

# SB 138 (McGuire): Count Me In! Expand Access to School Meals



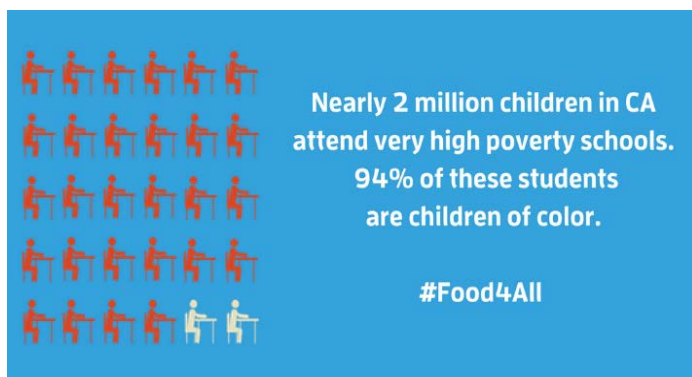
**Direct certification with Medi-Cal helps schools.  
Universally free meals allow schools to help children and families.**

**Medi-Cal direct certification gives schools better data, but data doesn't always lead to action.  
State policy should guide districts towards equity for disadvantaged students.**

- **Lack of geography plays an unfair role in determining if students receive free school meals.** Even after years of outreach and promotion, less than half of the highest poverty California schools provide federally-funded universally free meals, despite fiscal gains for schools and clear benefits for their students.
- **Some districts believe that universal meal provisions that remove traditional meal applications can jeopardize their LCFF funding.** Misunderstanding about the alignment between universal meal provisions and LCFF persist. SB 138 overcomes this barrier, while still allowing for local control.
- **Federally-funded universal meals prevent LCFF funds from being unnecessarily spent on unpaid meal debt.** Unpaid meal debt is a growing problem that must be paid off with non-federal revenue- often district general funds. Universal free meals leave LCFF funds for other critical services.



**Universally free school meals support students of color in communities of concentrated poverty, who face myriad systemic barriers to success.**



- **Universally free school meals remove overt identification and stigma,** which is more important than ever for immigrant students. Fears around school meal applications have intensified. This barrier is removed when free schools meals are provided to all.
- **Universally free school meals are particularly important for Latino and Black youth.** California's schools are nation's most segregated by race, language and class. SB 138 addresses economic, racial and health inequities faced by many low-income students of color and supports their future success.
- **Universally free meals help working poor families as they pursue upward mobility.** SB 138 averts potential harm from an unintended consequence of minimum wage increases, as working poor families can lose access to subsidized school meals before they can afford to pay for them on their own.