live in low-income households and are therefore eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals.



The National School Lunch Program currently serves 2.2 million (or 69%) of California's low-income students. Improving meal quality, appeal, and access – for example, by providing adequate time to eat – would help reach the additional 985,000 students eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch.

Nearly **2 million** of the state's most vulnerable students miss out on the health & academic benefits of school breakfast.



Serving breakfast after the bell increases student participation.

Research shows that school breakfast, and in particular breakfast after the bell, improves academic performance, physical health, and emotional well-being.¹

\$340 million

California public schools would receive an additional \$340 million in federal meal reimbursements if their breakfast programs reached as many low-income students as their lunch programs.

Children who participate in the school meal programs tend to have healthier diets than their peers.^{2,3,4} Thanks to improved nutrition standards, students are now eating more fruit, vegetables, and whole grains in school meals than ever before, along with less sodium, fat, and excess calories.^{5,6}



Opportunity: Grants to Expand Breakfast After the Bell

In January 2018, school food authorities can apply for grant funding to cover the start up or expansion of breakfast after the bell programs at schools. For more information: <http://cfpa.net/school-breakfast>

Traditional K-12 California Public Schools ⁷	2015-16	
Enrolled Students	5,472,434	
Number & Percent of Enrolled Students with Low-Income ⁸ (Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price School Meals)	3,224,204	59%
Number & Percent of Low-Income Students Served by School Lunch	2,239,177	69%
Number & Percent of Low-Income Students Served by School Breakfast	1,233,166	38%
Additional Federal Meal Reimbursements that Would Be Received if School Breakfast Served as Many Low-Income Students as School Lunch ¹⁰	\$ 340,488,112	

References

¹ CFPA's Research Overview on School Breakfast:

<http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/SBP/Legislation/BAB-ResearchOverview-2016.pdf>

² Ibid

³ Robinson-O'Brien R, Burgess-Champoux T, Haines J, Hannan PJ, Neumark-Sztainer D. *Associations between school meals offered through the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program and fruit and vegetable intake among ethnically diverse, low-income children.* J Sch Health. 2010;80(10):487-92

⁴ Johnston CA, Moreno JP, El-Mubasher A, Woehler D. *School lunches and lunches brought from home: a comparative analysis.* Child Obes. 2012 Aug;8(4):364-8

⁵ Cohen JFW, Richardson S, Parker E, Catalano PJ, Rimm EB. *Impact of the New U.S. Department of Agriculture School Meal Standards on Food Selection, Consumption, and Waste,* American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 46(4):388-394, online March 4, 2014.

⁶ Schwartz MB, Henderson KE, Read M, Danna N, and Ickovics JR, *New School Meal Regulations Increase Fruit Consumption and Do Not Increase Total Plate Waste,* Childhood Obesity. June 2015, 11(3): 242-247.

Technical Notes

This analysis was conducted by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) using California Department of Education (CDE) data for the 2015-16 school year. Participation statistics reflect average daily participation calculated as total meals claimed divided by total days on which meals were served. All values in the table above are rounded to the nearest whole number. For the purpose of the report, CFPA used only a subset and a snapshot of the data received from the CDE. The methods and calculations used for analysis are from CFPA.

⁷ For the purposes of this analysis, "traditional public schools" and "public schools" excludes charter schools, community day schools, continuation schools, special education schools, alternative schools of choice, juvenile court schools, full virtual schools, and similar school types outside of traditional K-12 sites. Charter schools are currently exempt from many sections of the California Education Code, including the requirement that schools make one nutritionally adequate, free or reduced-price meal available to each low-income student each school day.

The school meal participation and reimbursement data included in this analysis refer to the operation of the federal School Breakfast Program (SBP) and/or the National School Lunch (NSLP) Program by public schools from October 2015 through April 2016.

⁸ The data in this row describe the number of students reported as being eligible for free or reduced-price (FRP) meals as of October 2015. Data on FRP eligibility were downloaded from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/files/sp.asp>.

Income guidelines for students eligible to receive free and reduced-price school meals:

- Free meals: household income at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG)
- Reduced-price meals: household income between 130% and 185% of FPG

Foster, migrant, runaway, and homeless children and children from households participating in CalFresh, CalWORKs, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation, and for a limited number of households, MediCal, are considered categorically eligible to receive free school meals.

¹⁰ Additional federal reimbursements are calculated with meal participation data for school year 2015-16 and reimbursement rates for school year 2016-17.