

County of Santa Clara
Board of Supervisors
Supervisorial District Four
Supervisor Susan Ellenberg



100353

DATE: February 11, 2020

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Susan Ellenberg, Supervisor
S. Joseph Simitian, Supervisor

SUBJECT: Universal Meal Pilot Program in High-Need Schools

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Approve referral to administration to establish a pilot program to provide supplemental funding to school districts that participate in universal meal programs to reduce food insecurity among students. (Ellenberg/Simitian)

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

This referral requests that administration develop a pilot program that would allow for \$2,000,000 per year in supplemental funding for schools that apply to participate in the pilot over a four-year period, for a total of \$8,000,000. Additional resources may be identified by the Administration for program evaluation and implementation activities.

It is requested that funding be available to support participating schools for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

Meal gap projections produced by Second Harvest of Silicon Valley estimate that approximately 12,000 students would be served over three million meals per year under this proposal at a County cost of about \$0.60 per meal (1).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Second Harvest of Silicon Valley estimates that 1 in 3 children in Santa Clara County are food insecure and child hunger was identified as a top priority in the Comprehensive Child Health Assessment conducted by the County of Santa Clara in 2018 – 2019 (2).

The County of Santa Clara plays a crucial role in addressing child food security through the administration of CalFresh, the California program of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program. However, federal rule changes on who can access CalFresh and for how

long, as well as the fear created by regulations such as Public Charge, mean that The County of Santa Clara finds it increasingly difficult to connect families to important food assistance programs. Additionally, with the high cost of living in Santa Clara County, many families struggling with food insecurity may fall above the threshold for food assistance programs and free and reduced price school meal programs which is set at 185% of the federal poverty level, or less than \$50,000 annually for a family of four.

This environment requires additional collaboration and leveraging of resources between the County, School Districts and local partners like Second Harvest of Silicon Valley to ensure that federal and state resources are maximized in our community, that programs have a broad reach, and that vulnerable families are supported.

Research shows that receiving free or reduced-price school lunches reduces food insecurity, obesity rates, and poor health outcomes for children (3, 4). Additionally, research has shown that kids who participate in school breakfast programs have higher standardized test scores, fewer behavioral problems and higher attendance (4, 5). In Santa Clara County, approximately 68% of eligible students participate in the school lunch program and only 35% participate in School Breakfast leaving nearly 30,000 eligible children unserved for lunch and over 55,000 unserved for breakfast (6).

One approach to expanding access to healthy meals for children and reducing family food insecurity is the adoption of universal meal programs in high-needs schools. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2 (P2) are mechanisms in the federally funded National School Lunch Program that enable high-poverty schools to serve meals free-of-charge to all students (3). Adoption of CEP or P2 can benefit the entire school campus by increasing meal participation, eliminating stigma or fear of enrolling in school meal programs, eliminating parent debt for unpaid school meals, reducing administrative demands on schools and building a sense of community at school (3). The expansion of school meal participation can allow families to extend their financial resources further including County-administered CalFresh and WIC assistance.

While nationally almost half of schools eligible for CEP have adopted the model only 15% in California have opted to utilize CEP, the third lowest state in the U.S. (7). In several states and in the District of Columbia this adoption has been supported by providing supplemental funding to participating schools for each meal above the federal reimbursement (8).

This referral directs Administration to establish a four-year pilot program to provide supplemental meal funding for high-needs schools in Santa Clara County that choose to participate in universal meal programs. The pilot would be inclusive of all school campuses in Santa Clara County that meet eligibility for CEP or that have at least 70% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM). The proposed funding level of \$2,000,000 per year assumes 50% of eligible campuses participate in the pilot. Based on 2019 student data there are 84 campuses across 17 school districts in Santa Clara County that would be eligible for this pilot program (9).

Eligible Districts	Eligible Campuses	2019 Enrollment at Eligible Campuses
Alum Rock Union Elementary	24	9112
Campbell Union	1	466
Eastside Union High	7	4146
Evergreen Elementary	2	910
Franklin-McKinley Elementary	13	5611
Gilroy Unified	4	1610
Luther Burbank	1	516
Milpitas Unified	2	585
Moreland	1	386
Morgan Hill Unified	4	1640
Mount Pleasant Elementary	3	1268
Mountain View – Los Altos Union	1	79
Mountain View Whisman	1	268
Oak Grove Elementary	3	1283
San Jose Unified	13	5882
Santa Clara Unified	3	506
Sunnyvale	1	475
17 Districts	84 Schools	34,743 Students

This proposed pilot program would run from the fall of 2020 through the spring of 2024 to cover four full academic years in alignment with meal program eligibility criteria which runs in four-year cycles. Funding disbursement and confirmation of ongoing school participation would be provided annually. The pilot program should include the following elements:

- Program eligibility criteria to be inclusive of all school campuses in Santa Clara County that meet eligibility for CEP or that have at least 70% of students eligible for FRPM to participate in P2.
- A standard per meal funding level across all pilot participants and projections of a maximum funding level for each eligible school based on student enrollment and projected meals served.
- A participant application and review process that prioritizes 1) districts with higher percentages of low-income students 2) schools with larger student enrollment and 3) schools that will provide universal breakfast using “breakfast after the bell models” to

align funding with best practices, and selection of at least one eligible applicant school in each supervisorial district to participate, if possible.

- An evaluation of pilot program reach and impact leveraging existing school meals reporting mechanisms. Key elements should include changes in participation, meal program costs and reimbursement, and lessons learned from participating schools. An evaluation of the first three years of implementation and sustainability recommendations should be presented to the Board of Supervisors no later than December 2023.

The engagement of the Santa Clara County Office of Education and Second Harvest of Silicon Valley in developing pilot program criteria, review processes and outreach to eligible school districts is requested as part of this referral to assure alignment with existing data on meal program eligibility, school meal program operations, and mechanisms for school district communication.

To allow for implementation by the start of the 2020-2021 school year this referral requests administration return to the Board on March 24, 2020 with an initial pilot program plan, timeline and authorization of program funding. Subsequent action may include finalizing an evaluation plan and agreements with participating schools for the pilot.

BACKGROUND

The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are child nutrition programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service to provide food in school or institutional settings. These programs are operated by public and private schools throughout the country. State agencies receive the federal funds to distribute to local school districts that serve the meals and may create additional standards for school nutrition programs in their jurisdictions. Since federal funding does not cover the full cost of meals offered by the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, the remaining costs for meals is borne by children's families or states or localities that choose to supplement federal funding with grants or additional per-meal reimbursement (8).

Universal free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2 are mechanisms in the federally funded National School Lunch Program that enable high-poverty schools to serve free-of-charge to all students.

CEP is a tool that allows high-poverty districts or schools to offer both breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge. A district can utilize this option for any school that has an Identified Student Population (ISP) of 40% of enrollment or more. ISP students are children directly certified for free meals through data matching because their households receive CalFresh, CalWorks, or MediCal or children who are certified for free meals without an application because they are homeless, migrant, enrolled in Head Start, or in foster care. CEP is a relatively new option for schools and became available nationwide at the start of the 2014-2015 school year.

Provision 2 allows schools to offer breakfast, lunch or both at no charge to all students and is a financially viable reimbursement options for schools that have around 70% of students enrolled in free or reduced-price meals.

REFERENCES

- (1) Second Harvest Silicon Valley, CEP and Provision 2 Eligibility Projections, December 2019
- (2) County of Santa Clara Public Health Department, Santa Clara County Children’s Health Improvement Plan, September 2019.
- (3) Second Harvest Silicon Valley, Universal School Meals Fact Sheet, 2019.
- (4) “Benefits of School Lunch”, Food Resource and Action Center, accessed December 2019, <https://www.frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch>.
- (5) “No Kid Hungry Starts with Breakfast”, Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis, No Kid Hungry, accessed December 2019, <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/download-resource/No%20Kid%20Hungry%20Starts%20with%20Breakfast.pdf>
- (6) Santa Clara County Nutrition and Food Insecurity Profile, California Food Policy Advocates, accessed December 2019, <https://cfpa.net/county-profiles/>
- (7) Food Resource and Action Center, 2017. “Report: Community Eligibility Provision Continues to Grow in the 2016-2017 School Year”, Food Resource and Action Center, 2017.
- (8) “Summary of State Laws Addressing the School Breakfast Gap”. The Network for Public Health Law. May 2019.
- (9) Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility Data, California Department of Education, cde.ca.gov/ds/sh/cw.