



March 3, 2020

Honorable Toni Atkins
President pro Tempore, California State Senate

Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker, California State Assembly

Honorable Holly J. Mitchell
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee

Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget

Honorable Richard D. Roth
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 1
on Education

Honorable Kevin McCarty
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 2
Education Finance

RE: \$60 Million in Ongoing Prop 98 Funding for Improving School Food Quality and Participation & \$10 Million in One-Time Funding for Staff Training - Department of Education (6100) Budget SUPPORT

Dear Legislative and Budget Committee Leaders,

The Center for Ecoliteracy, the Office of Kat Taylor, NextGen California, and the California School Employees Association respectfully request your support of the proposed \$60 million in ongoing Proposition 98 funding in the Governor's 2020-21 budget for improving the quality of reimbursed school meals and increasing participation in school nutrition programs. We also support the \$10 million in one-time Proposition 98 funding to provide training to school food service workers so that they may prepare and promote healthier food for students. We are extremely grateful for the Governor's prioritization of advancing these critical goals, and want to underscore the importance of this funding in the final Budget Act. The proposed \$60 million of ongoing funding represents an enormous opportunity for schools to serve more high quality meals, improve student health and academic achievement, bolster California's agricultural economy, and benefit our environment. The complementary investment of \$10 million one-time funding for training food service workers is critical in school districts' efforts to increase access to fresh – and freshly prepared – food for California kids as well as to support the viability of working in public education food service.

Everyday, thousands of schools throughout California are responsible for serving millions of school meals to feed their students. Although many school districts have made positive strides to provide locally-sourced, fresh, healthy ingredients to prepare their school meals, other districts across the state struggle to improve their nutrition practices due to constraints around funding, labor, food procurement, and administrative burdens. The evidence, however, is overwhelming that students who eat nutritious foods in schools are healthier and perform better academically -- they are less tired, more attentive, and better able to retain information. This

means that the food we serve in our lunchrooms and afterschool programs can help to better the lives of many children, especially those who are growing up in poverty, and who are therefore consuming up to half of their daily calories at school. (1)

The Governor's proposed \$60 million increase, and COLA adjustment, would increase the state's school meal reimbursement from 0.24 cents per meal in 2019-20 to 0.34 cents per meal in 2020-21 (2), which will go a long way towards improving the quality of school meals and increasing participation in the program. In particular, our organizations support the inclusion of "California-grown" and "fresh fruits and vegetables" in the final language for the \$60 million investment. Increasing the investment in school nutrition in this way will have a multitude of benefits for California kids, schools, farmers, our economy, and food service workers including:

- Buying California-grown food supports California farmers and strengthens local economies. School food in California is a \$2.4 billion industry, and school cafeterias can often be the largest "restaurant" in town. By directing more of this investment to local farmers, schools can help local economies thrive with every dollar they invest generating between \$1.03 - \$2.40 of economic activity. (3)
- Kids who eat healthy food are better prepared to succeed academically. (4)
- Students are more likely to consume food that is fresh, (5) thereby reducing food waste.
- Healthy students are absent less often, increasing attendance-based revenue for schools. (6)

In addition, the inclusion of \$10 million to invest in food service staff training is an essential component of this program. Training school food service staff is central to preparing fresh, healthy food for students. When the 89 public school districts who participate in the California Food for California Kids® Network were asked what was the one thing they needed to serve more freshly prepared, California-grown food, the overwhelming response was *staff training*. (6)

Our organizations believe that this additional funding provides an enormous opportunity for schools across our state to serve more high-quality meals, improve student health and academic achievement, bolster California's agricultural economy, and support the food service workforce. For the aforementioned reasons, we strongly support this funding increase and respectfully request your approval of the \$70 million increase for school food improvements and training.

Respectfully,



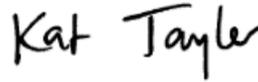
Ben Valdepeña
Association President
California School Employees Association



Adam Kesselman
Executive Director
Center for Ecoliteracy



Arnold Sowell Jr.
Executive Director
NextGen California



Kat Taylor
Principal
The Office of Kat Taylor

CC: Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Office of First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom
California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond
Senator Connie M. Leyva
Senator Mike Morrell
Assemblymember William P. Brough
Assemblymember James Gallagher
Assemblymember Monique Limón
Assemblymember Jose Medina
Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi
Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell
Assemblymember Jay Obernolte

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6. Food Research and Action Center .2010. "How Improving Federal Nutrition Program Access and Quality Work Together to Reduce Hunger and Promote Healthy Eating," p. 4. www.frac.org/pdf/CNR01_qualityandaccess.pdf.