



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: COUNTY MANAGER

File #: 20-582

Board Meeting Date: 8/4/2020

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Supervisor Warren Slocum, District 4
Subject: Universal Meal Pilot Program in High-Needs Schools

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommendation to:

- A) Approve an allocation of \$1,000,000 of Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding for the purposes of establishing a pilot program to provide supplemental funding to school districts that participate in universal meal programs to reduce food insecurity among students; and
- B) Authorize the County Manager, or the County Manager's designee, to negotiate an agreement with the San Mateo County Office of Education to provide for the transfer of \$1,000,000 in CARES Act funds to the San Mateo County of Education and to provide for the administration and distribution of the grant funds to San Mateo County school districts.

BACKGROUND:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Get Health San Mateo County estimated that 13% of children in San Mateo County were experiencing food insecurity. With the high cost of living in San Mateo County, many families struggling with food insecurity fell above the income threshold for food assistance programs and free and reduced price school meal programs which is set at 185% of the federal poverty level, or less than \$50,000 annually for a family of four. The COVID-19 pandemic has only served to exacerbate food insecurity; since March 2020 Second Harvest of Silicon Valley has more than doubled its food distributions to families in San Mateo County. This environment requires additional collaboration and leveraging of resources between the County, School Districts and local partners like Second Harvest of Silicon Valley to ensure that federal and state resources are maximized and families are supported.

Research shows that receiving free or reduced-price school lunches reduces food insecurity, obesity rates, and poor health outcomes for children. The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are child nutrition programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service to provide food in school or institutional settings. Universal free meals

through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2 are mechanisms in the federally funded National School Lunch Program that enable high-poverty school districts or schools to offer both breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge. A district can utilize this option for any school that has an Identified Student Population (ISP) of 40% of enrollment or more. ISP students are children directly certified for free meals through data matching because their households receive CalFresh, CalWorks, or MediCal or children who are certified for free meals without an application because they are homeless, migrant, enrolled in Head Start, or in foster care. CEP became available nationwide at the start of the 2014-2015 school year. Provision 2 allows schools to offer breakfast, lunch or both at no charge to all students and is a financially viable reimbursement options for schools that have around 70% of students enrolled in free or reduced-price meals. The deadline to opt in to CEP or Provision 2 for the 2020-21 school year has been extended to August 31, 2020.

DISCUSSION:

This proposal, developed by County staff in collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank of Silicon Valley and the San Mateo County Office of Education, would support districts that elect to offer universal free meals to all students by opting in Community Eligibility Provision or Provision 2 of the National School Lunch Program. Under the proposal \$1,000,000 in CARES Act funding would be granted to the County Office of Education and the County Office of Education would distribute these funds to school districts that would use them to fill the cost gap between CEP or Provision 2 reimbursement rates and costs to provide universal meals for this school year. Over time, this pilot will test if districts will be able to achieve economies of scale by preparing meals for all of its students, thereby reducing the need for an ongoing subsidy. Information learned from this pilot program will be presented to the Board of Supervisors at the end of the 2020-21 school year.

Given the August 31, 2020 deadline to opt into Community Eligibility Provision or Provision 2 of the National School Lunch Program, in addition to authorizing and directing the \$1,000,000 grant of CARES Act funds to the County Office of Education, we recommend that the Board of Supervisors vest the County Manager or his designees with authority to negotiate all appropriate agreements with the County Office of Education and other entities regarding the terms and administration of the grant and to develop, in collaboration with the County Office of Education and other appropriate stakeholders, appropriate processes to administer the grant and the distribution of funds to school districts that apply to participate.

FISCAL IMPACT:

At the direction of this Board, the County Manager will negotiate and enter an agreement with the San Mateo County Office of Education to administer and distribute funds to school districts in San Mateo County that apply. There is no fiscal impact on the County General Fund associated with approving this allocation of \$1,000,000 of CARES Act funds.