

Invest in School Meals for All



1 million students

could all have access to

free school meals

but don't.



Opportunity

Children who are well nourished can learn, grow, and achieve at their fullest potential. Offering school meals free of charge to all students helps protect kids from hunger, stigma, California's unrelentingly high costs of living, and federal policies that are undermining the availability and adequacy of other public nutrition programs.

Legislative Action

Make targeted State investments to enable the implementation of universally free breakfast and lunch in schools where there is a substantial need among students but federal rules make the provision of universally free meals unattainable or unsustainable for school districts and charter schools.

Why This Matters

Food insecurity. Throughout our state, which boasts one of the world's largest economies, at least two million children live in households that struggle with food insecurity (limited, uncertain, or inconsistent access to enough food).

Lunch shaming & school meal debt. State and federal policies help protect students from lunch shaming. Now we must make sure that schools have the resources required to sustain practices that eliminate shaming, prevent school meal debt, and best serve students who are experiencing need.

Educational equity. School meals are an educational tool. Addressing the opportunity gap affecting low-income students and students of color, particularly Black and Latino children, requires that we meet students' most basic needs, including nutrition.

The eligibility gap. Federal eligibility criteria for school meal programs do not reflect true levels of need in California. A family of four making more than \$33,475 per year (\$644 per week) does not qualify for free school meals but does not make a living wage.

Schools as a safe harbor. As new federal policies, including threats to the health & safety of immigrant Californians, make it harder for families to access enough food, schools should be a safe harbor where children are nourished and able to thrive.