

## FACT SHEET

# SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

## The School Lunch Program Benefits Children, Parents, and Schools by:

- ❖ Providing children with meals that include the vitamins, minerals, and calories they need.
- ❖ Offering parents a convenient and affordable way to provide their children with a meal during the day.
- ❖ Improving learning ability and classroom behavior among students that eat school lunches.

## What are the Challenges around the School Lunch Program?

- ❖ School meal programs must be self-supporting.
- ❖ Foods in the school lunch may vary in quality and be limited in variety.
- ❖ There may be a stigma attached to the lunch; in some schools, students who receive free and reduced priced meals are made to stand in different lines than those students paying full price. (This often results in fewer students choosing the free or reduced price lunch even though they are eligible.)
- ❖ Schools may have street vendors and/or local fast food establishments nearby that offer unhealthy, less expensive, and often times, more appealing foods.
- ❖ The school environment (such as long wait times for meals and unpleasant eating surroundings) may be a barrier to students eating in the cafeteria.
- ❖ There may be no cafeteria.
- ❖ Students and parents are unaware of what food offerings are in the school lunch.
- ❖ Competitive/a la carte offerings (foods and beverages sold outside of the school lunch) pull students away from choosing the school lunch.



## What is the School Lunch Program?

*The School Lunch Program is a Federal program that assists public schools and non-profit private schools in providing affordable meals to children. The program offers free or reduced price meals to children who qualify based on family size and income. It is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and, in California, by the California Department of Education (CDE).*



### What is the Ideal Situation?

- ❖ Good quality, varied, and appealing foods which may require updates in food service equipment and staff training.
- ❖ Fast service and a pleasant eating environment.
- ❖ One payment system for all students; a system that does not discriminate.
- ❖ Adequate time for students to eat and socialize with friends.
- ❖ Appropriate marketing of the school lunch program to attract student participation.

### What does your LSWP say about school lunch?

### What Can Parents Do?

- ❖ Talk to your children about their school's meals to determine what is currently offered and how they feel about it.
- ❖ Promote the school lunch to other families.
- ❖ Arrange a visit to your child's cafeteria to see what foods are sold, how they are presented, and what the eating environment is like.
- ❖ Work with other parents, the school wellness committee, and food service staff to address facility challenges and barriers to improved food choices.
- ❖ Work with food service staff and school administration to ensure that students are not singled out in meal lines based on how they pay.
- ❖ Conduct student surveys to determine what would increase student participation in the school lunch program.
- ❖ Work with the food service staff to conduct taste tests of new, healthier foods. (Students are more likely to buy new foods if they have tasted them before).
- ❖ Assist food service with school lunch marketing efforts.
- ❖ Determine if street vendors are operating close to the school grounds, and if so, work with the principal or assistant principal and the city to eliminate street vendors around school property.
- ❖ Work with food service to arrange parent volunteer programs to support food changes in the cafeteria (e.g., assist in keeping salad bars clean and appealing for students).

### Additional Resources

*Changing the Scene, Improving the School Nutrition Environment*, USDA, Food and Nutrition Service

A toolkit that addresses the entire school nutrition environment from a commitment to nutrition and physical activity to pleasant eating experiences, quality school meals, other healthy food options, nutrition education, and marketing the issue to the public.

[www.fns.usda.gov/TN/Resources/changing.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/TN/Resources/changing.html)

*School Nutrition by Design*, CDE

An overview and strategies for implementing a healthy nutrition environment.

[www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fdl/documents/schnutrtn071206.pdf](http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fdl/documents/schnutrtn071206.pdf)

*Feed More Kids for School Lunch Success*, CDE

Provides guidance on how to get more students to eat the school lunch.

[www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/feedmorekids.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/feedmorekids.asp)

*Team Nutrition*, USDA, Food and Nutrition Service

Provides resources that support child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance for food service, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/>