



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION**

**TONY THURMOND**  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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September 15, 2021

Dear County and District Superintendents, Charter Schools Administrators, School Principals, Chief Business Officials, and School Nutrition Program Operators:

**School Meals and Supply Chain Issues During School Year  
2021–22**

As our nation faces the ongoing effects of a worldwide pandemic, COVID-19 continues to disrupt manufacturing, supply, and distribution chains across many industries. Our School Nutrition Programs all over the country are experiencing these unprecedented realities of food, equipment, and supply shortages resulting in limited inventory that is essential for serving a variety of healthy foods and offering nutritious school meals.

In California, these realities are equally disheartening. Our 1,971 School Nutrition Program Operators are experiencing extraordinary challenges to providing quality meals to our 6.1 million students each school day. School foodservice departments statewide are trying to manage staffing shortages, unanticipated termination of food and supply contracts, last-minute cancellations of partial and entire food orders, unexpected substitutions of food products, and **significant** increases in prices—as much as 30 to 60 percent. Any one of these issues can upend a carefully planned foodservice operation, yet the majority of our school foodservice departments are experiencing all of them simultaneously.

Our School Nutrition Program professionals are to be commended for their resilience and dedication. Since day one of the pandemic, they have been on the front lines serving school communities to ensure children have access to much-needed meals. As they prepared for the new school year, many were eager to greet their returning students in-person and looked forward to offering a variety of favorite fresh, nutritious, and culturally diverse school meals. No one anticipated the additional challenges they would be facing with limited food availability, staff shortages, distribution issues, and inflationary pricing.

The environment in which our foodservice professionals are providing school meals is complex under the best of conditions and, now more than ever, it requires the commitment and understanding of the entire school community. I am asking each member of the school community, from leadership to parents, to lean in and support your foodservice operations during this challenging time.

I am also interested in hearing of any additional foodservice disruptions your school is facing so that these specific situations can be elevated at the federal level as we all look

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for viable relief and potential solutions. Please submit your examples via email at [SNPinfo@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SNPinfo@cde.ca.gov).

### **Existing Operational Supports**

For School Year 2021–22, there is a nationwide targeted meal pattern waiver that provides some flexibilities for schools experiencing supply chain issues related to COVID-19. All schools are strongly encouraged to request these flexibilities. School Nutrition Program Operators can opt into the waiver and access the meal pattern flexibility request at <https://surveys2.cde.ca.gov/go/snmpmpwaivers21.asp>. The California Department of Education is advocating for additional nationwide meal pattern flexibilities.

There is also flexibility to the federal procurement requirements. School Nutrition Program Operators may conduct emergency noncompetitive procurement(s) when an urgent need or emergency arises, such as the need to replace missing foods or paper goods with alternative sources or products quickly. Emergency noncompetitive procurement methods are a standing flexibility and do not require a waiver. For additional questions and technical assistance on emergency noncompetitive procurements, contact [SFSCONTRACTS@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SFSCONTRACTS@cde.ca.gov).

Below are some additional supply chain strategies to consider:

- Shorten menu cycles to two or three weeks.
- Place product orders earlier and forecast food needs for a longer period.
- Communicate potential changes to school meals with families.
- Consider purchasing smaller quantities of product(s) through one or more local producers or small businesses instead of purchasing products in a single, large transaction through a broadline distributor.

These are unprecedented times, and I want to thank our school foodservice directors and their staff for their service, creativity, and professionalism. This pandemic has persisted for 18 long months. As we work to resume on-campus learning and meal service, we must recognize the demanding reality in which our foodservice teams are operating and their steadfast commitment to maintaining access to nutritious meals for all students.

Facing these challenges together, we will successfully navigate and overcome them.

Sincerely,

/s/

Kim Frinzell, Director  
Nutrition Services Division  
California Department of Education