**Sample Letter of Support**

**School Nutrition Funding in Final State Budget Package**

**Background:** School meal programs are a vital source of nutritious food for millions of California students whose families struggle to make ends meet. In this time of crisis, free meals served by schools continue to be an essential resource. As the 2019-20 school year comes to a close, children’s continued access to these meals reaches a critical junction. While USDA recently extended several flexibilities to meal programs through August 30, 2020, there is no state or federal policy guaranteeing those programs will continue to operate during the summer months. Closing sites or otherwise diminishing meal service will leave low-income children without ready access to much-needed free meals. Now, with economic hardship and food insecurity on the rise, extending and expanding the reach of free meal programs is imperative.

**What’s next:** The Senate Budget plan proposes that $63.2 million in available federal dollars (ESSER - Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief funds) be allocated to schools for meals served until the start of the next academic year. We are calling on the Governor to ensure the final state budget package includes the $63.2 million in child nutrition funding and pairs the funding with an expectation that children can continue accessing meals from schools throughout the summer months.

**How you can help:** We encourage organizations and individuals to use this sample letter or write their own letter in support of this request to protect children from hunger this summer. **Final budget decisions are being made this week, so please voice your support as soon as possible!**

**PLEASE EMAIL YOUR LETTER OF SUPPORT NOW!**

**Email your letter** **to: Leg.Unit@gov.ca.gov, & jared@cfpa.net.**

**Organizations**: be sure to submit your letter on letterhead.

**Individuals**: be sure to include your mailing address in your letter.

**Questions? Contact Jared Call at (323) 401-4972 or jared@cfpa.net**

**[Insert letterhead or mailing address]**

**[Date]**

The Honorable Gavin Newsom

Governor of California

1303 10th Street, Suite 1173

Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Support for School Nutrition Funding in 2020-21 State Budget**

Dear Governor Newsom,

**[I am/Name of your organization is]** writing in support of the Senate budget provision that allocates additional, dedicated funding for child nutrition. We respectfully request your support of state budget action to ensure that meal programs help protect children from hunger and food insecurity throughout the upcoming summer months.

**[Insert your organization’s mission and connection to school/child nutrition programs. If you are writing as an individual, please describe your connection to school/child nutrition programs.]**

**Ensure Free Meals Reach Children This Summer**

Before the COVID-19 crisis, more than 2 million California children lived in households affected by food insecurity (having limited, uncertain, or inconsistent access to the food necessary to live a healthy life).[[1]](#footnote-1) Emerging evidence indicates that food insecurity is growing dramatically as the pandemic continues. In a nationally representative survey conducted in late April, nearly 35 percent of households with children reported that “the food we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have enough money to get more” during some portion of the past 30 days.

School meal programs are a vital source of nutritious food for millions of California students whose families struggle to make ends meet. In this time of crisis, meals served by schools continue to be an essential resource. Combined federal, state, and local responses to have given children continued to access meals from school-based nutrition programs despite campuses being closed.

In March, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began granting flexibilities that allow program operators to serve meals in ways that align with public health orders while still reaching children in need. That same month, you issued Executive Order N-26-20 to sustain state education funding during the physical closure of schools and made receipt of that funding contingent on four conditions, including the continued provision of meals to students. Staff and administrators at schools across California have done the incredible work of offering free meals to children in non-congregate (“grab and go”) settings since the early days of the COVID-19 emergency.

As the 2019-20 school year comes to a close, children’s continued access to these free meals reaches a critical junction. While USDA recently extended several flexibilities to meal programs through August 30, 2020, there is no state or federal policy guaranteeing low-income children will have access to those programs during the summer months. Closing meal sites or otherwise diminishing meal service will leave low-income children without ready access to much-needed free meals.

For children at risk of food insecurity and hunger, summer has always been a particularly harsh season. Under normal circumstances, a number of schools and community organizations do serve free meals during the summer, but those programs typically miss more than 85 percent of low-income children who would be served during the academic year.[[2]](#footnote-2) Now, with economic hardship and food insecurity on the rise, extending and expanding the reach of free meal programs is imperative.

CFPA supports the Senate Budget provision that allocates $63.2 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support local educational agencies (LEAs) serving meals to children until the start of the new school year. To help address the looming summer nutrition gap, we respectfully request that:

1. The Administration works with budget leaders to continue the statewide expectation that LEAs serve non-congregate meals during the COVID-19 response and recovery, inclusive of school breaks, that has provided critical food access since the school closures.
2. The State establishes a disaster reimbursement for meals served during COVID-19-related campus closures, inclusive of school breaks to provide the resources necessary to offer meals in a manner that supports the safety of students, families, and personnel. An LEA's receipt of this disaster reimbursement is contingent on compliance with the statewide expectation (above) of continued meal service.
3. The State discontinues the [summer meal waiver process](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbnsdsnp032013.asp) during the COVID-19 response and recovery for LEAs operating summer sessions via distance learning or other models.

We appreciate your consideration of the above request as a means of addressing the immediate need to prevent hunger and protect the health of California kids this summer. To meet the nutritional needs of children during the upcoming academic year and beyond, we urge your full support of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which enables schools to offer meals free of charge to all students while optimizing the receipt of federal funding.

**Maximize Uptake of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)**

The Community Eligibility Program (CEP) is a federally authorized option for serving breakfast and lunch free of charge to all students in any participating school. USDA has extended the CEP application deadline for school year 2020-21: LEAs now have until August 31 to apply. Given the severe economic downturn, more CA schools will (1) be eligible to serve universally free school meals via CEP and/or (2) be able to leverage more federal reimbursement for meals as federal CEP funding formulas are tied to student poverty data. LEAs can set CEP federal funding formulas for four years using current student data.

To maximize the reach of school meals among students and the amount of federal school meal funding drawn into our state, we recommend that the Administration work with the Legislature to support CDE in (1) issuing updated guidance (no later than June 30, 2020) strongly encouraging LEAs to apply for CEP and (2) providing targeted technical assistance among LEAs to ensure the broadest possible uptake of CEP for the 2020-21 school year.

**[I/We]** support child nutrition funding in the 2020-21 state budget because **[feel free to add your own reasons]**

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

**[Your name and title]**

**[Your organization, if applicable]**

Cc: The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review

 The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget

 Keely Bosler, Director, Department of Finance

1. CFPA Factsheet, *Food Insecurity In CA, 2019*, available at <https://cfpa.net/GeneralNutrition/CFPAPublications/FoodInsecurity-Factsheet-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CFPA Factsheet, *Snapshot: Summer Hunger in CA*, available at <https://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/Summer/CFPAPublications/SOWA-Factsheet-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)