

2020

California Child Nutrition Access Institute

Childhood hunger is an urgent issue in California: 1 in 5 kids live in a family that struggles to provide enough food for everyone, and no community is exempt. Hunger has long-term ramifications on children, including lower test scores, weaker attendance rates and a higher risk of preventable illnesses. Effective programs exist to ensure kids get the nutrition they need to reach their full potential, but right now they aren't reaching all the children and families that may benefit.

On February 25-26, 2020, No Kid Hungry California and the California Department of Education co-hosted the first ever California Child Nutrition Access Institute. The two-day convening in Sacramento brought together key stakeholders from around California who can influence child nutrition policy and practice in their communities, including state education agency staff, school nutrition directors, superintendents, non-profit partners, school board members and education association members. Participants heard from state and national leaders who have made significant strides to increase access to child nutrition programs and split into task forces to develop collaborative plans of action and shared goals across three focus areas: school breakfast, out of school time and community engagement.



“We’re talking about something so basic as coming in and having enough food to eat – that’s really an issue of equity and equality.”

DR. MARIBEL GARCIA

SUPERINTENDENT,
EL MONTE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Themes

Through plenary panel discussions and smaller task force working groups, participants explored strategies for expanding access to nutrition programs for California kids. A few key themes emerged:

Together we go far. Partnerships and collaboration are key. The institute reinforced the importance of identifying allies, aligning objectives and learning from one another as the path to achieving shared goals.

Bold leadership is an essential ingredient. Moving the needle requires leaders who are willing to use the power of their voice to exert pressure and create a wave.

Hunger is an equity issue. Access to nutrition is deeply intertwined with health outcomes and the ability to get a good education. Equity requires removing shame and stigma and ensuring all students have easy access to healthy food with dignity.

Find the right messengers. Panelists and participants talked about the importance of identifying the trusted voices who can help open doors, whether it's utilizing the bully pulpit or exerting grassroots influence.

Data and scientific research change minds. Decision makers have many competing priorities. Data and research can illustrate how feeding kids relates to other issues like test scores and the bottom line.

The power of storytelling. At the same time, stories help put a face to the policies we promote and celebrating success is a great incentive that can create a domino effect.

Next Steps

The Institute was only a jumping off point. Each task force will receive a \$35,000 grant from No Kid Hungry California to implement their action plan over the next three years in order to reach the shared goals they agreed upon. Task force members will participate in webinars throughout this year and convene in person in October to reconnect and update the group on their progress.

“We can’t educate the kids unless they’re in their seats and ready to learn.”

ADONAI MACK

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF FEDERAL RELATIONS, ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

“We have the data and we hear it from educators - having enough food to start the day matters.”

DOROTHY MCAULIFFE

NATIONAL POLICY ADVISORY, SHARE OUR STRENGTH AND FORMER FIRST LADY OF VIRGINIA



No child should go hungry in America. But 1 in 7 kids lives with hunger. No Kid Hungry is ending childhood hunger through effective programs that provide kids with the food they need. This is a problem we know how to solve. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization working to end hunger and poverty.