



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION**

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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August 9, 2021

Dear Food Service Director:

**WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL**

On behalf of the entire California Department of Education (CDE) Nutrition Services Division (NSD) team, I am pleased to welcome you to School Year (SY) 2021–22. While I am certain that the end of the previous school year brings with it a sense of relief, there is much to acknowledge and celebrate. School food service teams across California went above and beyond to ensure children had continued access to nutritious meals in many new ways that none of us thought possible! Your tireless leadership ensured that for the past year, across our Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), more than 919 million meals were provided to children through satellite distribution, home delivery, grab and go, and bulk meal service. You and your teams have sustained superior service through the school week, holidays, and the summer. This past year has elevated the important role of school meal programs within communities and the strong connection between easy access to nutritious meals and preserving equity in learning opportunities for all students.

You should feel proud of the difference you have made through the pandemic—you are all extraordinary. I have a deep appreciation for the hard work that you do every day. As more people are vaccinated in California, we are excited to see districts resuming in-person instruction and meal service this school year.

**A Return to Campus**

As schools begin to return to more normalized operations through in-person instruction, we know that some may continue to offer remote or hybrid learning. The look and feel of the meal operations for the upcoming year will be unique to each district and individual school sites within a district, yet the one constant is the strong health and safety measures you are all continuing to implement. It is important to check with your county health department for protocols specific to your area and another resource that is helpful is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Toolkit for K-12 Schools*. You can view the most up-to-date guidance and tools on the CDC COVID-19 Toolkit for K-12 Schools web page at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/toolkits/schools.html>.

I am appreciative that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has already issued a number of waivers for the duration of SY 2021–22, allowing maximum flexibility for you in providing meals to students in a manner that best suits your instructional model. However, there is also greater emphasis on state agencies to track the use of these

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waivers. As a result, some waiver elections must be confirmed routinely during SY 2021–22, though, overall, the year-long availability of these flexibilities will reduce much of the uncertainty of last year. Please note that all CNP Operators will need to submit their meal service waivers before using the flexibilities. For more information about how to use and apply for the waivers refer to the CDE SY 2021–22 Initial Waiver Elections webpage at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sy2122initialwaivelect.asp>.

## **Universal Meals**

I am thrilled that USDA is allowing schools, regardless of zip code or income eligibility, to offer all students free meals for the entire SY 2021–22 under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) while also receiving the higher Summer Food Service Program reimbursement rate. This brings us one step closer to achieving the California goal, starting in 2022-23, the School Meals for All Students initiative that is a priority and commitment of our State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond. Your engagement is critical as we build the framework that is intended to supplement the federal meal programs. Please be sure to submit your input and questions to the newly created [UniversalMealsSY22@cde.ca.gov](mailto:UniversalMealsSY22@cde.ca.gov) mailbox. We are also planning additional stakeholder touchpoint as well.

## **Staff Training**

As you embark on the new school year, many of you will have new staff who have never worked in school nutrition and are not familiar with our plethora of program requirements. The NSD team would like to offer a few professional development topics to consider: food safety and sanitation, meal counting and claiming, and of course, your integrity plan. Here are a few online resources to consider as you develop your training plan:

- The CDE Nutrition web page  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/index.asp>
- The SSO  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/ssfo.asp>
- CNP Course Catalog web page  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/ed/cnpcoursecatalog.asp>
- Integrity Plans can be found on the CNP COVID-19 guidance web page under the Resources tab at  
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/cnpcovid19guidance.asp>.

## **Student Support**

Now that we are emerging from the challenges of the pandemic, children may experience an increased level of anxiety about returning to campus for in-person learning. Multiple aspects of the school environment, including school nutrition programs support a student's health, well-being, and academic success. Mealtimes is a great opportunity to provide valuable support and encouragement for students transitioning from distance learning to the classroom. This is also an ideal time to reconvene your local school wellness policy committee to assess your previous health and wellness goals and start planning for SY 2021–22. The CDC has developed school nutrition policies and practices to support the social and emotional climate and learning of students. Examples include:

- Providing adequate seat time for meals gives students the opportunity to socialize and connect with peers, in small cohorts and in accordance with local guidelines.
- Encouraging teachers to eat meals with students can help reinforce healthy eating behaviors and strengthen relationships with students, ensuring adherence to local and state COVID-19 precautions.
- Offering nutrition education that helps students recognize how a healthy diet influences emotional well-being.

For more information about the connections between the school nutrition environment, the social and emotional climate in school, and activities that support a student's social and emotional learning, visit the CDC Healthy Schools School Nutrition and the Social and Emotional Climate and Learning web page at

[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/school\\_nutrition\\_sec.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/school_nutrition_sec.htm).

## **Continued Communication**

We have received positive feedback about the Town Halls and it is our commitment to continue our monthly Tuesday @ 2 School Nutrition Town Hall meetings to support your work, maintain open communication, provide timely updates and build upon our collaborative partnership. We will continue to provide state updates along with a panel of your peers to discuss their challenges and successes in their food service operations. We will also continue to provide up-to-date information on our COVID-19 Guidance in the CNPs web page. We encourage you to bookmark the page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/cnpcovid19guidance.asp> and visit it often for timely news and links to helpful resources to assist you in planning your meal operations. Be sure to reach out to your School Nutrition Programs (SNP) County Specialist for specific questions about operating your program. The SNP County Specialist list is available in the Child Nutrition Information and Payment System Download Forms section, Form ID–Caseload. You may also contact an SNP Office Technician by phone at 916-322-3005 or 800-952-5609, Option 2.

Thank you for all you do every day to serve your students and community. All of us at the CDE along with the SSPI applaud you and your staff for your dedication and

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tireless efforts to provide dependable access to healthy food during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. I feel fortunate to be a part of the California child nutrition community and look forward to another productive year ensuring children have access to nutritious meals year-round.

In the spirit of collaboration, respect, accountability, integrity, and making a positive difference,

Kim Frinzell, Director  
Nutrition Services Division