

With experience as a Director of Childhood Nutrition in three separate school districts over the past 24 years, Jim Picola has increasingly grown to recognize the critical connections between school nutrition and academic success. As a result he has harnessed his role as Director of Childhood Nutrition for Oxnard School District (OSD) to help mitigate the harmful effects of poverty by optimizing student participation in the federal school meal programs.

Over the last few years, the number of students benefitting from school meals at OSD has gone up dramatically. Mr. Picola attributes most of the success to Direct Certification, a process that certifies eligible low-income children for free meals without the need for paper applications. The increase can also be attributed to a number of initiatives aimed at increasing access to food for low-income students: (1) providing additional points of sale for meals throughout the district; (2) ensuring that culturally appropriate food choices are regularly offered; (3) operating salad bars through a Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grant program; (4) launching a backpack program that allows low-income students to take food home for the weekend.

A fierce advocate within his school district, Mr. Picola frequently presented the concept of universal feeding to district administrators. When all students are offered school meals at no cost, high-poverty school districts benefit by increasing school meal participation and drawing down additional federal funds. That message hit home for administrators in the 2014-15 school year when district leaders engaged the community in developing the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). With support from administration, Mr. Picola had already launched a successful program that provided second chance breakfast to all students at no cost. There was enough buy-in and understanding of how meals benefit low-income students that the school district decided to include the program in the LCAP. Including school nutrition programs in the LCAP demonstrated the administration's commitment to ensuring that children receive the nutrition support they need so they are ready to learn.

OXNARD SCHOOL DISTRICT



“Our district realizes the importance of district wide universal feeding”

Jim Picola, Former Director of Childhood Nutrition
Oxnard School District

DISTRICT ACTION

Oxnard included providing breakfast at no charge to all students and offering second chance breakfast so that students are ready to learn in their Local Control and Accountability Plan. The action reflected the district's commitment to district wide universal feeding.