

Just the Numbers

Improving Charter School Nutrition: Hunger Should Not Be a Choice



Introduced by Assembly Member Mike Eng (D-Los Angeles) AB 1594 *Improving Charter School Nutrition: Hunger Should Not Be a Choice* seeks to extend the needy student meal mandate to California charter schools, ensuring that all low-income students, whether attending a traditional public school or charter school¹, have access to the essential nutrition benefits of school meals. The statistics below are drawn from the most recently available data regarding charter school enrollment and free and reduced-price (FRP) meal eligibility for both traditional and charter public schools in California. For more information contact Alexis Fernández at alexis@cfpa.net.

Charter School Facts

- Number of newly opened charter schools in California during the fall of 2011: **100**
- Total number of active charter schools in California (2011-12 SY): **982**
- Total number of California students enrolled in charter schools (2011-12 SY): **412,000**
- Percent of total California public school students enrolled in charter schools (2011-12 SY): **7%**

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price (FRP) Meals

- Percent of FRP-eligible students in *all* California public schools (2009-10 SY): **56.7%**
- Percent of FRP-eligible students in non-charter California public schools (2009-10 SY): **56.7%**
- Percent of FRP-eligible students in California charter schools (2009-10 SY): **55.8%**

California Charter Schools Operating NSLP and SBP²

Information regarding the operation of NSLP and SBP is available for 440 of the 815 active charter schools operating during the 2009-10 SY. The status of the remaining 375 charter schools is unknown:

- **432** of the charter schools operated NSLP during the 2009-10 SY and 8 did not.
- **370** of the charter schools operated SBP during the 2009-10 SY and 70 did not.

For the remaining 375 active charters for which NSLP and SBP status is unknown there is no available data to determine whether these schools operated a meal program, with what frequency meals were offered, what nutrition standards were used, and whether these meals were offered at free or reduced-price. Some charter schools do not serve meals because they do not offer classroom-based instruction.

Schools operating NSLP and/or SBP meet California's needy student meal mandate by making at least one nutritionally adequate meal per day available to low-income students at free or reduced-price. Schools that choose to operate NSLP and/or SBP in order to meet the needy-student meal mandate also offer meals to *all* students in order to comply with federal NSLP and SBP regulations.

¹ Charter schools are tuition-free, public schools that operate independently from the school districts central bureaucracy.

² NSLP refers to the National School Lunch Program and SBP refers to the School Breakfast Program

RP Meal Eligibility in California's Top Five Counties for Charter School Density

While the number of charter schools across the state continues to grow steadily, the density of charter schools varies by county. The table below shows FRP meal eligibility among the five California counties that currently have the highest density of charter schools. In four of the five counties, the percent of FRP-eligible students is very similar for charter schools and traditional schools. In Alameda County, the percent of FRP eligible students in charter schools is notably higher than the percent of FRP eligible students in traditional public schools.

| County | Total Number of Active Charter Schools in the Fall of 2011 | FRP Eligibility in Charter Schools 2009-10 SY | FRP Eligibility in Non-Charter Public Schools 2009-10 SY |
|-------------|--|---|--|
| Los Angeles | 261 | 70.4% | 65. % |
| San Diego | 95 | 54.5% | 49.9% |
| Alameda | 50 | 65.7% | 40.8% |
| Sonoma | 40 | 46% | 44.7% |
| Sacramento | 39 | 52.2% | 56.8% |

Methodological Notes

- The free and reduced-price eligibility data used in this analysis reflect October 2009 and are publicly available from the California Department of Education at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/cw/filesafdc.asp>.
- Data regarding participation in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program was provided by the California Department of Education, please contact CFPA for more information.
- Data describing the number of currently active charter schools in California and the number of enrolled charter school students reflect the 2011-12 school year and are publicly available from the California Department of Education at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/si/cs/ap/rpt.asp>

Contact: Alexis Fernandez | 510-433-1122 x111 | alexis@cfpa.net
www.cfpa.net