



2023 White Paper

School Nutrition Association California Universal Meals

Background

In School Year (SY) 2022–23, under the leadership of Governor Newsom and Senator Skinner, coupled with the support of the Legislature, California became the first state to implement a statewide Universal Meals Program for school children. California’s Universal Meals Program (Universal Meals) builds on the foundations of the federal National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Through this program, the state meal mandate was expanded to include both a nutritionally adequate breakfast and lunch for all children each school day. It also required high-poverty schools to participate in a federal provision, which helps to ensure the maximization of reimbursement from the Federal government.

Successes

1. Provides equity for all students
2. Reduces hunger
3. Creates opportunities for current and new employees, with increased hours and benefits
4. Creates goodwill within the community
5. Enables students to be more prepared for learning
6. Provides flexibility in how families leverage their financial resources

Keys to Continued Success

1. Supply chain stabilization: food, supplies, and equipment
2. Adequate staffing
3. Ensure adequate time for students to eat
4. Investment in facilities, infrastructure, and training
5. Continued community education on the importance of submitting free and reduced-price meal applications

Sustainable Advancement

Over the last three years, we have seen the importance and impact that nutritious and consistent school meals can bring to families and students. Universal meals in California help to ensure every student is nourished for success. In order to sustain this progress and continue to enhance school meal programs across the state, school nutrition operators need continued support to improve facilities and infrastructure, recruit and retain highly qualified staff and source the highest quality of foods for students. Your support is appreciated in these efforts to ensure all students in California thrive.

For more information or questions please contact:

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