

Working out of a small back office in Lynwood Elementary, Miguel Villarreal has overhauled the food services program at Novato Unified School District (NUSD). A veteran in the field, Miguel has over 30 years of experience ensuring children's nutritional needs are met.

As a tireless advocate, Miguel has a history of seizing opportunities to enhance wellness. He phased out high-sugar foods, established a Farm to School program, introduced healthy salad bars, and started Meatless Mondays. Through innovative partnerships he has utilized dietetic interns to support the district and launched an engaging cooking and nutrition education program for students. When he first heard about the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), he recognized another opportunity.

During his 14 years at NUSD, Miguel has raised nutrition as an equity issue, reminding administrators that a large number of students do not have access to healthy foods. Many NUSD students do not qualify for free meals by the federal poverty guidelines, yet their families struggle to make ends meet due to the high cost of living in the Bay Area. These students may qualify for reduced-price meals, but still can't afford the cost and miss out on the healthy school meals available. At countless meetings he has fiercely advocated for the district to support academic achievement by ensuring all students' nutritional needs are met. When he learned that school districts are required to solicit input from stakeholders when developing the LCAP, he encouraged administrators to use supplemental LCFF funds to cover the cost of reduced-price school meals.

Miguel's innovative idea was welcomed by administrators, who recognized that covering the forty-cents per meal for these students would likely result in increased school meal participation while supporting low-income students. In 2015, NUSD included covering the cost of reduced-price meals in their LCAP. The additional cost to the district was estimated to be just 0.0005% of the district's entire budget. As the LCAP continues to be revised, Miguel relentlessly advocates for food services to remain a funding priority for the district.

NOVATO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



“LCFF has helped bridge the equity gap for our reduced priced meal students by allowing all of them access to healthful school food.”

Miguel Villarreal, School Food Services Director
Novato Unified School District

DISTRICT ACTION

NUSD now covers the cost of reduced-price meals for qualifying low-income students with LCFF funds. The change has led to greater student participation in school meal programs, and due to economies of scale the district can now offer healthier, higher-quality food.