



**SECOND HARVEST**  
of SILICON VALLEY

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **FREE SUMMER MEALS PROGRAMS MAKE A COMEBACK, FEEDING KIDS AND ELIGIBLE ADULTS WHO NEED NUTRITIOUS MEALS THIS SUMMER**

Additional support may be on the way as California is poised to be the first state to permanently adopt free school meals for all students

- Following a year of modifications due to the pandemic, free summer meals are back and any child who is 18 or younger can get a safe, free lunch at more than 80 sites in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties—no registration is required.
- Some sites also offer free breakfast and an afternoon snack as well as low cost meals to adult caregivers.
- For help finding a meal site or other food resources this summer text “Summer” for English, “Verano” for Spanish, “Muahe” for Vietnamese or “Лето” for Russian to 876-876 or visit [www.shfb.org/getfood](http://www.shfb.org/getfood).

SAN JOSE, Calif., June 11, 2021— While summer has always been a difficult time for families that rely on school meals during the academic year, unprecedented rates of food insecurity and unemployment due to the pandemic have made access to free summer meals programs more important than ever. To increase awareness and encourage participation in free summer meals programs in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley is collaborating with high need school districts, libraries, social service organizations and other nonprofits throughout both counties to raise awareness and help connect families with the nutritious food they need to thrive this summer.

This year, there are more than [80 federally funded summer meals](#) sites in both counties where any child or teen 18 or younger can obtain a free lunch with no advance registration or documentation required. Some sites also offer free breakfast and an afternoon snack. To encourage participation, select sites have received grants to offer low cost or no cost meals available to parents and caregivers so families can share a meal together. While many of the sites will continue to offer the “grab and go” meals that were implemented during the pandemic, some will once again serve meals on location as county restrictions continue to loosen.

“For many low income students, the breakfast and lunch they get at school are some of the only nutritious meals they can count on,” said Leslie Bacho, CEO of Second Harvest of Silicon Valley. “The pandemic has magnified the important role that daily, nutritious school meals play



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in fighting child hunger and food insecurity. So many families are working hard to cover back rent and other expenses they incurred as a result of job losses and wage cuts during the pandemic. Free meals for kids, as well as other food resources, are available and can help.”

### **Summer meals provide relief to families**

For Norma and her husband, who both lost their jobs as a seamstress and carpenter during the pandemic, school meals have been a source of support for their four kids while the family navigated the challenges the COVID-19 crisis. "Once you have food within your reach, it helps you out with your children a lot because they can be more focused in school," said Norma. "A full belly equals a happy heart and an open mind. Summer meals helped me a lot because sometimes my child couldn't concentrate when he felt his belly growl. He was not concentrating because he was hungry. Once he ate, he became relaxed."

[Studies](#) show that kids who don't get enough nutritious food to eat have trouble concentrating, are sick more often, and are more likely to suffer emotional and physical effects that can last a lifetime. "The benefit is our children are more concentrated in school; they are more attentive and more awake because their body is fueled," said Norma.

Federally funded [Summer Nutrition Programs](#) are designed to replace school breakfast and lunch, filling a nutrition gap that exists for thousands of low-income children during the summer months when they are at risk for the consequences of hunger, which include physical and emotional issues, as well as the possibility for “summer slide” where they can lose ground academically when school is out of session. Even before the pandemic, there were a number of barriers that kept kids and families from accessing summer meals, including a lack of transportation and conflicts with work or childcare. Other families were simply unaware that the programs existed or struggled with the stigma attached to receiving assistance.

### **Universal School Meals would provide additional relief year all year long**

Second Harvest — along with other food banks, school nutrition directors, medical professionals and community leaders across California — have long advocated that free school meals should be available to all students, all year long. Universal school meals would help ensure children have the health, energy, and focus needed to thrive in school, laying the foundation for a successful future. Access to all would also help ease the stigma associated with receiving a free meal at school.

On June 3, both the California State Senate and Assembly Budget Committees approved funding that would make California the first state to permanently adopt Universal School Meals. The funding would increase state school meal reimbursements by \$54 million in



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the 2021-22 school year and provide \$650 million in ongoing Proposition 98 funding, beginning in the 2022-23 school year, to cover the costs of offering free breakfast and lunch for all students. Second Harvest, along with a coalition of nearly 200 health, nutrition, education, labor, community-based organizations and other food banks is now calling on Governor Gavin Newsom to support the legislature's budget proposal.

"Universal school meals will ensure that every child is ready to learn and thrive; feeding all children together also creates community – it's an important investment in our country's future," said Bacho.

### **For more information on Free Summer Meals or food assistance**

Families who need help finding a summer meal can text summer text "Summer" for English, "Verano" for Spanish, "Muahe" for Vietnamese or "Лето" for Russian to 876-876. For help accessing other food resources, call Second Harvest's multilingual Food Connection hotline at 800-984-3663 or visit [www.shfb.org/getfood](http://www.shfb.org/getfood).

### **About Second Harvest of Silicon Valley**

Founded in 1974, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley is one of the largest food banks in the nation and a trusted nonprofit leader in ending local hunger. The organization distributes nutritious groceries through a network of more than 300 partners at drive-thru and walk-up sites across Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Due to the prohibitively expensive cost of living in Silicon Valley and the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger is at an all-time high. Second Harvest is now serving 500,000 people on average every month, which is twice as many people as they reached pre-pandemic. Second Harvest also connects people to federal nutrition programs and other food resources, and advocates for anti-hunger policies on the local, state and national levels. To learn more about how Second Harvest is responding to the incredible amount of need in Silicon Valley, visit [shfb.org](http://shfb.org).

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