

# Access to Meals for Low-income Children in the California State Preschool Program

Data Brief • February 2019



More than  
**168,000 children**  
participate in the California  
State Preschool Program.<sup>1</sup>



Governor Newsom  
wants California to enroll  
**200,000 children**  
by 2021.<sup>2</sup>



**ALL of these children  
need reliable access  
to nutritious meals.**

## As California works toward universal preschool, we must ensure preschool programs meet children's basic needs.

Children need nutritious food every day to grow, develop, and thrive. But nearly one quarter of California's families can't afford to meet their basic needs.<sup>3</sup> The California State Preschool Program (CSPP) was established to serve low-income families.<sup>4</sup> CSPP has a unique opportunity to support families by guaranteeing that young children have access to nutritious meals during this critical stage of their development.

## Researchers analyzed children's access to meals in preschool and child care settings.

Researchers at the University of California, Nutrition Policy Institute, evaluated children's access to meals in California's preschool and child care settings. In 2018, more than 680 randomly selected child care providers, including more than 77 providers from the California State Preschool Program, responded to a survey about offering meals.

## Not all children have access to meals while in care.

Although the majority of survey respondents report providing children with access to meals and snacks for both part-day (3+ hours) and full-day instruction (6.5+ hours), **nearly one quarter of survey respondents provide only snacks and no meals to children enrolled in part-day programs.**

All child care centers are required by state law to follow the nutrition standards of the Child Care Food Program<sup>5</sup> if serving food.<sup>6</sup> The program's requirements for snacks are minimal in comparison to those for meals. For example, serving just a half cup of milk and eight animal crackers would meet the snack requirement – while standards for meals require that foods such as proteins, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are served.



SNACK

This meets the snack requirements of the Child Care Food Program.



MEAL

This meets the meal requirements of the Child Care Food Program.



University of California

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Nutrition Policy Institute



Endnotes:

1. Analysis of Child Care Provisions in the California State Budget for Fiscal Year 2018-2019. Child Care Law Center. July 31, 2018. Accessed from: <http://childcarelaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Child-Care-Law-Center-Analysis-of-Child-Care-Provisions-in-the-California-State-2018-19-Budget.pdf>
2. Early Childhood Summary of the 2019-2020 Governor's Proposed Budget. Accessed from: <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/2019-20/pdf/BudgetSummary/EarlyChildhood.pdf>
3. Estimate based on the 2016 California Poverty Measure published by the Public Policy Institute of California: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/child-poverty-in-california/>
4. "Low-income" refers to families earning 70% or less of the state's median income (e.g., a family of three earning no more than \$4,502 a month or a family of two with a monthly income of less than \$4,173).
5. Child Care Food Program refers to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). More information about CACFP and the program's nutritional requirements can be accessed here: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/cc/>
6. Child care centers are not required to serve meals. However, Cal. Code Regs. tit. 22 § 101227(a)(1), establishes a requirement that if child care centers serve food they must meet the nutritional requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program for all meals and snacks served.