



Proposed California Budget Strengthens Commitment to School Meals for All

California's 2022-23 budget proposal makes unprecedented investments to increase quality and expand access to freshly prepared school meals at a time when families still struggle with staggering levels of food insecurity

Jan 11, 2022 - (Sacramento, CA) - California Governor Gavin Newsom's proposed [2022-2023 state budget](#) unveiled on Monday strengthens a critical, long-term commitment to nourish all 6.2 million public school students with freshly prepared, California-grown schools meals through nearly half a billion dollars in new investments, according to a coalition representing education, agriculture, and food banks.

Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, all public schools will be required to offer two free meals per day to all students, regardless of income eligibility. Gov. Newsom's budget builds on this School Meals for All commitment by proposing \$480 million in additional investments, including doubling Farm to School funding from \$30 to \$60 million, and \$450 million over three years to upgrade school kitchens and support school nutrition professionals in serving more freshly prepared California-grown meals.

"Time is of the essence as California looks to make good on its historic commitment to provide quality School Meals For All, thanks to the leadership shown by Governor Gavin Newsom and the State Legislature, especially Senator Nancy Skinner and Assemblymembers Kevin McCarty and Luz Rivas," said Kat Taylor, founder of TomKat Ranch. "We look forward to continuing to work with Governor Newsom and the Legislature to ensure school administrators and farmers have what they need to provide free, locally-grown school meals to all students."

Last year, California became the first state in the nation to permanently adopt free school meals for all K–12 students after the Legislature and the Governor came to an

agreement on a 2021–22 operating budget to reduce child hunger, support essential school nutrition workers, and bolster the state’s agricultural sector. The Universal School Meals Program secured \$650 million in ongoing Proposition 98 funding beginning in 2022–23 to cover the costs of offering breakfast and lunch to all students.

Throughout the pandemic, schools have served as nutrition hubs for families, millions of whom report they do not have enough food to eat. According to the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), one in five Californians don’t know where their next meal will come from, with greater levels of hunger experienced by Black and Latinx families. Long-term government support is critical to ensure schools get the resources they need to do what they do best: provide students with the essential tools needed to learn, grow, and thrive.

“No child should go hungry, and food banks know firsthand child hunger spikes when school meals aren’t available,” said Itzúl Gutierrez, Senior Policy Advocate at California Association of Food Banks. “We are very grateful to Senator Skinner for continuing her national leadership pushing to ensure children are fed not only when school is in session, but also during out-of-school times when children miss out on school meals. It is also critical to improve school meal access by streamlining the process for families and schools to make it easier to apply.”

Thanks to California’s leadership in elevating the role school meals play in the health and educational outcomes of children, all 6.2 million of the state’s public school students will be eligible for free breakfast and lunch at school starting in the 2022–23 school year.

“California is leading the way for our country to make healthy school meals a part of every child’s educational day,” said Zenobia Barlow, Executive Director of the Center for Ecoliteracy. “School districts in the California Food for California Kids® Network serve 330 million school meals each year. Their top priority is ensuring free school meals made with fresh, local ingredients are available to all students, permanently. Investments in school meal programs are an investment in children’s health and learning.”

Through unprecedented investments in school kitchen upgrades, training for school nutrition staff, and the largest Farm to School grant program in the country, School Meals For All is bringing to fruition a future where fresh, locally-grown school meals benefit school nutrition professionals, local communities, and all students — no matter their income.

“We applaud Governor Newsom's prioritization of investments critical to helping California continue to provide universal free school meals for all students,” said Tiffany Germain, NextGen California’s Research and Policy Advisor. “As the pandemic continues, hunger levels in our K-12 school populations remain incredibly high, and this additional funding will not only reduce food insecurity among our students, but also improve equity and access issues. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature to ensure schools provide more healthy, freshly prepared, climate-smart meals.”

TomKat Ranch, Center for Ecoliteracy, NextGen California, and the California Association of Food Banks led the 2021 School Meals For All coalition, with over 200 organizations advocating to make free school meals available to all K–12 public school students in California.

What People Are Saying

“During the pandemic, school meal programs provided essential support to California farmers. At Palm Springs Unified, we fostered a partnership with farmers in the Coachella Valley, helping to keep them in business and keep students fed with fresh, local foods. At Oakland Unified, building relationships with local farmers will allow us to be resilient to supply chain issues and serve fresh, local school meals. Now is the time for the state to support these connections — it's a win-win for everyone.”

– Stephanie Bruce, Senior Executive Director of Nutrition Services, Oakland Unified School District

“School Meals for All sets our children up for success. They receive the nutrition they need to flourish, the exposure to where it comes from, and the education to continue working towards a food system and planet where future generations can thrive.”

– Nora LaTorre, CEO, Eat REAL

“We grow more than enough food to feed everybody but the problem comes with the distribution of those foods as well as the power structures.”

– Nelson Hawkins, Founder, We Grow Urban Farms (Sacramento)

“Free school meals help working- and low-income parents save money on food so that they will have more for rent.”

– Susan Park, Executive Director, Asian Americans for Housing and Environmental Justice (Los Angeles)

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