

Address School Meals in Charter School Design

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Opportunity

As public schools of choice, charter schools have a responsibility to serve all students, regardless of socioeconomic status. However, unlike other public schools, California charter schools are exempt from the long-established state requirement to make free and reduced-price school meals available to socioeconomically disadvantaged students. **To enable parents and other stakeholders to make informed decisions, charter school petitions should address the provision of nutritious, affordable school meals.**

Legislative Action

- ➔ Ensure that charter school petitions describe how – and if – the nutritional needs of low-income students will be met.

Why This Matters

California has the nation's highest concentration of charters with more than 1,200 schools that collectively enroll nearly 600,000 students. Charter school growth is predicted to continue.

Nutrition resources, such as the federal school lunch and school breakfast programs, are necessary to equitably address the needs of low-income students. These programs reduce the negative impacts of poverty on health, child development, and learning.

Charters are public schools open to all children. Enrollment data shows that charter schools are as racially and economically diverse as other public schools. However, **among low-income children in all public schools, charter school students are less likely to be reached by free and reduced-price school meals.** Charter school autonomy and flexibility allow for innovative academic strategies. To foster equity, these strategies should serve the needs of low-income students -- including the need for nourishment.



Existing California law upholds charter school accountability via the charter school petition and renewal process. Incorporating into this process a requirement that charter schools describe how – and if – they will address the nutritional needs of their low-income students will allow parents and other stakeholders to make informed choices.

For more than 20 years, CFPA has been the state's trusted food policy advocacy organization dedicated to increasing low-income Californians' access to healthy food at home, at school, and throughout entire communities. CFPA's advocacy agenda draws on the anti-hunger, nutrition, and health movements. Working as both a policy leader and supportive policy ally, CFPA continues to build on its long history of success.