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Summer Meals Participation Doubles for Many of California's School Districts During COVID-19

Districts in Urgent Need of Resources to Respond to Pandemic

SACRAMENTO, CA – California school districts recently reported that participation in summer meal programs during the COVID-19 crisis has increased significantly, sometimes doubling or tripling, compared to previous years.

“The essential role of school food has been demonstrated in countless ways during the pandemic,” said **Adam Kesselman**, Executive Director of the Center for Ecoliteracy, whose California Food for California Kids initiative supports districts across the state. “In addition to supporting children’s health and academic success, schools have bolstered local food systems by purchasing and serving locally-grown foods. Due to COVID-19, they’ll be serving meals at an unprecedented scale over the summer months.”

School districts and community partners have collaborated since mid-March on the pandemic response during regular calls hosted by the Center for Ecoliteracy and LunchAssist. Forty-four California-based education agencies participated in last week’s call, which collectively serve over 75 million meals each year in 1,179 schools where over 670,000 students are enrolled. Here are some of the ways they discussed the surge in demand for summer meals compared with last year:

“We surpassed what we served all of last summer in our first four days of service this summer,” said **Leslie Pring, SNS, Director of Nutrition Services with Twin Rivers Unified School District**. “We served 58,000 meals last summer and last week we served 77,577.”

“We served two times the amount of summer meals in one week than we did all of last summer,” said **Stephanie Bruce, Director of Nutrition Services with Palm Springs Unified School District**.

“We will serve more summer meals in our first week than we did all of summer last year,” said **Dr. Robert Lewis, CEO of Santa Clarita Valley School Food Services Agency**.

[Recent](#) statewide advocacy efforts have focused on making school meals a priority in the California Budget, as districts are struggling to keep kids fed during COVID-19.

“We will continue to champion the nutritional needs of California’s students and their families,” said **Kat Taylor**, founder of the TomKat Ranch Education Foundation and TomKat Ranch. “With unprecedented unemployment plaguing our state during this pandemic, there is a greater need to ensure that our most under-resourced communities are being served, starting with addressing hunger.”

[New research](#) from the University of California Berkeley’s Institute of Urban and Regional Development and School of Public Health found that many school districts are trying to meet the demand for emergency school meals with fewer resources and drastically higher costs. In a state where 58% of students qualified for free or reduced priced meals prior to COVID-19, school meal programs critically need resources to adjust their operations at a pace that matches students’ needs.

About the Office of Kat Taylor

Kat Taylor is active in a variety of social enterprises, public benefit and philanthropic ventures on the West Coast. Concurrently, she serves as Co-Founder and Board Chair of Beneficial State Bank, a Community Development Financial Institution whose mission is to bring beneficial banking to under-resourced communities in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner. Taylor is also the founder of TomKat Ranch and the TomKat Ranch Educational Foundation, dedicated to inspiring a sustainable food system through ranching, training, tours, research, and school food and garden programs. Taylor serves and has served on many non-profit boards including the Harvard Board of Overseers, Ecotrust, Good Samaritan Family Resource Center, ProPublica, CuriOdyssey, Insight Prison Project, KQED and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

About the Center for Ecoliteracy

The [Center for Ecoliteracy](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to cultivating education for sustainable living. One of its key initiatives, [California Food for California Kids®](#), supports systems change by improving children’s health, education, and the state’s economy while teaching students where food comes from and how it reaches the table.

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