School Meal Programs:
The Basics

Funding
All public schools, including charter schools, can participate in the federal school meal programs.1

Participating schools receive federal funding for each meal served. Generally, schools receive the highest reimbursement for meals served to the lowest-income students.

California schools can also receive state funding for meals served to low-income students.2

School meal programs receive categorical, entitlement funding that exists independent of school general funds. State and federal funding can be used for food, staffing, equipment, and other expenses necessary for the operation and administration of a school meal program.

Public grants and loans are also available to support the startup, expansion, and improvement of school meal programs.

Facilities
While all students deserve access to first-rate school facilities, many public schools face infrastructure challenges and are still able to offer meals without a kitchen or cafeteria. In fact, a statewide survey found 70 percent of California school districts deal with infrastructure limitations when serving nutritious school lunches.3

Operation & Administration
All schools have options in how they administer and operate school meal programs.4 For instance, charter schools can

- Prepare meals at an onsite or central kitchen;
- Contract with a school meal vendor such as a local school district; or
- Contract with a food service management company to handle any aspect of their school meal program; and
- Serve meals with or without using the federal nutrition programs.

Contact: Tia Shimada, Director of Programs | P: 510.433.1122 ext 109 | E: tia@cfpa.net
Endnotes

1 For more about the National School Lunch Program, visit: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/nslp.asp.

2 For more about California’s State Meal Program, which can operate in conjunction with (or separately from) the National School Lunch program, visit: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/stm.asp.


4 For more information about options such as school meal vendors and food service managements companies, visit: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbnsdsnp012009.asp and https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbsnp072016.asp.