

Back to Basics: Food & Fairness in Schools



3.6 million

low-income, K-12 students in CA

1 in 2

attend a very high poverty school

94%

of students in very high poverty schools are children of color

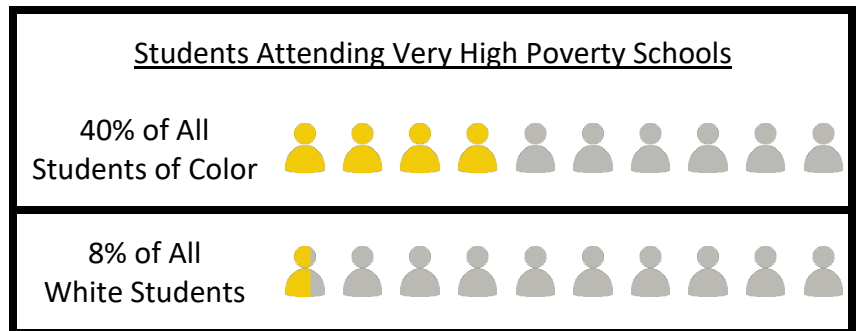


August 2017 • This fall, more than six million students will head back to public schools across California.

These students will take their seats in schools that are highly segregated by race & class. This has profound effects on children, their families, and whole communities.

Nearly two million children in California attend very high poverty schools where at least 80 percent of their classmates meet the federal threshold for low-income (i.e., eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals).¹

Forty percent of California's students of color² attend these very high poverty schools. The same is true for only eight percent of white students.³



Systemic segregation of California's public schools is tied to persistent achievement gaps between student groups.

Low-income students fare worse than their higher-income peers. African-American and Latino students fare worse than their white and Asian classmates.⁴

California must do more to meet the needs of all students in its public schools.

From state education funding (LCFF) to school meals, students deserve equitable access to critical resources that support their success.

See endnotes for details & data sources.



California charter schools are **public schools**

They enroll more than **600,000 students**

340,000+
of those students are eligible
for free or low-cost school meals

Unlike all other public school students, charter school students are not guaranteed access to free or low-cost meals.

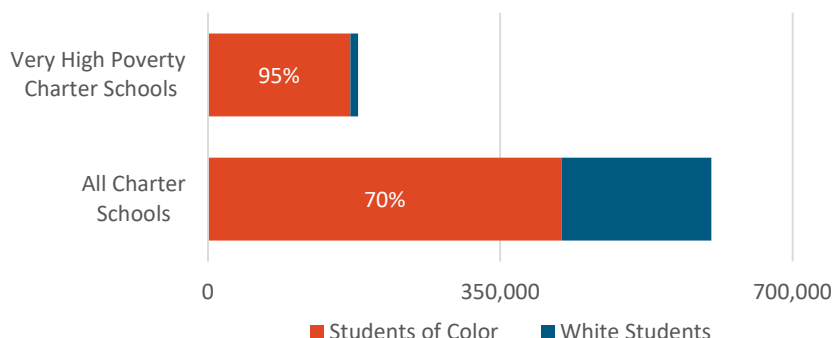


See endnotes for details & data sources.

Charter schools are a rapidly growing segment of California's public school system. Like other public schools, charter schools enroll a significant number of low-income students and students of color.

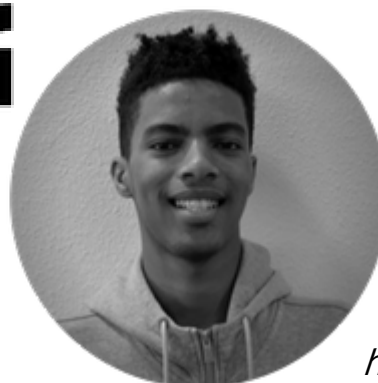
Nearly 180,000 students attend very high poverty charter schools – and 95% of these students are children of color.⁵

Students of Color in Charter Schools



Charter schools receive state and federal resources designated to support low-income students (e.g., Title I and LCFF funds for disadvantaged students). Like all public schools, charter schools are also entitled to state and federal funds for the operation of school meal programs. **But charter schools are the only public schools not required to provide school meals.**

What does that mean for charter schools students?



We need food to function and some families aren't able to afford full-price school meals. Everyone deserves to have equal

opportunities and by having free or low-cost meals, everyone does.

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Incoming Student at San Diego State University



35 counties

where a child can qualify for a housing voucher but not a free school meal

\$368

per child per year for families to buy the average school lunch in these counties

\$500+

per child per year in the seven counties with the highest average prices for school lunch



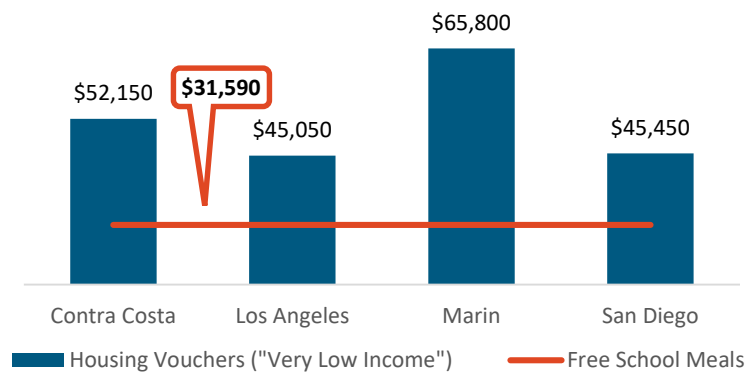
Systemic hurdles like these force families to make tough choices about which basic resources they can afford.

See endnotes for details & data sources.

California kids are missing out. Everywhere across the country, federal nutrition programs (school meals, WIC, CalFresh, etc.) use the federal poverty line to measure need and eligibility. But high costs of living in California, particularly housing costs, drive families into true poverty regardless of the federal measure.⁶

Case in point, **across 35 of California's 58 counties, a child can qualify for a "very low-income" housing voucher but not a free school meal.**⁷ How is that possible? Eligibility criteria for housing vouchers take into account local median incomes – and the income limits for school meals are based only on the federal poverty line.

Program Eligibility: Maximum Income for a Family of Four



While the State pursues long-term solutions to education inequities, the housing crisis, and other root causes of poverty, immediate solutions are needed to protect California kids.

For those who meet existing eligibility criteria, the federal nutrition programs can provide an immediate measure of relief and help keep children out of poverty.⁸ With the right changes, these programs and other State investments could do even more to address the true levels of need in California.



Serving meals free of charge to all students (i.e., universally free meals) creates hunger-free schools in communities where many families are struggling. This strategy provides nutritious food to students who meet the federal criteria for need and to those who don't but are still harmed by the high costs of living in many California communities. **Universally free meals are one way to tackle the true levels of poverty in California public schools.**



California Food Policy Advocates

is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and well being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food.

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Endnotes

¹ CFPA analysis of student poverty data from the California Department of Education for the 2016-17 school year. Includes all public schools. Data accessed on 8/1/2017 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp>

² "Students of color" includes students identifying as "American Indian or Alaskan Native", "Asian", "Pacific Islander", "Filipino", "Hispanic or Latino", "African American", or "two or more races". These categories are designated by the California Department of Education.

³ CFPA analysis of student poverty and enrollment data from the California Department of Education for the 2016-17 school year. Includes all public schools. Data accessed on 8/1/2017 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp> and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesenr.asp>.

⁴ California Department of Education. News release for 2016 results of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) tests. Accessed on 8/1/2017 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr16/yr16rel57.asp>

⁵ CFPA analysis of student poverty and enrollment data from the California Department of Education for the 2016-17 school year. Includes all charter schools. Data accessed on 8/1/2017 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp> and <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesenr.asp>.

⁶ Bohn, Sarah, Caroline Danielson, Matt Levin, Marybeth Mattingly, Christopher Wimer. 2013. *The California Poverty Measure: A New Look at the Social Safety Net*, Public Policy Institute of California.

⁷ CFPA analysis comparing gross income limits for Section 8 housing vouchers (2017) and free and reduced-price school meals (2016-17 school year). California establishes county-specific income limits for housing vouchers. The limits, based on local median income, are established for three categories: "extremely low income," "very low income, and "low income." This comparison uses the category of "very low income". Income limits for housing vouchers accessed on 8/1/2017 from <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/income-limits/state-and-federal-income-limits/docs/inc2k17.pdf>. Income limits for school meals accessed on 8/1/2017 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/rs/scales1617.asp>.

⁸ See endnote 6

Sidebar page 1: see endnote 1

Sidebar page 2: see endnote 3

Sidebar page 3: see endnote 7; analysis of cost to families for school lunches conducted with 2016-17 paid lunch equity data provided directly from the California Department of Education. Average cost to families is the "most frequent charge for paid meals" averaged by county. Annual estimates assume a 175-day school year.