June 5, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via electronic mail

RE: Funding for COVID-19 Emergency School Meals - SUPPORT

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are currently facing the economic and public health fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. Thanks in no small part to the legislature’s and your leadership, California has managed to flatten the curve and has entered into the initial stages of recovery. Despite hardship and continued challenges, an adequate pandemic response must include state and federal funding that gives our most under-resourced communities reliable and safe access to food.
We are writing to respectfully urge your support for funding in the 2020-21 California budget to provide flexible resources to all public school nutrition departments that face additional costs in feeding students during this public health crisis. Specifically, we wish to urge you to adopt the legislature’s allocation of $63.2 million for a COVID-19 child nutrition reimbursement account in the budget. This supplemental funding is critical to help cover the additional costs and losses of revenue associated with COVID-19 school food service, and will aid public school districts in continuing to safely serve meals to students during the pandemic.

During this time, access to food is one of the most basic human needs that must be met. Demand for food aid has increased eightfold\(^1\) in some areas amid this crisis, and lines of cars extend for miles from school sites and food banks, which are scrambling to meet the explosion in need. Schools have stepped up to provide meals to students in need, but current state funding, and the CARES Act (H.R.748/ S. 3548), does not currently account for the increased costs of feeding students during COVID-19 and the subsequent recovery.

The pandemic has introduced new challenges and growing budget deficits for many school nutrition service departments as they continue to pay their staff, lose sources of revenue, incur additional costs related to packaging and equipment, and source adequate personal protective equipment. Recent draft guidance\(^2\) from your office regarding on-site school meal practices, if adopted by schools as they reopen, will extend these additional costs for already burdened school districts.

It is imperative that we help prevent child hunger at a time when their families cannot afford to pay for food. As a coalition, we support increasing access to school meals for as many California kids as possible during the COVID-19 crisis. Additional funding can help keep school meal programs open, leveraging federal reimbursements that could be lost if school nutrition programs are serving fewer students or are forced to close. These dollars are critical for helping students in need, keeping communities safe, and stimulating a struggling agricultural economy by encouraging purchases of California-grown food. Without adequate funding and formal safety plans, many schools could be forced to discontinue emergency meal service if an employee or volunteer tests positive, leaving critical federal dollars on the table.

Student nutrition has tremendous effects on educational achievement and quality of life outcomes later in life. Lack of access to healthy food is exacerbated by socio-economic status and most prevalent in low-income communities of color.\(^3\) Providing financial resources to school nutrition programs ensures schools have the opportunity to play a vital role in keeping their communities fed, including traditionally under-resourced children. We strongly support the inclusion of this additional funding for school nutrition in the 2020-21 budget.

Respectfully,

Kat Taylor
Principal
The Office of Kat Taylor

Adam Kesselman
Executive Director
Center for Ecoliteracy

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\(^3\) [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
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CC:
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