

The University of San Francisco

USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

Master's Projects and Capstones

Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects

Spring 5-21-2022

What's Lunch Got to do With It?: A Case Study of California Policy, Educational Equity, and the First Statewide Universal School Meals Program

Rebecca Murillo
rdmurillo11@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/capstone>



Part of the [Education Policy Commons](#), [Food Studies Commons](#), [Health Policy Commons](#), [Policy Design, Analysis, and Evaluation Commons](#), and the [Social Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Murillo, Rebecca, "What's Lunch Got to do With It?: A Case Study of California Policy, Educational Equity, and the First Statewide Universal School Meals Program" (2022). *Master's Projects and Capstones*. 1366. <https://repository.usfca.edu/capstone/1366>

This Project/Capstone - Global access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Projects and Capstones by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

What's Lunch Got to do With It?: A Case Study of California Policy, Educational Equity, and
the First Statewide Universal School Meals Program

A Capstone Thesis Presented to the Faculty of The College of Arts & Sciences
University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

Rebecca Murillo

May 2022

What's Lunch Got to do With It?: A Case Study of California Policy, Educational Equity, and
the First Statewide Universal School Meals Program

A Capstone Thesis Presented to the Faculty of The College of Arts & Sciences
University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

by

Rebecca Murillo

May 2022

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this
thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Sarah Burgess _____

Date _____

David Donahue _____

Date _____

Author Release Form

The University of San Francisco and the College of Arts and Sciences have permission to use my M.A. Capstone Paper project as an example of acceptable work. This permission includes the right to duplicate the manuscript and allows the project to be checked out from the College Library.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
List of Acronyms	
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	10
<i>Anti-hunger, Nutrition Quality, and Participation Rates</i>	11
<i>Equity in School Cafeterias</i>	16
<i>California as a Case Study</i>	19
<i>Conclusion</i>	21
Methods.....	22
<i>Appendix A</i>	89
Legislative History.....	28
<i>The Framework: Tinkering Towards Utopia</i>	29
<i>School Meals at the Federal Level</i>	32
<i>California Education Funding: Propositions 13 and 98</i>	37
<i>California’s State Meal Program and the CEP (revisited)</i>	45
<i>Finding (and focusing on) the Bills that Mattered</i>	47
<i>The Budget and the Trailer</i>	53
Data Analysis.....	57
<i>Understanding, Challenging, and Changing Systems</i>	59

<i>Helping Everyone by Helping those Suffering Most</i>	63
<i>“Not Going Back to Normal”: Optimism and a Positive View of the Future</i>	69
Conclusions & Recommendations.....	73
<i>#1 Policy: Sustainable Funding for the Future</i>	76
<i>#2 Replication: A Model for States and the Nation</i>	77
<i>#3 Improving Procurement</i>	79
<i>#4 Rethinking School Staff Labor and Kitchen Infrastructure</i>	80

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the eleven individuals who allowed me to interview them for my capstone project. While some sources wished to remain anonymous, the following individuals consented to share their information:

Jose Vargas, Policy Manager, United Way

Melanie Flood, Director of Communications, First 5 Center for Children's Policy

Katie Ettman, Food and Agriculture Policy Manager, SPUR

Andrew Cheyne, Deputy Direct SNAP, Food and Research Action Center

Becky Silva, Policy Advocate, California Association of Food Banks

Itzul Gutierrez, Policy Advocate, California Association of Food Banks

Lena Brook, Senior Advocate and Director of Food Campaigns, Natural Resource Defense Council

Jessica Bartholow, Chief of Staff, Office of Senator Nancy Skinner

Alexa Norstad, Director of Programs, Center for Ecoliteracy

I would also like to thank my first reader, Sarah Burgess for her thorough comments and enduring guidance through this entire process. I would also like to thank my second reader, David Donahue, for being an enthusiastic thought partner in imagining educational equity. Thank you to Kresten Froistad-Martin, the University of San Francisco Urban and Public Affairs Program Director for her kindness and support throughout this program. Finally, thank you to all the faculty of the Urban and Public Affairs program.

Abstract:

In July 2021, California became the first state to pass a program which guarantees two meals a day to all K-12 students at no cost. This project examines California's journey to pass this Universal School Meals Program (USMP) and explores how such a program can provide equity for students. I produce a legislative history which traces how school meals are funded and regulated at the federal level, California's public education funding system, their state meal program, the policies which created changes that allowed the USMP to pass, and the legislation of the program itself. Framework presented by Tyack and Cuban allow for this process to be understood as one of education reform which worked to challenge systems and consider school meals a learning resource as necessary as a textbook or desk. To understand how this program may promote equity, semi-structured interviews were conducted with legislators and advocates involved in the passage of the USMP. Interviews demonstrated that this program was viewed as providing equity in the ways it approached the issue of hunger. Applying concepts of targeted universalism to these interviews allows for a definition of equity to be realized, emphasizing that promoting equity requires an understanding of systems and centering of groups which those systems oppress most. With the legislative history and targeted universalism framework, I present the USMP as an example of how policy can create programs which provide equity, opening a pathway for policy and programs of the future to follow suit.

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Definition</i>
USMP	Universal School Meals Program
FRP	Free or Reduced Price Meals
CEP	Community Eligibility Provision
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
SBP	School Breakfast Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
FDA	Federal Drug Administration
CA SMP	California School Meal Program
ISP	Identified Student Percentage
NSD	Nutrition Services Department

Figure 1: A glossary of terms and acronyms frequently used throughout this paper

Introduction

Rather than a problem, this project began with a solution to hunger experienced in school cafeterias. In July of 2021, California became the first state to pass a Universal School Meals Program (USMP)¹, ensuring that all students receive two meals a day at no cost. Specifically, this program was provided funding because it was included in the AB130 budget bill, obtaining \$650 million to begin in the 2022-23 academic year. The passage of this program was seen as a huge win for the anti-hunger community, who have long centered hungry students in their legislation and advocacy initiatives. Even though legislation that targets hungry students often gains bipartisan support, there were a few crucial factors that contributed to the funding of the Universal School Meals Program—conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, a surplus in the California state budget, and the work of the Anti-Hunger Community. Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, school meals were already under scrutiny in the United States. Unlike other countries, where meals are served for free to all students as part of the school day, school meals in the US require payment from students, leaving some students who could not afford meals hungry. Outside of hunger, primary focus areas in the school meal space prior to the pandemic were to improve nutrition, increase access to school meals programs, move towards values-based procurement, and extend meal times. Of course, these issues remain today, but the inclusion of the USMP in the state budget has allowed hunger to take center stage.

When the start of the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close and switch to online instruction in the spring of 2020, it not only meant that students were no longer receiving in person instruction, but also that they were no longer receiving any meals from their school cafeteria. Providing breakfast and lunch at home may not have been as burdensome for families

¹ This program is also referenced as School Meals for All or Universal Lunch depending on who you are talking to.

with stable incomes, but for lower income families, the costs were harder to carry. Additionally, because lower income individuals are more likely to work in service industry, or people-facing jobs, it was more likely that their hours were cut somewhat or altogether as a result of shelter in place orders, leaving them with even less income to prepare more food at home. At the national level, what the COVID-19 pandemic revealed was a system which disproportionately benefits certain groups over other race and ethnicity groups. An example of how certain groups benefit is demonstrated by a Bureau of Labor Statistics report, which found that white males were least affected by employment loss in 2020, most likely due to the fact that they work in offices which could switch to remote work. On the other hand, Asian and Hispanic women were most affected by job loss from the service or childcare sector (Bureau of Labor Statistics). This imbalance motivated a slew of research around the topic of equity, which has since become a buzz-word of sorts and created new positions in the public and private sectors alike. Generally speaking, equity recognizes how systems which have been in place for centuries are oppressive and create barriers for certain groups. Moving past equality, which provides the same access to all, equity recognizes that we do not all start in the same place, and calls for adjustments to be made to these imbalances. Understanding equity is important as it provides context for the significance of the USMP and the historical context with which it was passed.

Anti-hunger campaigns were already prevalent prior to the pandemic, but with a new vocabulary of equity, they could be strengthened with language influenced by equity to recognize and focus on the groups most affected by hunger. Addressing hunger in schools by feeding low-income students already existed before the pandemic in the forms of the Free and Reduced-Price (FRP) meal program and the summer food program. Both of these programs aim to address hunger by increasing access to nutritious school lunches, but have their own barriers

to enrollment. Normally, students required to pay full price unless they are enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price (FRP) meal program. To enroll in the FRP a parent or guardian must fill out an application to confirm they meet program requirements, a household income of under \$48,000 for reduced price, and \$34,000 for free (within 130-185% federal poverty, respectively) or qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Federal Register Archives). Students admitted to the FRP program pay under \$0.50 each for lunch and breakfast, rather than the typical cost which sits around \$2.50 per meal. Even if the student is eligible for FRP meals, a parent or guardian may hold certain cultural beliefs of not applying for government assistance programs, or fears related to immigration status when the application for FRP meals asks for their citizenship status, also leaving them with little to no food.

These programs help to alleviate hunger at schools by making meals more accessible and affordable, but hunger and the barriers families face when enrolling are only part of a larger group of issues. These programs also created conditions in school cafeterias where students were being bullied or shamed. Known more commonly as lunch-shaming, various forms of bullying occur both in and outside of the cafeteria, affecting more than just the students. For students in the FRP program, it is possible for them to be served a different lunch than non-FRP participants, a lunch whose quality was reflected in the decreased price. In the case that a student does not have money for lunch, they can also be served a different, and typically less substantial, meal. In some cases, students are served what has been nicknamed a “shame sandwich,” of what is either a pb & j or cheese sandwich. The apparent differences in meal quality become reason for teasing or bullying in the cafeteria, which can influence a student to decide not to eat lunch at all, preferring the acceptance of their peers over eating. Outside of the cafeteria, parents are pressured by the school to pay for meals or keep their students meal account funded. The Food

Research and Action Center (FRAC) has collected dozens of stories of children who have had their lunches thrown out because they were unable to pay, or stamped on the hand with “I owe money,” (FRAC). Again, these sociocultural issues are difficult to research, often coming out of anecdotes or popular media. Anti-shaming legislation has been passed to mitigate negative effects of lunch shaming, prohibiting schools from serving different meals to students who are unable to pay for lunch and furthermore prohibiting schools from pressuring parents to pay.

Hunger, shaming, and bureaucratic processes such as program enrollment are only a small number of issues within our food system and can create a tumultuous environment of battles around which area is the most important or which should be addressed first. While anti-hunger and anti-shaming initiatives were present prior to the pandemic, improving nutrition standards, increasing organic foods, and extending meal times are still the most conversations surrounding school meals today.² Because hunger is not a concern for families with more stable incomes, nutrition initiatives are often well supported in more affluent neighborhoods, who are also more likely to be politically involved. This had led to a skewing of the issues within the school meal space. Instead of focusing on fulfilling the basic need of hunger, the focus was put on nutrition. This largely neglects low income and under resourced communities, who often have less time to organize around political issues. Hungry students have been shown to perform poorly time and time again throughout academic and popular articles alike, which point out that a lack of adequate nutrition can lead to setbacks in the classroom and development, leaving students at a disadvantage both during their school years and beyond (FRAC). Instead of simply feeding students, a focus on improving nutrition has dominated the political space. This not only

² The Build Back Better Plan recently updated nutrition standards for school meals at the federal level (USDA 2022).

disregards a basic human need, but by ignoring the hunger of students also limits them from realizing their academic potential.

Racial and economic inequalities exacerbated by the beginning of the pandemic took the spotlight for most of the country and in the case of schools, the requirement for online classes brought forth disparities in internet access, leaving school districts scrambling for Wi-Fi hot spots and laptops with access to popular video conferencing software. On top of the issues teachers and school staff were experiencing during classroom minutes, school nutrition services staff were facing similar issue in making and distributing food to students and families. At the national level, in Federal Fiscal Year 2020, 76.9 percent of school meals were served at Free or Reduced-Price cost in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In California, 54 percent of public and nonprofit private school K-12 students are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price meals (Kids Data). With three quarters of the nation's students and over half of the state's student population relying on FRP meals, and those students no longer coming to the school campuses every day, nutrition services staff essentially needed to transform from a cafeteria into a food bank overnight to distribute food to students and families. An outstanding amount of coordination between schools, food banks, and the community made it possible to continue to feed students while schools were closed during the pandemic. These coordination efforts would not have been impossible without emergency waivers from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the primary federal power that controls school meals nationwide.

Normally to serve school meals, each school food authority ³ must enroll in one or both federal school meal programs– the National School Lunch Program and/or the School Breakfast Program. By enrolling in these programs, schools pay for their school meals through

³ A name given to encompass a range of school entities that serve meals- individual schools, school districts, central kitchens, etc.

reimbursements provided by the USDA. Importantly, schools must meet nutritional standards that are set by both the USDA and the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) to receive reimbursement. If school meals do not meet nutritional standards set by these two federal entities, they are at risk of not receiving their full reimbursement. The reimbursement model itself can be criticized for causing school cafeterias to operate on small margins, bargaining staff time and food quality to meet requirements. Even so, 100,000 of approximately 134,000 nationwide participate in the NSLP, SBP, or both. Just the NSLP serves 22.6 million students per day for a total cost of \$14.2 billion (Ralston et. al. 2008). To make this a little more complicated, there is also an option for the state itself to have its own school meal program along with the national programs. California is one such state where a school food authority may choose to participate in either the national level or state level programs. What is most important to understand here is that, prior to the start of the pandemic, schools were required to meticulously keep track of the nutrition of their meals and how much students owed.

Federal emergency waivers released by the USDA released at the beginning of the pandemic drastically changed the way schools normally serve meals. These waivers allowed schools to serve meals and other food items to all students at no cost regardless of income, and loosened nutritional standards. These waivers essentially created universal school meal programs nationwide by addressing the needs of hungry students first and eliminating bureaucratic processes that often take up a lot of staff time. Schools have been operating with these waivers for the past two academic years, but the waivers will expire in June 2022. With this in mind, what the inclusion of the USMP in California's state budget ultimately means is that the state allocated funding which would maintain the conditions the federal waivers created. California has done an immense amount of legislative work to create the conditions that allowed for the

inclusion of the Universal School Meals program in the budget passed in AB130. With the creation of a state-wide Universal School Meals program, California is able to continue to serve meals to all students past June 2022, when other states will have to return to pre-pandemic tracking requirements.

The historical complexities of subsidizing school lunches demonstrate the novelty and significance of California's USMP. California presents itself as a unique case study because of its economy, which is often booming. Uniquely, the USMP being adopted into the omnibus bill of AB130 allows it to be funded by Proposition 98 dollars, which are taken from the State's general fund. In fact, funding the USMP with Prop 98 dollars is possible due to the economic surplus California found itself in amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing the \$650 million to be allocated to the Universal School Meals Program. Although cities like Boston and Chicago have passed city-wide Universal School Meal programs, at the time of passing no other state had made the commitment to guaranteed free school meals for all K-12 students.⁴ Considering how long the NSLP and SBP programs have been running, the reimbursement process, and the intricacies of school food reform, California's journey to the realization of a statewide USMP becomes an important case to study, with the potential of offering a road map for other states to follow suit and understanding how a state-wide USMP could promote education equity for students.

To demonstrate how Universal School Meals might lead to education equity through a case study, my capstone project will examine the process by which the USMP came to be included in AB130 in California. My capstone project will focus on two things, first on the legislative history of AB130 and how California may have been primed to pass such historic

⁴ Since passing AB130, Maine has passed their own state-wide programs, with several other states following suit.

legislation, and second on the views of legislators and advocates who worked on the passage of AB130. While focus has been put on implementing school lunch changes nationwide, using California as a case study will reveal the process that an individual state may go through to pass a state-wide USMP. My capstone project will shift focus past the issues of nutritional standards and will not be an examination of dietary behaviors or nutrient intake. Conversations in both of these areas can be muddled with value claims and influenced by popular diet trends. Instead, I recognize that the creation of the USMP was a huge win for the anti-hunger community writ large. Focused on feeding hungry students to feed all students, this historic program also serves as an example of the ways in which policy can advance equity, in this case within the education system. By using California as a case study, I ask: how do legislators and advocates view the passage of AB130 and the USMP as providing equity for K-12 students?

For my thesis, I use two methods, legislative history and interviews, to answer my research question. Concepts presented by Tyack and Cuban are used in the legislative history to review how structures have already been challenged and changed to create education reform by making school meals a requirement for learning. Understanding how these changes occurred to allow for all students to be fed demonstrate how policies are developed in a process of power conflict which challenges equitable outcomes. Interviews demonstrate how legislators and advocates involved in the passage of the USMP understood it as a means of promoting equity for students. Specifically, I argue that legislators and advocates do view the USMP as promoting equity because they chose to center those most affected to challenge and change systems, holding an optimistic view of how the program can positively impact not only students, but school staff, teachers, families, and even the broader community. These impacts move past feeding all students to consider how programs can reduce bureaucratic processes, improve

learning experiences, and alleviate shame. By focusing on the needs of hungry students first to lift all students, the USMP serves as an example of how targeted universalism can be realized. Targeted universalism offers a novel, modern framework to how policy can achieve equity. This framework asks that the needs of groups most affected by oppressive systems are addressed while working collectively towards achieving a common goal. Ultimately, targeted universalism provides the framework for how programs like the USMP can achieve equity and be replicated in other issue areas.

To answer my research question, my capstone project will cover six sections. In the first, I will review three bodies of literature which reflect the conversations in research surrounding school meal programs thus far, highlighting studies of federal programs and policies, how equity exists in scholarly literature, and school meals studies specific to California. The second section will review why my proposed methods of legislative history and semi-structured interviews are the best way to answer my research question. Third, I produce a legislative history which reviews how school meal programs are run from the federal to the state level, the funding structures for California public education and the policies which paved the path for the USMP to be created. This section will revolve heavily around the funding structures and power conflicts which needed to be navigated and I use concepts presented by Tyack and Cuban to do so. Fourth, I present data from interviews organized into three themes which reveal how equity is envisioned by legislators and advocates, and how targeted universalism allows for the advancement of equity in policy. Fifth, I present the conclusion and potential significance my capstone project can have for the field of Urban and Public Affairs and broadly. The sixth and final section of my capstone project outlines recommendations which are made for California policy, the potential of a USMP at the federal level or for other states, and for future advocacy and coalition work.

Literature Review

The introduction reviewed the main problems with school meals which were present prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now I turn to the literature to review the scholarly conversations that coincided with these problems, revealing the gap my thesis aims to fill. The literature in this space spans public health, education, economics, and policy journals and vacillates between quantitative and qualitative, at times making a clear path difficult to find throughout the bodies. The bodies of literature often correspond with historical and cultural shifts in which integral policies and programs were introduced such as the federal school meal programs, Child Nutrition Act, Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, the creation of the Community Eligibility Provision, and several California policies. While a majority of the literature reviewed included policy recommendations at the end, finding a path from these policy recommendations to action is difficult. Studies often point out something simple, that more food means better performance, but fail to understand what that means outside of nutrition. It isn't just that kids are eating more nutritious food, although that is part of it, it's that they are given similar opportunities as their classmates to succeed in the classroom. This literature review will cover three areas 1) anti-hunger, nutrition quality, and participation rates 2) equity and food justice in school cafeterias and 3) the California school food landscape. By taking this path through the research, I will examine how research has diversified from being solely focused on nutrition to include more qualitative studies that focus on case studies of access and equity, the importance of case studies, and specifically how equity-focused case-studies can contribute to this area of research.

Anti-Hunger, Nutrition Quality, and Participation Rates

Within this body of literature, I show where the research focus on school meal programs and reform has been over the past decades, which will offer context for the following bodies of literature and demonstrate how research has moved from economics and nutrition towards policy and equity. While school meal programs like the NSLP and SBP were enacted decades ago, research surrounding their impacts did not surface until the 1980s, noting an important shift for America as health and diet culture emerged. Literature within this earlier field of research focuses on school meal programs as a means to address hunger in “poor” or “needy” children (Akin 1993, Devaney 1989). The identification of “needier” students in these early articles can be seen as an early demonstration of equity, as these students were offered meals to provide similar nutritional opportunities to their wealthier classmates. However, there is a disconnect in what types of food was provided to students and there is a lack of nutritional comparison between food in the NSLP and SBP programs and that of a more typical school lunch. Research surrounding these differences have the potential to show why future nutritional requirements were added with the passage of HRFKA. This first and most expansive body of literature concerns the various program and policy goals at the federal level. I will first review literature of the programmatic goals of anti-hunger of the earliest school meal programs, the NSLP and SBP. Then, I will review literature surrounding nutrition quality and attitudes and behaviors towards HRFKA changes. Finally, I will review conversations surrounding the primary goal of the CEP, assessing participation rates.

Early studies done on the NSLP and SBP impacts were primarily in the field of economics and viewed as a cost benefit analysis to determine if the program was actually feeding “needy” children. More specifically, the American Journal of Agricultural Economics published

a number of articles relating to the school meal programs and nutrition in the 1980s. Of the earlier articles published, those of Akin (1983) and Devaney (1989) are the most prominent and bring forth the primary research focus of the following decades: how school meal programs affect the nutrient intake of schoolchildren, with a focus on students in poverty. Using statistical models with an economic framework, these studies focus on a return on investment in the school meal programs themselves. Both Akin (1983) and Devaney (1989) find that nutrient intake of “needy” children who participated in the programs, however, Devaney’s focus on SBP notes that even though students who participated showed an increase in nutrient uptake, the participation rate was not high and therefore the program was not reaching the students it aimed to (Devaney 1989, 945). The focus on how school meal programs affect low-income, needy, or impoverished children prevails throughout the literature, reflecting the goal to lift these groups of students out of poverty which will then transform into goals more focused on equity as will be demonstrated.

Because the primary goal of the HHFKA was to improve nutrition standards, research in this area shifts to follow that goal. This shift also saw the emergence of a methodology that has since become more common: the pre and post implementation method. The main objective of this method within this body of literature is to demonstrate what impacts the HHFKA had on nutrition quality (Cohen 2014, Smith 2016, Mozer 2018). Smith (2016) and Cohen (2014) use this method to argue that the updates in nutritional standards required by the HHFKA did improve nutrition quality in a statistically significant way, primarily in increases in fruit and vegetable consumption. Additionally, Mozer (2018) uses this same method, but with a larger period of time to assess nutrition quality, proving with statistical significance that the standards set by the HHFKA did in fact improve school lunch quality. When taken together, studies done by Smith (2016) Cohen (2014) and Mozer (2018) all demonstrate the nutritional impact that the

standards set by the HHFKA can have for students, whether over short or long periods of time. These studies are only a small selection of those demonstrating nutritional impacts, and by reviewing this small selection I demonstrate that nutrition quality does not need to be included in my capstone project, as the topic is prevalent within the literature, which allows me to continue through the literature in search of the gap where my capstone project could fill.

In addition to quantitative studies of nutrient intake, qualitative studies emerged in this area of the literature, asking stakeholders in the schools on how HHFKA was affecting their school meals. Yon (2016) builds on these results with a qualitative approach that seeks to examine behavior. By studying the perceptions school nutrition directors had of the changes, Yon (2016) focuses instead on how the implementation of HHFKA nutritional standards affect school nutrition staff. Interestingly, Yon's results conflict slightly with those of Cohen (2014), Smith (2016) and Mozer (2018) in that they found school nutrition directors perceived that there was a decline in student participation, that nutrition education should happen outside of the school environment, and that new standards would increase the time to prepare meals. Another qualitative approach to nutrition quality was taken by Woodward-Lopez in 2014. Combining an economic framework with geography, they examined the impact that scratch cooking in two school districts. Noting that scratch cooking is beneficial in improving nutrition quality but may not always be cost efficient, Woodward-Lopez (2014) found that costs were often case specific by geography, and one district may end up paying more for scratch cooking where others saw no significant change due to varying labor and ingredient costs (Woodward-Lopez 2014). These differences in results point to the complexity of measuring how policies change nutrition, where it seems that even if they changes are providing better nutrition, that doesn't always point to

program success and other factors such as support for school nutrition staff, or implementation specific to geography should be considered.

Along with the passage of the HRFKA, the CEP also allowed school districts with high poverty rates to implement a form of Universal School Meals, with the program goal of increased participation. Where the NSLP and SBP focused on anti-hunger, the CEP took a slightly different route in addressing food insecurity. This shifts the focus of this body of literature, where hunger can be seen as an issue with a simple solution of more food, food insecurity calls for a more systemic view that incorporates economics, access, and education. Hecht (2022) notes the primary problems the CEP aims to address are the rate of food insecurity in children, stigma around free and reduced-price lunches, and the administrative burden put on schools. Other research on the CEP follows suit in moving away from focus on anti-hunger initiatives and towards addressing food insecurity, a small but important shift as food insecurity typically also includes prioritizing more nutritious food, rather than anti-hunger programs which include a wider range of foods. The qualitative studies in this area reflect the behaviors and perceptions of school meal reform and is tied to my research question by demonstrating a cultural shift away from nutrition and towards availability, which can be viewed as a transition towards equity by prioritizing providing nutritious meals for low-income students. Studies surrounding the CEP led to a new group of research examining how making school meals more accessible could assist not only children, but schools as well, taking a more systematic approach than earlier NSLP and SBP goals focused solely on anti-hunger. There were two common types of studies in this body of literature: case studies of schools and/or districts who have implemented some form of universal school meals through the NSLP and research focusing specifically on the CEP of the HRFKA. The shift towards more place-specific studies also

signifies the recognition of the ways in which place and geography play a role in program implementation. In this area, studies have actually diverged from nutrition-specific to include a number of other themes, including participation, academic performance, diet quality, and financial impact(Cohen et al 2021). While studies show the many benefits of increased access to school meals, there are also concerns about food waste expressed. As more students participate in school meal programs and adapt to new menu items, an increase in food waste was found to be a downside of a Universal School Breakfast Program(Blondin 2014). An increase in school meal participation and food security were the most significant results across multiple studies, with measures of other outcomes such as BMI, food security, attendance, and finances were mixed based on the socioeconomic status and location of the school (Andreyeva 2021, Bartfield 2019, Schwartz 2019, Crepinsek 2006, McLoughlin 2002). With regards to place and location, multiple studies in this body of literature noted in the discussion section the significance of the location of their study and called for more case studies to be completed to better understand Universal School Meals and the CEP (Turner et al 2019, Schwartz et al 2020, Cohen et all 2021). Certainly, diet quality is still an important factor in these studies, but it is not as present, with most common result being that of increased school meal participation itself, determining if students would actually participate in a Universal School Meal program to warrant an investment, which does mirror the research aims of the first body of literature (Akin 1993, Devaney 1989). The studies reviewed in this body of literature demonstrate how scholarly conversations have followed the program goals over the decades, and in turn how methods have changed as well. It is important to understand this shift in the historical context as it also reflects what problems were viewed as prominent during the respective time periods, shifting from anti-

hunger in the postwar era, to nutrition in the early 2000s, and now in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic towards a more systematic approach.

Equity in School Cafeterias

The literature surrounding federal programs and policies in the school meal space focuses on program and policy goals of anti-hunger and nutrition standards. Studies on the CEP began to acknowledge the systemic issues to be addressed when studying hunger and food insecurity. This recognition provides a pathway towards equity as it identifies potential problems within the school food system that create unnecessary barriers such as policies set at the federal and state levels or local school administrative policies (Hecht 2022). However, research on issues within the food system have been studied since the late 1990s as part of the emerging food justice movement. The food justice movement and equity share a similar goal of addressing systemic issues and eliminating barriers to provide equal opportunities for resources. Because of this, food justice discourses can be seen as the food-specific equity framework. Food justice work requires a systemic view no matter the issue. I chose to research food justice discourses to better understand how this systemic view allows for multiple issues to be addressed at once. As Eric Holt-Gimenz (2011) notes, the foundations of food justice are built upon the idea that all humans have a basic right to food. Additionally, he argues that food justice entails a rethinking of the system that has left people of color and underserved communities at a disadvantage, calling on a democratic process of community stakeholders being involved in decision making, and new business models that support disadvantaged groups (Holt-Gimenz 2011). Richard Gottlieb touches on these same points, adding areas like “overfed and undernourished” and “manipulating food choices” to the food justice discourse, along with expanding upon the discussion of food

politics (Gottlieb 2011). These two areas Gottlieb (2011) points to can be viewed in the school food space as well when considering the previous body of literature. They call into consideration how anti-hunger goals may not have led to nourishment, and how setting strict nutrition requirements can be limiting in other ways. These considerations reveal how critical it is to understand the systems which create the issues prior to attempts to solve them. By first understanding systems, solutions can address multiple issues at once.

Searching for scholarly conversations that explicitly use food justice or equity terminology to study the school food system, school meals, and/or cafeterias produced very few results. Understanding the prominent themes in food justice discourse allowed me to find conversations with similar themes. Janet Poppendieck's work, *Free for All* (2010), includes the common areas studied in previous bodies of literature including calling for more school subsidies to prevent them from choosing lower quality foods, but it also builds on that to argue that doing so would provide equally nutritious food for all which would lead to equal educational opportunities for all students, as well as noting the strain that school meal programs put on nutrition services staff (Poppendieck 2010). Studies that use equity-specific frameworks take different directions, one in policy and the other in implementation. Like Poppendieck's work, McLoughlin (2020) also points out the pressure that schools feel to source ingredients and how that might affect the capacity to distribute food. Focusing on the period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic when the USDA provided waivers to distribute food to all student and loosened nutrition requirement, McLoughlin uses a Getting to Equity (GTE) framework in four urban areas to examine healthy food access and deterrents to healthy food, arguing that increasing access and reducing deterrents actually increase equity because they focused on getting healthy food to areas with limited access (McLoughlin 2020, 772). Examining the ways

in which different policies have addressed sociocultural issues such as lunch shaming, Fleischhacker argues that policy can ensure equitable access to school meals, offering an overview of six items of legislation in various states that are focused on anti-lunch shaming and universal school meals. All six items of legislation have been proposed but not passed, which further demonstrates the difficulty of passing equitable policy and the significance of the passage of AB130 in California (Fleischhacker 2020). Only one other study attempted to address anti-shaming policies which had been implemented to prohibit schools from shaming parents into paying for their children's lunch, this happened either via debt collection, refusing to serve the child lunch, or giving them what was previously termed as the "shame sandwich." However, the study was extremely limited in what it could measure, as shame is difficult to standardize, so Sprurance et al (2021) could only measure whether such policies led to more debts being paid. They found that anti-shaming policies did not lead to more debts being paid, which can be useful to know, but also does not accurately measure how the policy affected what it was meant to-shame.

A new study by Hecht (2022) builds upon previous studies and also includes the policy aspect of the CEP. Utilizing a new multilevel conceptual framework, Hecht (2022) examines how and why a school or school district would implement the CEP, again taking a more systemic approach by examining not just how the CEP will affect students' meals, but also what factors and risks must be considered. This study demonstrates the shift away from seeking to prove that programs can actually improve nutrition, as those have been done before. Instead, Hecht (2022) becomes the first study to offer a means of evaluating what types of schools may benefit most from the CEP based on, or a Universal School Meal program based a number of factors: federal, state and local policies, school district administrative policies, school-specific administrative

policies, and school demographics. This framework will be useful to consider as I answer my research question and pivotal to the potential significance of my capstone project. This body of literature covered a specific section of the food justice discourse and its relation to equity, applying those overarching themes to the sparse number of studies that have begun to bridge the gap from studying program-specific goals to more recent anti-shaming policies and the case for equity. The small size of this body of literature indicates a need for more equity research to be conducted, but also outlines the difficulty in conducting such research because of how varied definitions of equity can be.

California as a Case Study

The bodies of literature presented thus far have covered the transition in research surrounding school meal programs from anti-hunger to nutrition to participation rates and how equity and food justice have influenced a sparse amount of literature in the school meal space. Following the path towards case studies, this body of literature will focus on what has been done solely in California, providing further context to my own case study and identifying where the gaps in California-specific literature may be. Studies done in California follow a similar trajectory to the bodies of literature presented thus far, beginning with nutrition focused and moving towards access and equity. In addition to studies on federal level programs like the NSLP, SBP, and HHFKA changes, California-specific policies of SB 12 and SB 395 are also examined. California had already passed SB 12 and SB 395 in 2007, prior to HHFKA, and case studies focusing on school food reform via nutrition standards were already present. Even before the passage of SB12 and SB395 an early case study in the San Francisco Unified School District found that cost was the biggest factor in student lunch participation, and argued for higher

federal subsidies for school lunch programs, already advocating for more affordable school lunch programs(Wojcicki and Melvin 2006, 1546). This only magnified with the passage of the HHSFKA in 2010, when the overall focus of these studies shifted to measure how well schools are able to reach compliance, and because they are happening at the state-level can identify trends and patterns such as the affects the geography of the school may have on their implementation due to access to resources. Overall, they did find that the policies were successful in improving student nutrition because they removed foods that are most often linked to obesity (those high in sodium and fat) (Woodward-Lopez 2010, Samuels 2010). However, simply limiting the number of foods high in sodium and fat is only one piece of improving student nutrition through school meals, next comes improving the quality of the meals themselves. Here Woodward-Lopez takes an economic approach as early school meal program studies did when examining the benefits of scratch cooking in cafeterias finding that in California, scratch cooking did not always mean higher ingredient or labor costs, (Woodward-Lopez 2014) Taber (2013) examined conflicting federal and state level regulations once HHSFKA was passed, and, similar to studies found in the first body of literature, found that more availability of nutritious food led to more consumption of that food but still only accounted for around half of the calories eaten daily. The focus on nutrition is still the most prevalent. Although this study does point to a need for food security for students, it does not fully examine how providing this food security might affect areas outside of nutrition as discussed in the second body of literature, and does not take equity or justice into account (Taber 2012). Showing the difficulty for California schools in applying to the CEP, one study found that not all schools who were eligible applied, calling for more research to be done in this area to inform policy makers, and wondering how California intends to have all eligible schools apply for the CEP (Turner 2019). These California-specific studies have followed a

similar trajectory as the previous bodies of literature, with nutrition dominating the conversation before moving towards topics of food security and increasing access through the CEP, but like the previous body of literature surrounding equity, there is a lack of research focusing specifically on how increased access to nutritious school meals for all can lead to educational equity in California schools specifically.

Conclusion

These three bodies of literature demonstrate that research has focused on program goals and evaluation, that equity frameworks are only beginning to emerge in scholarly conversations, and that California-specific studies have followed the same scholarly trajectories. The focus of each body of literature has traced important historical and cultural events in school meal regulations and health, but does not provide concrete measures with which to study equity and education reform through school meal programs. I include food justice discourses within the second body of literature in an attempt to bridge the gap between education reform and equity, but was unable to find a comprehensive, systemic approach to addressing school meal reform within the scholarly conversations. The role of policy in school food reform has scarcely been studied. The few articles which do take on this subject present policy recommendations to decrease shame or increase access to school meals. These articles have also covered many policies which have not worked, but rarely include what has. California-specific studies mirrored those of the earlier bodies of literature, but also included a few items of legislation passed prior to the HHFKA that present California as a state that is potentially more primed to be the first to pass the USMP legislation. These bodies of literature cover the goals of school meals programs, the potential for equity frameworks, and how California has approached school food

reform, primarily focusing on the goal of improving nutrition. Even goals of addressing hunger are met with nutrition variables to study, which miss the point. Hunger is not only nutrients, and hunger is dependent on the individual, making a large study difficult to conduct.

The literature considers improvements to school meal programs with a macro lens but primarily focuses on micro variables like nutrient intake. Ultimately, what the literature fails to consider, and what equity frameworks call on us to do, is ask how goals can affect multiple groups and multiple issues. Studies must be specific and refined in nature, and understandably a broad topic can lead to messy data. However, by using more qualitative methods and combining legislative history with interviews, I aim for my capstone to expand on areas previously confined to singular groups in the literature. Adopting a more systemic framework, I use California as a case study to consider how issues within history, policy, and cultural contexts are interconnected and their effects on multiple groups. In doing so, I argue that taking a systemic approach with the USMP will provide equity for California K-12 students.

Methods

The literature review demonstrated that conversations have primarily focused on nutrition standards, with little consideration for how school food reform could create change on a systemic level. The gap in the literature not only exists in content, but in the ways that the data is used. While there are qualitative studies within each body that utilize interviews, the data continues to be used in ways that perpetuate the focus of school meal programs on nutrition narratives, and focus primarily on school staff. No studies were found which specifically seek out the views of advocates and legislators involved in school food politics. Understanding these views is crucial

to connecting how policy can impact equity because it is necessary that legislators and advocates are intentional about leading with equity in the legislative process. My research question of “How did California legislators and advocates view the USMP as providing equity for K-12 students?” aims to fill this gap in the literature by presenting the views of legislators and advocates, gathered through semi-structured interviews. To provide sufficient context to these interviews, I produce a legislative history of how the USMP came to be included in the AB130 budget bill, arguing further why my selected methods of analysis of the legislative history and semi-structured interviews best answer my research question.

When producing the legislative history, I began at the federal level and moved towards the state level, focusing on funding streams and systems which control public education and school meals, then turning to the policies which seek to change and challenge those systems. Relevant policies became difficult to find, as policies which I thought would be best to analyze turned out to only be loosely related. This also affected who I reached out to for interviews, and finding individuals who were closely tied to the USMP became difficult. Researching the legislative history and reaching out to potential interviewees became a battle in itself, as pieces of legislation have multiple groups of people working on writing and advocacy campaigns for a broad range of issue areas. Not only are there a number of bills which did pass, but there are even more which died along the way, each involving their own group of individuals working on them. After sufficient research on the legislative history, reaching out within my network, and a slew of unsuccessful cold outreach emails, the key groups I identified to reach out to for interviews were those working on anti-hunger legislation. This included the organizations involved in the School Meals for All coalition who drove the advocacy efforts for the USMP, the office of Senator Nancy Skinner, and the offices of State Senators and Assembly members who

either directly sponsored AB130 and the USMP or worked on significant items of legislation that preceded AB130. Additionally, I relied heavily on snowball sampling, asking each interviewee for suggestions or warm handoffs to other potential interviewees.

Each method was conducted incrementally, as I became better versed in the legislative history, contacts to reach out to for interviews became clearer. I discovered several speed bumps in analyzing the correct policies, which could only be corrected with supplemental information provided by my interviewees. Most importantly, I understood that the common language in the political world is that the USMP was “included in the budget” and not necessarily that the passage of AB130 was itself significant. This shifted who I reached out to for interviews, as I realized the budget committee involved in writing AB130 was not as involved in anti-hunger initiatives as I would have imagined, but were likely in communications with anti-hunger champions. Even with relevant State Senate and Assembly members identified, receiving a response was difficult, as most contact is limited to online forms for constituents only.⁵ Legislators and advocates work on multiple items of legislation and campaigns throughout the year, and interviewing them about one specific item is challenging. Therefore, understanding the legislative history became important both for myself to be informed prior to and gain credibility during interviews and for readers to be able to contextualize and understand the importance of themes extracted from data analysis of the interviews. Scheduling interviews only added to the difficulty, as the individuals who were most involved in legislative or advocacy efforts of AB130 often hold positions of great importance, with very limited schedules. In one case, an interviewee responded that they were available during a specific time slot, and by the time I responded the slot had already been filled by another meeting. Scheduling interviews with the correct

⁵ An address was required to submit the contact request, and if you enter an address outside of their district the form would not be accepted.

individuals took perseverance and familiarity. Snowball sampling was helpful in my search, as I was connected with some of the correct individuals. Warm hand offs, whether direct or indirect, provided me with enough credibility in some cases to obtain an interview. Essentially, the more interviews I scheduled, the more connections I could make. As my list of potential contacts expanded, I was given names of individuals who worked more closely with the passage of the USMP, and I was slowly able to work my way from interviewees who were loosely involved, to those closely involved.

To understand how legislators and advocates viewed the USMP I chose to use semi-structured interviews rather than structured interviews or a survey to allow for more narrative to be gathered and examined for common themes. With a structured interview protocol or survey, questions would be at the risk of being overtly leading, and require that I directly ask about equity in the legislative process. A direct question about equity would likely lead the interviewee to answer how they thought they should, or even be overly aware of being politically correct. With semi-structured interviews, I am able to ask questions about the legislative process that do not specifically mention equity, but in which I aim to see if equity is the answer. These questions are provided in Appendix A and include “During the legislative/advocacy process, what issues did you imagine the USMP could address? Who did you imagine it would impact the most and why? And what are some of the challenges you think the USMP might face in implementation?” along with a few probing questions for select topics. The flexible nature of these questions allows me as the interviewer to gather more information as to how equity exists currently in legislative conversations, whether explicitly or implicitly as well as explore how each interviewee’s personal and professional background might influence their response.

All interviews were conducted via Zoom, which eased some scheduling frustrations and allowed for the meeting to be recorded with the interviewee's permission. Once interviews were complete, they were uploaded to Otter.ai, a transcription platform which allowed me to keep their information anonymous. I read through each interview to highlight topics of interest and indexed common themes and important quotes into a spreadsheet which I was able to reference while writing the data analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews proved invaluable, as interviewees were able to share more intricate and nuanced details of how policies were passed, or not passed, which I was unable to comprehensively research on my own. While I sought to find a balance between legislators and advocates, legislators are a difficult group to connect with, as I felt like I needed much closer connections to gain access to their time. Ultimately, I conducted nine interviews with 11 individuals who were involved at various levels (either closely or loosely) throughout the process of including the USMP in the AB130 budget bill.

The roles that interviewees held and their personal and professional experiences proved useful no matter how closely they were involved in the process. A majority of interviews were conducted with individuals who worked with organizations involved in the School Meals for All coalition, with some involved in adjacent coalition areas focused on farm to school or sustainability initiatives. Understanding how each interviewee was related to the USMP is important to consider how equity is imagined by individuals working in policy. Therefore, I provide a brief overview of how interviewees were related to the USMP, and include a table for reference.

Moving from the loosely to closely involved, Interviewee W brought experience from their previous role working with an Assemblymember on items of legislation more closely related to programs focusing on children ages 0-5 such as Healthy Start, which also included

language surrounding school meals. Interviewee B also brought experience from a previous role, where they worked in communications for a leading organization in the School Meals for All coalition. Their experiences focused more on the advocacy messaging and what was being pushed to the public. Interviewee G works for another School Meals for All Coalition member, and focuses more on good food purchasing initiatives but has significant advocacy experience in food systems issues. As a member of a separate coalition, Interviewee R, like Interviewee G, was able to provide insight on how organizations working in different areas of the food system manage to collaborate and focus on one issue area at a time, even when they believe their issue area may be the most important. Two interviews were conducted with two individuals at once, Interviewees A,B, Z, and F were will individuals who also work for member organizations of the School Meals for all Coalition. Grouped with Interviewees R and G, information from these interviews provided insight as to how advocacy and coalitions work together to address issues.

Three of the interviews conducted proved useful for the legislative history as well. Most prominently, an interview with Senator Nancy Skinner’s Chief of Staff, Jessica Bartholow, was crucial to understanding the history of the USMP. Because of the significance, I chose to name her in the data analysis section. Additionally, Interviewees L and N demonstrated significant experience with the legislative history of the USMP, based on their experience in advocacy work. To highlight the unique contributions of each interviewee, I provide the table below.

Code	Role	Relevance
W	Policy Manager	Previous legislative aide
G	Advocate	Works at member organizations of School Meals for all Coalition
B	Formerly worked in Communications	Worked on anti-hunger communications for USMP with School Meals for All
N	Advocate	Years of experience in anti-hunger policy, works at member organizations of School Meals for all Coalition
	Jessica Bartholow Chief of Staff, Sen Skinner	Senator Nancy Skinner championed the USMP
R	Policy Manager	Experience in adjacent coalition
A/B	Advocates	Two advocates, work at member of School Meals for all Coalition
L	Deputy Director	Formerly worked at member org of School Meals for all Coalition, currently works national level policy research
Z/F	Advocates	Two advocates, work at member of School Meals for all Coalition, focused on farm to school

Figure 2 -The letter assigned to each interviewee and their relevance to the passage of the USMP

The legislative history and interview data are both necessary, as each informs the other. By using this combination of methods, I first reveal the power structures that needed to be challenged, and the ways in which they were challenged to create education reform. Interview data then reveals how challenging power structure and the views of legislators and advocates can work to promote equity through policy.

Legislative History

The previous section reviewed the importance of producing a legislative history along with conducting interviews to answer my research question. In producing this history, I reveal the power structures and conflicts that were navigated to make a statewide Universal School Meals Program a reality. This section will review the legislative history and trajectory of anti-hunger legislation which led to the passage of the USMP in California. The legislative history is an

integral part of understanding the impact of the USMP's inclusion in AB130 because it can offer a road map for other states, or even the nation, to work towards future USMPs. As the budget bill, AB130 included funding for a multitude of programs, with the USMP taking up just two of 164 sections. The trajectory of the USMP can best be understood in two ways, an increase in funding and a reduction of bureaucratic processes. This section begins at the federal level, reviewing significant policies and programs in place. Then, I turn to California, reviewing the public education funding system, demonstrating how the state has adapted its own state meal program, and analyzing which policies have created the path for the USMP. Lastly, I integrate data from interviewees as to the timing, the key players, and the political wins necessary for this program. By reviewing funding streams and the bureaucratic processes that dictate how school meals are run, I highlight the significance of the timing of this historic program. I use concepts from Tyack and Cuban to demonstrate the power structures and struggles that were navigated for historic programs such as the USMP to pass, and for school meals to be considered more than just an anti-hunger goal but one of education reform.

The Framework: Tinkering Towards Utopia

Tyack and Cuban present integral concepts to education reform in *Tinkering Towards Utopia*. I place school meals in the field of education reform because not only does a meal provide students with nutrition for their physical development, but decreasing the hunger felt in classrooms can also mitigate behavioral issues, class disruptions, and the need for disciplinary action to control unruly students. Just as a student wouldn't succeed in class without a notebook and pencil, school meal reform demands that school meals be considered an equally important tool for learning. Additionally, in California school meals are funded with dollars from the

education budget and run by the state Department of Education. When placing school meals in education reform, three concepts by Tyack and Cuban can be used to frame the political process of the USMP: policy cycles and institutional trends, the role of schools in reform, and the grammar of schooling. These three concepts presented by Tyack and Cuban consider how incremental changes over long periods of time can lead to one significant moment of change and the importance of challenging and changing systems. By using this framework, I highlight the decades of work that California advocates and legislators put in to progress towards the inclusion of the USMP in AB130 and how the program creates education reform.

First, policy cycles and institutional trends acknowledges the timing of political processes and the recurrence of issue areas over the years. Tyack and Cuban “regard cycles of policy talk not as futile and irrational, but as an inevitable result of conflicts of values and interests built into a democratic system of school governance reflecting changing climates of public opinion,” (pg 41 Tyack and Cuban 1997). This concept acknowledges that policy often follows cultural values, and must adapt as those values shift over the years. The shifting of values can be traced by following what issue areas policy has addressed over the decades.

Second, how schools assist reform, questions how we define the “success” and “failure” of reform. This area recognizes the ways in which schools influence reform to create small incremental changes. More importantly, it points out that the needs of schools must be recognized by policymakers for significant change to occur, because disconnect in this area can result in failed reform or even displacement of goals if policymakers work in their own best interest first, and consider the needs of others second. This concept asks us to “Think of reform plans not as clearly mandated policies, but as concepts to be evaluated on the basis of their practical effects, positive and negative, and reformed accordingly,” (pg 63 Tyack and Cuban

1997). Here, there is a recognition that reform is often not one big push, but must be “tinkered” with, making small changes here and there, and adapting as one sees fit. Tyack and Cuban note that “For the most part reforms tend to accumulate, one on top of the other, adding to, rather than simply replacing what was before,” (pg 63 Tyack and Cuban 1997). By understanding reform as a process, rather than a singular event, the significance of producing the legislative history becomes clearer as a necessary tool for future reform.

Third, the grammar of schooling, considers how policy and reform challenge systems which have been accepted via historical or cultural norms. In the case of education reform, this can look like challenging the structure of the school day via classroom minutes, the use of textbooks, or the prominent theories taught. In their definition “The grammar of schooling is a product of history, not some primordial creation. It results from the efforts of groups that mobilize to win support for their definition of problems and their proposed solutions,” (Tyack and Cuban 1997). Challenging the grammar of schooling can be understood as challenging systems as a whole to redefine cultural norms. For example, considering meals as a necessary and required tool for learning can

All of these concepts provide a lens to understand the legislative history as a series of power struggles that created small changes which ultimately led to the possibility for one big change which redefines our understanding of the education system. Using these concepts, I trace the power in school meals from the federal to the state level. This power is present in funding structures which programs rely on to feed students, bureaucratic processes which affect families and school staff alike, and what we as a society have understood as the traditional classroom experience. By revealing how power and systems were challenged with small changes over times, I demonstrate how the USMP capitalized on these changes to produce significant reform.

School Meals at the Federal Level

To understand how a state-level program came to be, it is important to begin at the national level. Even though the program is run at the state-level, the California USMP will still be required to meet nutrition standards set by federal powers and relies on subsidies from other federal school meal programs and provisions to be reviewed. Understanding these factors of school meals not only assists in understanding how a state-wide program came to be, but also allows for the consideration of what a nation-wide program could look like. In this section, I provide an overview of the federal school meal programs that exist currently, significant policies that have been passed, and the powers that control nutrition regulations.

Federal school meal programs have historically existed as responses to hunger, then transitioned to nutrition, and are now shifting slightly towards sustainability. Susan Levine traces the history of policy in *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program*, focusing on hunger and obesity goals of these early programs. Providing school meals began with postwar anti-hunger initiatives in the New Deal Era targeted at high poverty students with the creation of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in 1946 as the result of the National School Lunch Act (NSLA). The NSLA was the first federal level policy change seeking to provide free and reduced-price lunches to “needy” students. This was followed by the Childhood Nutrition Act (CNA) of 1966, a time characterized by conflicts created by the Civil Rights Era and the War on Poverty. The CNA sought to improve nutrition standards for school lunches and add another meal option for students, and was the first time that schools were required by law to serve nutritious meals. This also marked the creation of a pilot School Breakfast Program (SBP) in 1966. Championed by Southern Congressman who noticed children

in rural areas coming to school hungry after working in the fields in the mornings, the breakfast pilot did not take at first, and did not gain notoriety until it was bolstered by news of a community-based program running out of California. The Oakland-based Black Panther Party began distributing breakfast to hungry children in 1969. As a group focused on Black Liberation, the Black Panthers saw this program as self-defense against hunger. The emergence of this program certainly influenced other areas to begin their own breakfast programs, and although this focus on breakfast coincided with the official national School Breakfast Program, it is not traditionally viewed as a direct influence to the creation of the program, but seen as an example of how important feeding children became during this time. As Levine also notes, the prevalence of hunger historically and more recent inclusion of obesity has continued to bring conversations of school reform to the political table, but rather than favoring the students, it has favored the interests of the nation's food and agricultural industry (Levine 2008).

Although they were implemented decades apart, the SBP and NSLP operate in the same manner, using a reimbursement model for K-12 public and nonprofit private (charter) schools (USDA Economic Research Service 2008). This reimbursement model requires schools track meal components for each student and turn reports in on a regular basis to be reimbursed for meals which hit their requirements. The requirements are based off nutrition standards which will be reviewed shortly, the funding structure is important to understand first. The programs are funded at the federal level but run state by state, with some states (like California) supplying funding from their state budget to run their own state meal program. To understand how these programs are implemented, the funding pathway is as follows: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) distribute funding for the NSLP and SBP, which goes through regional offices, state government, school districts, and to the schools

themselves, known as school food authorities (SFA) respectively. While both programs aim to address student hunger, they could not have predicted how creating programs targeted at low-income students would produce lunch shaming and stigmatize poverty.

It was not until 2010 that another significant policy was passed: the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA). This act aimed to improve nutrition quality of NSLP and SBP school meals across the United States, building upon the CAN of 1966. These changes also reflect important cultural and historical events, where the NSLP and CNA were passed to help postwar and post-depression school children, and HHFKA was a response to what was termed an “obesity epidemic” in America in the early 2000s. The nutrition standards set by the HHFKA required that Nutrition Services Departments (NSD) reconfigure some menu offerings, or “get creative” with ingredients to increase servings of protein, whole grains, or vegetables (Poppendieck 2008). Additionally, calorie limits were set by grade level no matter what developmental stage a child was in, meaning that some children could be overfed while others were underfed. Outside of requiring higher nutrition standards, the HHFKA created a pivotal piece of the pathway towards offering free school meals to every student, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which is applied to meals served through the NSLP and SBP. Targeted at high poverty schools, the CEP allows schools to apply for full reimbursement of two school meals, offering these meals to all students for free, which was the first glimpse of what a Universal School Meal Program (USMP) framework could look like. Use of the CEP has grown over the years as more schools learn of its benefits, with 33,171 schools nationwide participating in CEP in the 2020-2021 school year. The nutrition requirements of meals served through the CEP do not change, but one big benefit for both schools and parents came in the bureaucracy of the application and enrollment processes as

offering school meals to all students meant that schools no longer have to collect applications for FRP meals, and parent no longer had to fill out applications (FRAC).

Moving from funding, which controls *if* the program exists at all, to regulations, which controls *how* the program exists, the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are the federal powers that control the NSLP and SBP nutrition requirements. The FDA is in charge of certifying that food meet specific nutrition standards such as a fortified pasta containing enough iron, as well as set food safety standards such as requiring that a dairy product like a carton of milk be disposed of after a certain amount of time outside of refrigeration. The USDA then sets the Dietary Guidelines nationwide, suggesting the amounts of each of the five primary food groups to be eaten daily. This formerly took the shape of a pyramid with a carbohydrate-heavy bottom and unclear recommendations on how many servings were to be eaten a day, and what a serving size actually looked like. Recognizing this confusion, the USDA changed the shape of dietary guidelines from a food pyramid to MyPlate, which recommends certain amounts of the same five food groups to be on your plate at each meal: grains, protein, fruits, vegetables, and dairy.⁶ While for most Americans these are simple guidelines, for school meals these are nutritional requirements outlined in the HRFKA that schools must meet to be eligible for reimbursement.⁷

A 2014 report by the Government Accountability Office on the HRFKA changes revealed the process by which the USDA altered the nutritional requirements and the process the schools took to meet those requirements, ultimately finding that the USDA had implementation issues with compliance and oversight of the program. With regards to nutrition, the report

⁶ Water is now considered the bonus sixth food group as the USDA tackles what I can only assume to be America's "dehydration epidemic."

⁷ Note that this overview does not even begin to touch on how agricultural subsidies and commodity crops influence what shows up in USDA dietary guidelines or on plates.

acknowledged that most states and School Food Authorities reported increases in food waste due to adjustment to menu items, but that school staff thought these issues would decrease over time (Government Accountability Report 2014). Even though this path of funding may lead to implementation issues, without it, schools would not be able to serve meals to students at all.

To explain how the funding provided by these federal powers control school menus, and how school meal implementation works, take for example your elementary school. You might have been lucky to have a full kitchen with actual food service worker cooking meals from scratch every day, but you are more likely to have had a cafeteria experience that included a “warming cabinet” where precooked meals were placed to come to an eating temperature set by the FDA as safe. If your school was even luckier to have a salad bar, the temperature of the produce also needed to be kept at a temperature that was determined to be safe by the FDA. If foods were not kept at the appropriate temperature, they were required to be thrown out. No matter what, the ingredients for your school meals had to be approved by the FDA for nutrition contents, and the meal that those ingredients went into had to meet other nutrition requirements set by the USDA to even be placed on your cafeteria menu. If your school did not meet the requirements set by these federal powers, then they were at risk of not being eligible for the full reimbursement amount from the NSLP or SBP. School can choose to not participate in the NSLP or SBP, giving them more menu freedom, but if a school does not participate, it must raise the funds for school meals elsewhere. For wealthier districts, this is not an issue, for lower income districts, this is nearly impossible. Meals can only be reimbursed if they are deemed nutritionally adequate as it is defined in regulations, and if a student does not take a necessary component of a meal then that meal is not eligible for reimbursement⁸. Without reimbursement funding the

⁸ As you can imagine, forcing a student to eat meals may not contribute to a healthy relationship with food later in life. This has led to a “offer vs serve” model, where schools pushed to let students choose which items they wanted.

school may be operating in a deficit, perhaps a larger one than already occurs in most schools across America. If your school food service workers wanted to change the menu, perhaps add an additional fresh fruit or vegetable or a new menu item, they must evaluate the cost of ingredients and nutritional requirements necessary for reimbursement, completing a complex economic analysis of staff time, ingredient and labor costs, and nutritional quality. If the cost of adding the fresh fruit or vegetable were too much, they might consider adding a frozen or canned option. Finding cost effective ways to make meals meet nutrition standards proved tough, and in response the USDA made those nutrition standards more flexible, leading to the notorious “pizza is a vegetable” phase. To give schools an easier way to hid the nutritionally adequate meal requirements, the USDA classified the tomato sauce used on pizza to count as one serving of vegetables. While this does make it easier for cafeterias to meet reimbursement requirements, it also relies on the use of processed foods as a means to cut costs, which is more economical than adding more staff time to source and cut vegetables in a way that is appealing to students.

California Education Funding: Propositions 13 and 98

The school meals programs at the federal level reveal how funding structures and regulations impact how programs are run. Now moving to the state level, I examine the structures that fund California public education, which includes the current State Meal Program and future Universal School Meals program. Proposition 98 largely determines how much funding California schools receive each year, however, the fund originated in response to another Proposition which heavily impacted education funds, Proposition 13. The effects of Prop 13 and Prop 98 are pervasive throughout the California public education system, and begin to shed light on the dynamic of

by. shifting regulations around meal components. Instead of choosing every meal component, students could choose 3 out of 5

how a state with a wealthy economy can still have poorly performing schools. California has the largest economy in the nation and one of the top 5 largest economies worldwide. However, even with a flux of capital, California's public education system continues to place in the bottom of nationwide rankings (Walker 2016). California is also geographically large, taking up most of the west coast, it consists of varying ecologies not only environmentally but politically, socioeconomically, and culturally. Thought of as a wholly progressive state and leader in progressive politics, California actually only trends Democratic, with coastal counties trending blue, and central counties trending red (PPIC 2020). This political variance plays a large roll in elections with regards to propositions, more specifically propositions related to taxes. Taxes are typically a point of contention between Democratic and Republican parties, and while opinions do differ within each party based on income, Democrats lean towards believing the tax system is not fair and they should pay more, while Republicans feel like the tax system is reasonably fair, and that they pay enough or too much in taxes as it is (Pew Research Center 2019). The political diversity of California voters shapes the landscape in a variety of ways and can provide context to the passage of Prop 13.

Known originally as a "taxpayers revolt," Prop 13 passed in 1978 with a majority of the vote,⁹ changing the amount of money homeowners paid in property taxes each year. Instead of property taxes growing with the rate of inflation (typically 6-7% at this time), they were set at a growth rate of 2% per year, until the house is sold, at which point it will be reassessed at the market rate (ED100). At first glance, this is a win for homeowners, especially the elderly living on fixed incomes. With a lower annual increase on taxes, it was more likely that homeowners would stay put, and with housing prices increasing in the 1970s, homeowners struggling to keep

⁹ 64.79 % to be exact.

up with their property taxes were much keener on finding financial relief rather than thinking of the long-term effects. What Prop 13 also did was eliminate the ability for school boards to levy taxes for funding, which ultimately meant that school funding went from being controlled at the local level to the state level, meaning that changes to education funding must also be made at the state level, a daunting task. Without funding from property taxes that kept up with inflation, schools were doomed to be underfunded. With the passage of Prop 13, California voters essentially decided to disinvest in its own public education system.

Ten years after the passage Prop 13, the effects of its passage on public education only became more apparent as school spending became a smaller percentage of the state's budget. Class sizes grew, campus construction slowed, and schools continued to operate at near or complete deficits, scrambling to hire and keep staff around. With schools seemingly in decline, voters pushed for the passage of Prop 98, which would ensure a stable funding source for schools. Voting for increased school funding would appear a bipartisan issue that voters can get behind yet Prop 98 barely passed with only a 50.7% majority. Simply put, Prop 98 amended the California Constitution by calling for the state to set aside a larger portion of its general budget for education.

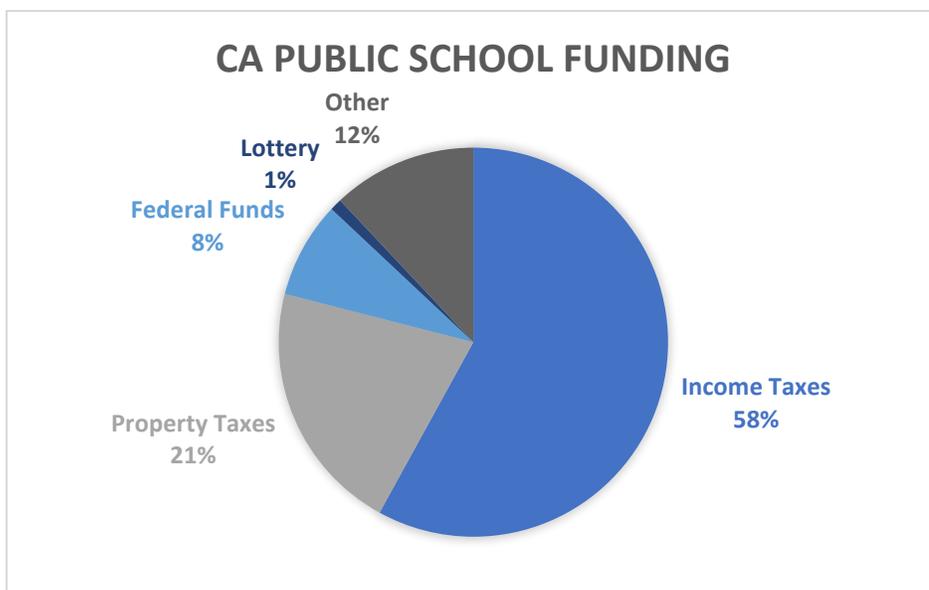


Figure 3- Funding sources for California Public Schools (Ed 100)

The full distribution of California public education funding can be viewed in figure 3 above, which includes funds from the federal government, income and property taxes, and a small portion from the lottery. Proposition 98 can also be viewed as an early effort for educational equity, as it recognized the unequal spending between districts due to varying property costs. A higher value property would provide for more funding than a lower value property, therefore districts with higher value properties would always make more than districts with lower value properties. However, the inner workings of Prop 98 become increasingly complicated, because even though districts receive a base level of funding, they are still able to raise money for themselves in other ways. This structure still favors districts with more resources and time, and leaves behind lower income districts. What Prop 98 ultimately sought to do was create a structure to provide a minimum funding guarantee, complete with formulas and tests, to provide each school with a base level of funding which was to be determined by attendance, per capita income, and local property tax dollars. The state is able to provide more than the minimum funding guarantee, but typically funds at or near the guarantee (LAO 2022).

In 2009, around 72% of total school funding came from Prop 98 dollars, which are raised via income, sales, corporate, and capital gains taxes (EdSource 2009). There are three tests that comprise Prop 98: Percentage of General Fund Revenues,¹⁰ Adjustment Based on Statewide Personal Income,¹¹ and Adjustment Based on Available Revenues (EdSource 2009).¹² The tests ultimately determine how much funding schools will receive each year, and therefore what programs will be funded. The first test is the most straightforward, and most commonly used. The second test is primarily used when the state sees sizeable growth in the general fund. The third test, which adds the additional 0.5% to test 2, is used when the general fund revenues are falling or growing at a slower rate, helping schools respond to reduced revenue. The most important factors for all three of these tests are daily K-12 attendance, per capita personal income, and per capita General Fund revenues (EdSource 2009).

Test 1 is most frequently used to determine the funding for schools each academic year. While other tests are meant to compensate for an economy with little or no growth, the frequency of Test 1 is a testament to California's successful economy, which continues to be the option that will provide the most funding to schools. The relationship of the economy and property taxes to school funding is precarious, and even though tests do consider a stable or declining economy, it is worth repeating that even with a booming economy and a surplus in the budget, California schools still rank low nationwide. This low ranking might typically be viewed as a result of underfunding, but California continues to put more funding into various education programs.

¹⁰ K-14 education receive a minimum percentage of General Fund revenues, around 41%.

¹¹ K-14 education must receive at least the same amount of state aid and local property tax dollars as received in the prior year, which is adjusted for changes in K-12 attendance

¹² K-14 education receive the same amount of state aid and local property tax dollars as received in the prior year, adjusted for changes in K-12 attendance and per capita General Fund revenues, and on top of that 0.5% of the prior year Prop 98 spending amount

This calling into question if 40 percent of the General Fund plus property taxes, is enough to bolster successful California schools.

Test 1 was found to be the most operative for the 2021-22 academic year, with K-12 Prop 98 Funding increased by 29 percent, providing \$30.5 billion in extra revenue (LAO). This revenue was used for a handful of targeted interventions, COVID related actions, education and workforce trainings, and curriculum and instruction projects. The overarching goals of the programs funded were to provide expanded learning opportunities as schools continued to navigate the classroom changes presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, including increasing funding to special education programs, and one-time funding for the Community Schools program which are schools with strong community partnerships that focus on the well-being of students and families. During this budget cycle, an \$54 million was provided for all school meals and one time nutrition initiatives, including funding for any kitchen upgrades to be distributed to local education agencies (LEAs). This kitchen infrastructure funding is an important aspect of implementing the USMP, as it recognizes how some schools lack appropriate equipment to properly implement the USMP. At the time this Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) report was released in October of 2021, the Universal School Meals program had already passed, with the program listed as receiving \$650 million of funding beginning in the 2022-2023 academic year (LAO 2021).

For the upcoming 2022-2023 academic year, Test 1 was found operative again as California continued to be in a budget surplus. For this year, the Universal School Meal program was listed amongst the programs to be funded. The reported funding for this program noted the \$54 million which was already distributed for the 2021-2022, adding a sum of \$596 million for the program, including implementation costs. This appears to be a significant portion of funding, but the

USMP comes in only fifth of the fifteen programs Prop 98 will fund for the academic year, which can be viewed in figure 4 below. Top priorities for the 2022-2023 academic year are a continuation of Expanded Learning Opportunities Program and adjustments to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) which assists schools with declining enrollment. Receiving the second and third highest funding amounts, the LCFF is worth reviewing, if even briefly, for its role in determining school funding. Enacted just 9 years ago in 2013, the LCFF is important to understand in the context of California needing to pass additional measures to ensure schools receive adequate funding. Like Prop 98, the LCFF contains various systems that are intended to classify schools in categories which will determine how much the state will need to intervene, or supplement, their funding. With the LCFF, LEAs (which include schools, districts, county offices, and charter schools) are provided with more flexibility for funds to be used to improve student outcomes. While Prop 98 is primarily concerned with attendance, the LCFF was implemented to provide more funding to schools with “higher need” students so that schools can spend more per student for additional services. There have been speculations as to the effectiveness of the LCFF. With the program still only 9 years old, there is certainly still room for improvement to ensure that districts with higher needs are actually receiving the funds they are supposed to. And while the LCFF is meant to equalize funding for all districts, it is worth noting that if a district’s property taxes exceed the LCFF funding, that they are allowed to keep the excess funds (ED100). This equality-focused funding structure that provides all schools with the same baseline is different from an equity focused funding structure which might take a redistributive approach in requiring districts who exceed LCFF funding to share the funds that they get to keep. With this funding structure in mind, the large sum of money (about \$3.3 billion) proposed to be spent on LCFF adjustments indicates the dedication to improvements, but it is

unclear of exactly what those improvements are proposed to be, and if they will take a more equity-centered approach.

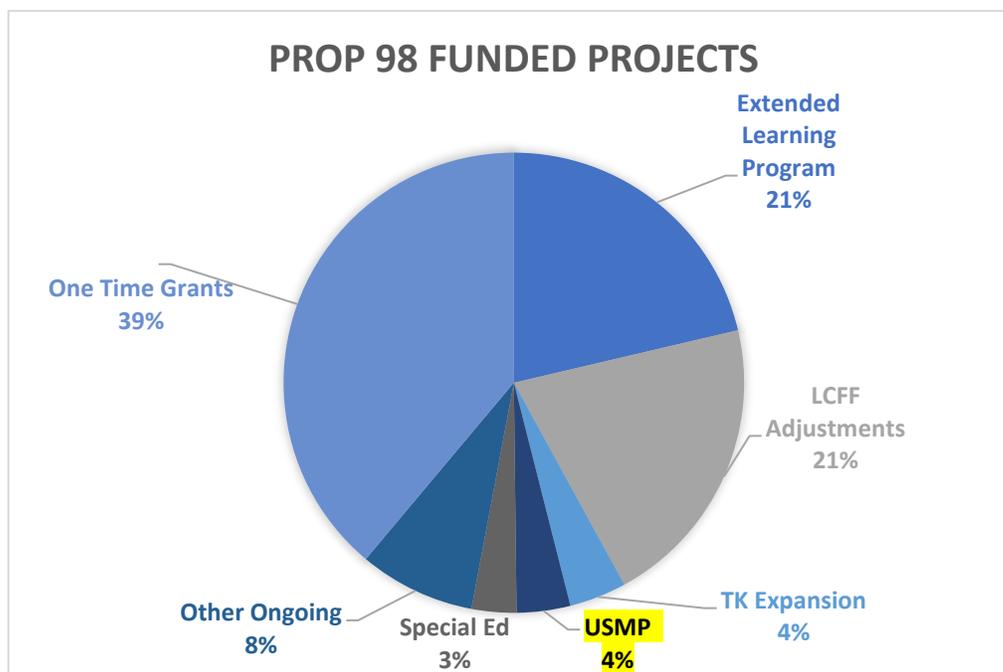


Figure 4- Funding distribution by percentage of 2022-23 Prop 98 Projects (LAO report)

As shown in table 4, compared to the \$3.3 billion proposed to be spent on LCFF adjustments, the \$596 million for the Universal School Meals program seems punitive. Further on in the LAO report, the authors recognize that there are numerous new programs proposed to be funded, and actually recommend that fewer programs receive funding. This suggestion does not necessarily come from a desire to funnel money into other programs, but a concern around each school's capacity to implement such programs. Compromises suggested included funding smaller amounts or allotting longer periods for implementation and recommended prioritizing proposals that address clearly defined problems that don't create unnecessary programs (LAO 2022). Implementation concerns are further justified in another LAO report which notes that school districts are having trouble spending over \$23 billion in one time funding. There are various

spending timelines for these one-time funding opportunities, but most need to be spent by September 2024. With so much money flowing into school districts, California's school rankings become even more complex, leaving a mix of answers as to why schools are not performing well.

The intricacies of Prop 98 funding and recent LAO reports demonstrate that California is attempting to funnel more funding to schools. However, it would appear that schools are having a difficult time using the funds. There are myriad factors as to why this might be, and certainly the past 2 years of life in a pandemic have taken a toll on school staff statewide. This review of Prop 98 spending is intended to provide a glimpse of how California legislators are currently prioritizing programs and funding, which appear to be mostly in expanded learning opportunities and creating a more robust LCFF formula to accommodate for declining attendance and performance in schools. These priorities will be important to keep in mind when the policies which created the California school food landscape are reviewed and the budget plan for the Universal School Meals program.

California's State Meal Program and the CEP (revisited)

To understand how implementation of the USMP might work and address the potential concerns of the LAO report, I review the California State Meal Program (CA SMP) and the role of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The California State Meal Program was established in 1975 with the passage of SB120, the Child Nutrition Facilities Act. The goal of SB120 was to provide schools with enough financial support to supplement the cost of school meals. Even though all schools must comply with nutrition standards set by the CA SMP, schools are not required to participate in the program itself. Instead, schools have the option of

receiving reimbursement for school meals from the federal level NSLP and SBP or the CA SMP, and the clarification is the NSLP reimbursements are for serving lunch to all students, and CA SMP funds are for serving “needy” students only. Additionally, schools can choose not to receive any reimbursements for their school meals if they are able to fund the program themselves.

Running a school meal program in any state requires compliance with multitudes of standards and constant economic analysis of ingredients and staff time, not necessarily considering how these choices affect the cafeterias and classrooms themselves. In California, schools enroll in NSLP or California’s State Meal Program (CA SMP) run by the State’s Department of Education. In order to participate in the CA SMP, schools must submit records including: the number of families that applied for free and reduced-price meals, the number of meals served each day, meal production and inventory records on the amount and types of foods served each day, and records of income, expenditures, and contributions received. Then throughout the school year, a reimbursement for meals is submitted guaranteeing that amount of nutritionally adequate meals that were served during the academic year. Reimbursement rates are determined by the amount of free and reduced-price meals served, if a school serves over 60% of free and reduced-price meals they are eligible to receive \$3.68 per meal as reimbursement, schools that serve less than 60% are eligible to receive \$3.66 (CA Dept of Education).

The language and qualifications of these reimbursement models are worth calling into question. According to the California Department of Education information page, it is unclear if you can participate in both. Schools that participate in the NSLP receive reimbursements for providing lunch to all students, with nutrition requirements set as one-third of the allowance of necessary nutrients. These same nutrition requirements hold true for CA SMP meals, however

the reimbursement rate is lower. Simply put, this means that the CA SMP program, intended to serve only “needy” students, receives less funding than the NSLP, meant to serve all students. The reasoning for this difference in funding is unclear, it is possible that the CA SMP simply does not receive the adequate funding amount to cover more meals. In this case, a \$596 million addition is a welcome change which is intended to cover all school meal costs. At this point, the CA DOE is still releasing guidance for LEAs, nutrition services staff, and other key players on how the USMP will be implemented, and are working to educating each of these key players via webinars (CA Dept of Education).

California schools have a choice to make when implementing the USMP. Similar to the CA SMP, schools will make a choice between receiving federal or state reimbursements. For federal reimbursements, schools will apply to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). At the state level, reimbursements will be provided via the CA SMP. The CEP was established at the federal level as a provision to the NSLP. This provision, as stated previously, was the closest item resembling a universal program that existed prior to the creation of the USMP. A handful of cities and school districts have managed to use the CEP, with resource sites available online through No Kid Hungry to assist schools in their application (No Kid Hungry). In the case of California’s USMP, schools which already have a high poverty rate will implement the USMP using the CEP on top of the NSLP, receiving federal reimbursements. Schools which do not have a high poverty rate will implement USMP through the CA SMP, using state reimbursements. This means that the USMP, which will need to be implemented state-wide by the 2022-23 academic year, has not only one, but two implementation pathways. Funding and resources aside, this is an extremely complex process which not only schools, but those in charge of USMP implementation at the state level must keep track of. The choice between two implementation

methods rather than one is a means to leverage the most funding, allowing the state to subsidize the USMP with federal dollars. Federal funding is necessary for the sustainability of the program, as it can offer a more stable funding source. Leveraging with federal dollars also creates a pathway for California to advocate for Universal School Meals at the Federal Level.

Finding (and Focusing on) the Bills that Mattered

Any piece of historic legislation is the result of the work that a series of bills passed prior that made incremental changes which paved the way. Following the history, or navigating the labyrinth as it came to be, requires focusing on the correct issue being addressed with each proposed piece of legislation. While legislative items surrounding competitive foods and beverages might be considered to fall into the history of AB130, in doing so follows the primary conversations in literature which focus on nutrition and not on what AB130 was trying to achieve- providing school meals to all students. Certainly, the nutritional awareness that California legislation items such as SB12 and SB695 (limiting the sale of competitive foods and sugar sweetened beverages on school campuses) shaped what school lunches look like in California today, but they were not concerned with obtaining funding, reducing lunch shaming, or eliminating hunger only improving nutrition by changing what food items can be sold in schools. Passed in 2005, before the nationwide nutritional standards were set by the 2010 HHSFKA, both items of legislation addressed an issue deemed very important at that time, the “obesity epidemic.” However, with the prolific amount of legislation proposed each year, it is not to say that there weren’t other issue areas outside of obesity being addressed. In fact, providing meals to low-income students has been a legislative goal since this period in the early 2000s as well. Interviews with those closer to the legislative process made tracing these items of

legislation possible, drawing on their years of experience navigating the many pieces of legislation. Interviewees shared various items of legislation that impacted the passage of AB130 which fell into three broader areas: enrollment process, anti-shaming or reducing stigma, and increasing access. Figure 4 covers pieces of legislation were deemed most relevant to history of the USMP as shared by interviewees.

Year	Policy	Description
1975	SB120	Childhood Nutrition Facilities Act
1978	Prop 13	Property Taxes Ceiling
1988	Prop 98	Creation of the Education Fund
2005	AB1385	Creation of data matching system for direct certification
2008	AB2300	Direct Certification Improvements
2010	HHFKA	Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act
2017	SB138	High poverty schools must apply for the CEP
2017	SB250	Child Hunger Prevention and Fair Treatment Act
2018	AB1871	Charter schools required to serve one meal to needy students per day
2019	SB265	Anti-Shaming
2021	AB130	Budget Bill – included funding for the USMP
2022	SB364	Trailer Bill for USMP

Figure 5 -Relevant policies organized chronologically

The barriers to enrollment that students and families faced when applying to school meal programs were the drivers of two significant policies in the early 2000s: AB1385 and AB2300. There needed to be an easier way for low-income students to enroll in school meal programs without needing to fill out a form. Applications were only barriers for families and students in need, and did not contribute to increasing participation rates due to language barriers, worries about immigration status, or in some cases cultural or personal beliefs about accepting assistance from government programs. In this case, advocacy efforts led by Nourish CA (formerly California Food Policy Advocates) called for students who participated in CalFresh or

CalWorks¹³ to be automatically enrolled in school meals. This required cooperation between local social services offices and school districts to share the required information which would allow CalFresh and CalWorks enrollment information to be shared with school districts, who would then enroll students in the meal program without the need for their families to fill out an application. At first, this sharing of information was only an option for schools, and as a result only 27% of schools chose to use that option (Nourish CA). While the federal government made it a requirement that students in CalFresh or CalWorks be automatically enrolled in school meals, there was no system for how to do this in California until 2005 with the passage of AB1385. Authored by then Assembly Member now State Senator John Laird, this item of legislation required that the California Department of Education create a computerized data-matching system in collaboration with the Department of Health Services what is known as the direct certification system, a crucial component to offering universal school meals (Bill text, AB1385). The creation of the direct certification was funded in part by the state but also required supplemental funding from the federal government to make the system sustainable. This system ultimately allowed for easier sharing of information between two state governmental departments as well as easier school meal enrollment processes for schools as well, as it became much easier to match students' information in the system and simply let the family know they were enrolled in the school meal program rather than keep track of an application. With the direct certification system in place, the process of enrolling more students in the school meals program became easier, but it was still not reaching its participation potential. To continue to increase participation and provide meals for low-income students, another public program was

¹³ CalFresh, formerly known as food stamps, is a supplementary food stipend provided to families who meet income requirement. CalWorks is financial assistance provided to families who meet income requirements with children. Both these programs often serve families at the poverty level.

included as part of the direct certification process. In 2008, under AB2300, authored again by Laird, students enrolled in MediCal¹⁴ would also be automatically enrolled in school meals programs. Establishing the direct certification system was a pivotal step in the process of providing school lunch to all as it removed application barriers for families and the burden of application tracking for schools. From here, California could focus on leveraging federal funding and systems for their program, and the timing of the HHFKA proved ideal for making this happen.

The HHFKA significantly changed school meals in the United States, solidifying policies and funding for school meal programs at the national level. Most commonly praised for the changes it made to nutrition standards, this act also created the CEP, allowing high poverty schools to serve meals to all students for free. With the system of direct certification already in place in California, schools had a good idea of their school's student poverty rate, and how many eligible students they were reaching. The CEP built on California's direct certification program with the introduction of the Identified Student Percentage (ISP). If a school had an ISP over 62.5%, then they would be eligible to receive a higher reimbursement rate for their school meals, enough to make all school meals free for all students. Put simply, the direct certification process was already "identifying" the identified students, making California well-primed to implement the CEP at qualifying schools.

Following the progression of policies from enrollment processes and bureaucracies and towards increasing access to FRP meals, the passage of SB138 and AB1871 in 2018 made progress in each of these areas. SB138, driven by Sen McGuire, required that schools (specifically the school district or county superintendent of schools) with a high poverty rate

¹⁴ MediCal is a subsidized medical insurance program. Like CalFresh and CalWorks, it is often serving families at the poverty level

adopt federal school meal provisions to allow service of both breakfast and lunch to all enrolled students. Schools can use direct certification to determine their poverty rate, and enroll in CEP or Provision 2 for reimbursement, but the State would provide additional reimbursement if necessary (Bill text, SB138). Legislatively speaking, charter schools were not included in SB138, but in 2018 around half of students in charter schools were low income not guaranteed access to a school meal. Assembly member Bonta's AB1871 used a similar strategy to specifically address access to FRP meals at charter schools, requiring schools to provide one nutritionally adequate meal per day to needy pupils (those who qualify for FRP) by the following school year, 2019-220 (Bill Text AB1871). The passage of these bills signifies the growing support for and momentum towards providing school meals for all from both the Senate and Assembly. With legislation already moving in this area, the language for USM was not completely unfamiliar to legislators, allowing the opportunity for further legislation to continue to build.

Reducing stigma and shaming in school cafeterias is a sociocultural issue, and therefore is difficult to address with policy due to the limitations of legislative language. Describing shame in legislation therefore relies on factors that are assumed to cause the shame, in this case payment owed to a school for meals. Revealing the stigma and shame that is felt by students in cafeterias and parent or guardians serves to strengthen the argument for policy and work in tandem with legislation that works to reduce hunger and increase school meal access. By adding language around stigma and shaming to their campaigns, legislators were able to advance more initiatives. Two significant policies were passed in this area, SB250 (2017) and SB265 (2019) which bookend SB138 and AB1871. Sen. Hertzberg and other sponsors of SB250 made significant progress towards USM with this legislation, also known as the Child Hunger Prevention and Fair Treatment Act of 2017. As the title suggests, this bill addressed both hunger

and shaming, but used an approach that had impacts both in and out of the cafeteria. Within the cafeteria, schools are not allowed to deny a student a meal if their parent or guardian is unable to pay, or serve them a different meal. Outside of the cafeteria, the school must attempt to provide the student with a meal through direct certification for FRP first, and not pressure the parents to pay or use a debt collector to collect unpaid meal fees (Bill Text SB250). Just two years later in 2019, SB265 addressed the need to refine the language and “impose a higher level of service” for a state-mandated local program, effective immediately. It further emphasized that schools cannot deny a student a reimbursable meal because their parent or guardian has unpaid fees (Bill Text SB265). Both bills ensured that schools would receive reimbursement for the meals provided even without payment from the parent or guardian of a student. However, as Sen, Nancy Skinner’s Chief of Staff, Jessica Bartholow noted, the money sometimes had difficulty getting to the schools, putting them in a difficult financial position. In that case, even though policy does forbid schools from pressuring parents to pay or denying students a meal, it may have been difficult to implement. With each bill passed, there are numerous bills in this area that did not pass. While this section is unable to provide an overview of every proposed item of legislation, focusing on those that did pass demonstrate the shifting values of elected officials.

The Budget and the Trailer

Policies addressing hunger, shaming, and bureaucratic processes created a pathway for the language of the USMP to emerge. In this case, the timing also plays a significant role in the creation of this program. Building off of conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the hunger that was revealed, the USMP was also able to gain support thanks to the work of the School Meals for all coalition and a handful of elected officials who were already passionate

about alleviating childhood poverty, of which childhood hunger falls into. The USMP is able to exist because it was included in AB130, but AB130 is a budget bill which also provided funding for a wide range of programs. Among legislators, the USMP is understood as being included in the budget, with the passage of AB130 itself as insignificant since it needs to be finalized every year. There was not one significant item of legislation that included the language of USMP, but the federal waivers provided the ideal environment for a program like this to be implemented at the state level. With each of these steps, legislators became more familiar with the language and purpose of the program, strengthening the campaign for the USMP.

When working on creating the USMP, Jessica Bartholow spoke with schools about how the program implementation might work, whether it would be more complicated for schools, saying that “the schools then came back around and said, yeah we could do universal because it’s better than ever now...”(Jessica Bartholow). By acknowledging what schools were experiencing and including them in the process of creating the USMP, the office of Senator Skinner was cognizant of how the education system operates as a whole. Rather than having a tunnel vision view of solely helping hungry students, Senator Skinner demonstrates how personal experience and knowledge influence policy creation. Personal experiences are also influenced by historic events and shifting cultural values, as the pandemic made clear.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated issues of hunger and accessibility, creating emergency food distribution centers at school sites and an increase in food bank visitors in general as Interviewee B noted of her previous work with the food bank. At a national level, the USDA provided federal waivers which loosened regulations for nutrition services departments at schools. Schools no longer had limitations on who they could serve, what they could serve, or at what time they could serve it. This meant that everyone could receive food during the period of

shelter in place and schools did not have to worry as much about meeting nutritional standards. When schools returned to in-person instruction, all schools received funding to provide school meals for free to all students. In the case of an emergency, free school meals for all became possible, so what AB130 really aimed to do was obtain funding to prevent these free school meals from disappearing.

AB130 is an omnibus bill which, loosely defined, is a budget bill which can cover one large area or many smaller areas and is viewed as being used primarily for convenience to pass a large amount of things at once (US Legal). In the case of AB130, the focus was on funding a variety of educational programming. Of 165 sections in AB130, USMP funding was Sections 63-64 (Bill Text AB130). This is important to consider for two reasons: first, that the small sections contain a much richer legislative history and second, how the language and placement of the sections impacted the passage of this program. Even though the USMP has obtained funding, there is still a need for language to be adopted around program. Currently, the funding serves as a means to prevent the conditions created by the federal waivers from disappearing.¹⁵ To create language around the USMP, Sen Skinner is now pushing SB364, which is going through the legislative hearings now, essentially acting as a trailer bill. Typical of federal bills, marker bills introduce a set of terms and language to describe an upcoming program or initiative. In this case, the language being introduced surrounds the USMP. Prior to this marker bill being introduced, conversations were had with various State Assembly members and Senators to gain support for the USMP. The passage of AB130 was the result of decades of work by legislative teams to improve enrollment processes and reduce both shame and hunger in school cafeterias.

¹⁵ There are approximately 40 waivers in place at the moment which range from what food can be served, when it can be served, how it can be served, and to who it can be served to. These waivers will expire in June 2022 (USDA).

In addition to the timing of the federal waivers, the combination of elected official in office at the moment plays a critical role for the USMP, both in the present and future. Many elected officials currently in office are invested in addressing childhood poverty, with hunger being one of the top issues. Whether elected officials are drawn to this area because of its bipartisan nature or based on their personal experience, the support that legislation is receiving to address childhood poverty is undeniable. Among these officials are Senator Skinner, Senator McGuire, Senator Hertzberg, Assemblymember Bonta, Pro Tempore Atkins, Superintendent Tony Thurmond and Governor Gavin Newsom. This is only a small group of officials who already focused on issues within childhood poverty. Having such a powerful group is a necessary political strategy to advancing any legislation, and served as an advantage in the case of the USMP.

This is in no way an exhaustive history of how the USMP came to be, but is informed by the views of interviewees and resources from coalitions alike. The number of bills which were never passed that I was not able to cover are a testament to how much work has been done by the anti-hunger community in this area. Additionally, SB364, which actually presents the language of the USMP, is still going through the legislative process. While it is likely it will pass because it is a trailer bill, the process only further reveals how systems are being navigated to make the USMP a reality.

The three concepts of policy cycles and institutions, how schools create reform, and the grammar of schooling provide a lens to understand this thorough but not completely exhaustive legislative history. The first illustrates the power the USDA has in limiting and expanding access to school meals, and how the California Department of Education works with this power to implement its own program. This concept also calls attention to how policy follows shifting

cultural values, as the predecessors to the USMP have done, shifting from anti-hunger to nutrition to anti-shaming. The second and third concepts consider how the systems which policies influence, such as education and funding, must be challenged in small ways which build on each other. The California public education funding system reimbursement model remain to be challenged, but the education system at large was challenged through these small policy changes which resulted from work by the anti-hunger community. These changes increased access to school meals and reduced bureaucratic processes, allowing the anti-hunger community to gain support for a larger legislative push like the USMP. The legislative history demonstrates that the USMP is a result of incremental changes which worked to challenge systems. This is significant as it reveals a path for other states to follow to implement their own statewide program, as well as consider which systems must be challenged and changed at the federal level. However, the history is only one part of fully understanding how policy and programs like the USMP can promote equity. The values and beliefs of those creating and advocating for these policies and programs provide a means for understanding how equity is envisioned and defined in the legislative space.

Data Analysis

The legislative history demonstrates how the creation of the USMP resulted from small incremental changes that challenged the powers and systems that place school meals within education reform. This history also reveals how legislation worked to remove barriers to school meal programs for students, parents, and school staff, but it does not fully address the views and goals legislators and advocates had for the USMP or consider how it could promote equity.

Interviews provide narrative and reveal intricacies within the legislative process that often go unnoticed or unrecorded, such as bills that did not pass, or elected officials who were crucial to anti-hunger initiatives. In this section, I analyze data collected from nine interviews with 11 interviewees returning to my research question of “How did CA legislators and advocates view the USMP as providing equity for K-12 students?”

In the case of my thesis, it is necessary to employ two concepts to fully address my research question. Three concepts presented by Tyack and Cuban were used in the legislative history to review how structures were incrementally challenged and changed to create education reform by considering school meals a requirement for learning. Moving past the legislative history, I now demonstrate how legislators and advocates involved in the passage of the USMP understood it as a means of promoting equity for students. Specifically, I argue that by continuing to challenge and change systems, legislators and advocates center those most affected first and continue to hold an optimistic view of how the USMP can positively impact not only students, but school staff, teachers, and families alike. These impacts move past feeding all students to consider how programs can reduce bureaucratic processes, improve learning experiences, and alleviate shame. These sentiments point towards the realization of targeted universalism, a modern framework which can be used in policy as a guidepost towards equitable program creation.

As an emerging framework,¹⁶ targeted universalism can be defined as “setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. Within a targeted universalism framework, universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted based on how different groups are situated within structures,

¹⁶ Which made its first appearance in scholarly articles in 2008 and still only exists in a handful of articles today.

culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal,” (powell 2019). As relatively new area of research, targeted universalism asks to move past targeted programs,¹⁷ which come with their own shortcomings to consider how prioritizing the needs of those with the least resources first, can result changing systems to help everyone. The following sections review the ways in which interviewees viewed the USMP in terms of the legislative process, issue areas it would address, groups which would be most impacted, implementation challenges, and potential for replication.

Understanding, Challenging, and Changing Systems

Similar to the legislative history, the labyrinth of issues that are connected to school meals also became difficult to navigate through interviews. Even though the USMP can be understood as an anti-hunger initiative, there are multitudes of connections to be made to other food systems issues such as shaming, farm to school or values-based procurement initiatives. Because interviewees were connected to the USMP and AB130 in different ways, their considerations for which issues this program would address, how it came to be, and the challenges it might face in implementation varied. What shone through the most, however, was how well they could connect the passage of the USMP to other issue areas and consider how this historic program will continue to advance progress in those areas as well. In this section, I will review the issue areas most discussed by interviewees and how systems-level thinking allows for equitable futures to be imagined.

Hunger was already viewed as an important issue to address and an issue that could be presented to the geographically and politically diverse California audience. By leading campaign

¹⁷ In the case of school meals, a targeted program would be the Free and Reduced-Price meal program.

and advocacy efforts with anti-hunger messaging, legislators and advocates were able to capitalize on a political moment created by the COVID-19 pandemic. By gaining support from organizations and Assembly and Senate members alike, building the appropriate momentum to put “all their eggs in one basket” and ask for the USMP, which was considered a significant reform rather than an incremental change. While policy thus far has worked to create small incremental changes, the USMP was viewed as being a huge step in reform and systemic change because of how it changes the way school meals operate in the state today.

Anti-hunger was top of mind for all interviewees when discussing the benefits of the USMP, but its goals lay beyond just addressing hunger. Several interviewees specifically called out that Senator Nancy Skinner was the champion of the USMP and therefore the interview with Jessica Bartholow, her chief of staff, proved invaluable. Among the breadth of useful information, she provided was that Sen Skinner “really wanted to make sure that we didn’t speak about it as an anti-hunger program anymore. This is she sees it as just like, part of the education system now,” (Interview with Jessica Bartholow). Coming from such a high-ranking elected official, this view of the USMP also serves as a reflection of the ways legislators can exercise their power and gain support for their initiatives. By communicating that this program would address more issues than just hunger, Sen Skinner’s office seemingly understood that they could gain the support of more individuals and coalitions alike to support the USMP and agree to its inclusion in the budget. The idea that meals are a part of education rang true for other interviewees as well, whether that was because of messaging from Skinner’s office or their own beliefs is unclear, but a third of interviewees shared similar thoughts. Interviewee B reflected these views when stating “kids go to school and, you know, we provide desks, books, and they just have to have the meals, you know, plain and simple, making sure they have access to food,”

(Interviewee B). In considering meals a necessary part of the education system, the USMP challenges the traditional learning experience. Rather than education happening strictly within the classroom, it can also happen in the cafeteria, on a plate. Building off of previous initiatives and research which have focused on nutrition and demonstrated how a meal can improve education, the USMP has the potential to create significant education reform by guaranteeing all students have the right to food and therefore the right to a stable educational environment.

The effects that guaranteed meals can have in the classroom were discussed by several interviewees. Nine out of 11 interviewees mentioned how teachers and/or school staff could also benefit from the USMP, sharing thoughts such as “if the kids are eating, they’re testing better...and they’re more attentive in school and there’s less disciplinary problems,” (Jessica Bartholow). While classroom disruptions have been tied directly to students being fed, other benefits were not tied to hunger at all. For example, the biggest way that the USMP can help school staff is by reducing tedious administrative and bureaucratic processes such as tracking which students are eating what. Interviewees recognized the various barriers faced by students, their parents and guardians, and school staff. While some of these barriers were addressed with the policies discussed earlier,¹⁸ it is challenging to significantly alleviate the stress of bureaucratic processes because there is also a need to gather data to determine program success.

As discussed earlier, the reimbursement model is tedious to work with, especially considering that the USMP requires schools enroll in state funding through the CA SMP or federal funding through the CEP. Schools will still be required to serve nutritionally adequate meals, and nutrition services staff will have to track those meals accordingly, but interviewees S, G, and N all believed that the USMP would alleviate bureaucracy in some way. Their sentiments

¹⁸ Primarily the changes made to direct certification, the creation of the ISP system, and the CEP.

included “allowing nutrition providers to...focus on the things that really matter,” (Interviewee S) or “help[ing] school food service directors balance their books, because the scale of participation impacts the scale of purchasing” (Interviewee G) or even helping “the nutrition department because there will be less time used for administrative efforts...it’s going to eliminate the entire part where they (the Nutrition Services Department) are constantly monitoring funding,” (Interviewee N). Interviewees perception of what bureaucratic process was informed by their work experience, which is why their responses differed, but it also demonstrates how mindful each of them were about how the USMP would affect schools in general.

The knowledge of systems which produce unnecessary barriers is demonstrated in the sheer number of issues that each interviewee also imagined this program would address. Food systems work is complex, and with interviewees working in different issue areas, answers sometimes shifted away from hunger and towards what they were most familiar with. While it is beneficial for those working on improving food systems to be aware of various issues, it has the potential to create confusion or conflict as well. Advocates and legislators are constantly trying to advance their issues in legislation, thankfully for the USMP, interviewees saw it as a stepping stone to helping their own initiatives in the school meal space. Working more closely with the farm to school area, a handful of interviewees noted that with students fed, they had the opportunity to really work on obtaining grants and funding for their own goals. Competition to advance legislation in your own interest was seemingly not an issue in the case of the USMP, as the anti-hunger community capitalized on timing and having a lot of powerful support on their side. All interviewees could agree that systems needed to be changed, and could see how the

opportunity to feed all students at no cost was a significant change in the system, opening up doors for more change to happen in the future.

Helping Everyone By Helping Those Suffering Most

In addition to challenging systems, how interviewees viewed who this program was for exemplifies their beliefs that those who are affected most by barriers and systems of oppression are the groups to center when creating policy. These views build on how interviewees think the USMP can change systems to who those changes will benefit most and consider cultural changes such as addressing shaming and stigma. Prompted with the question of “who do you imagine this program will impact most?” and “what are the ideal goals and outcomes?”, interviewees centered hunger as the primary issue, also including those who experience shame and economic strife. Because interviewees represented a wide range of areas within the food systems including farm to school, procurement, and sustainability, their answers to this question often aligned with their corresponding issue area. It became clear throughout interviews that everyone held a deep knowledge of barriers and oppressive systems that created the situations of hunger and shame. In addition to this knowledge, interviewees also expressed a great deal of personal experience with hunger or access to school meal programs, and often provided narratives. In this section, I demonstrate how interviewees shifted their thinking outside helping only those most affected by hunger, shame, or economic strife and towards how centering those most affected can also benefit everyone.

With hunger leading as the primary issue to address, interviewees drew from their experiences when considering who this program will affect most. For Interviewees W, B, and G, hunger was observed in their occupations. Interviewee B, who worked in communications with a

member organization of the School Meals for All Coalition saw hunger during their work, where it was top of mind every day, and only exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, going from serving 150,000 to 300,000 “nearly overnight.” Here, hunger was seen as the result of low economic resources, leaving parents and guardians with difficult choices to make sometimes choosing to feed their children over themselves (Interviewee B). For Interviewee W, hunger was mentioned in relation to classroom performance, stating “you know, the data in science for year and arguably decades has said, you know, students do better when they aren’t hungry” (Interviewee W). As someone who works primarily in education policy, this association of hunger to classroom performance illustrates how hunger is connected to each of our experiences. Interviewee N, a food policy advocate who is very well versed in the legislative history of direct certification, also saw hunger as a primary issue the USMP address “by far, yeah, providing meals you know, for every student every day, and every meal for the time that you are in school is a huge advancement” (Interviewee N). Again, this moves past the goals of changing systems as discussed in the previous section, and towards the goal of who to change the systems for. The perceptions of who this program would affect most were impacted by each interviewees experience and the issue area they work in, whether that be personal or professional. In most cases, these experiences are what drove a few interviewees into the positions they are in today, motivating them to create or advocate for policies that can prevent those experiences from happening to others.

An example of how centering hunger can help more than just the hungry was shared by Interviewee N. Experienced when advocating for breakfast to be served in the classroom, they shared how multiple groups benefited from a simple change. They noted that a school was seeing a lot of students go to the nurse’s office complaining of stomach aches, disrupting classroom

time and distracting nurses. To help students, teachers, and nurses, they advocated for breakfast in the classroom, sharing:

And after we started Breakfast in the Classroom, those visits to the nurse's office stop. And that was, oh my gosh. incredible to hear and also so saddening to hear that these kids what they had were hunger. They were hungry and they can't focus because their stomachs hurt, and they had to go to the office, but their office was not really providing the meals that they needed. They just held them there maybe calling mom or sometimes saying just lay down and just wait here. And I cannot imagine that it breaks my heart. Interviewee N

In addition to hungry students, half of interviewees offered other descriptors of “the poorest,” or those who have felt the impacts of lunch shaming (Interviewee S, L, N, G) when describing who this program would affect the most. There was also an awareness of how the students became hungry as a result of systems which limited their access to food or created environments where they experience shame for being enrolled in the FRP meal program. Interviewees G, N, and Jessica Bartholow shared their lived experiences with stigma, to preserve their narrative, I chose to include quotes below. Beginning with Interviewee G, whose work focuses on food purchasing,¹⁹ sharing a perception of how stigma appears in cafeterias was driven by emotion, stating:

...it is a huge step in the right direction for stigma of school meals, like if everyone gets a school meal, like no one's like, Oh, you're the kid on free and reduced lunch, which I know even growing up for me was certainly a thing....And we should not add to the stigma by making them hand over a quarter at the lunch table. Like that's not helpful to children. It creates weird, awful social situations and I hate all of that, from an emotional perspective- Interviewee G

Her perspective mirrored that of Jessica Bartholow, naming how demanding payment from parents and guardians perpetuates a stigma of poverty. The collection methods used for collecting school meal payments are invasive, and while policies have been implemented to

¹⁹ Good Food Purchasing is also a future goal of the USMP program.

prohibit schools from using debt collectors, it is difficult to say if parents or guardians receive that communication since the school is likely the party responsible for telling them. If parents and guardians are unaware of this, then fears of collections could also impact the decision to enroll in school meal programs. Along with the potential fear of collections, the pride in not applying for government assistance was also cited as a reason for not enrolling by Bartholow, who stated that her family did not apply for a lot of help. Instead, she signed up on her own:

When I finally did sign up for school meals, I forged my parents' signature, because I couldn't get them to sign it. I'm, like, you know, when you talk about, like, family, kind of in crisis, people need to understand what that looks like. And so, um, so yeah, I feel like it is shameful, that we are still asking little kids to come to school with, you know, coins in their pocket, or whatever, and sign up for the meals- Jessica Bartholow

There was not a clear explanation why, but the pride in not applying for assistance programs is a topic too large to be covered by my capstone project alone, and her experience again is meant to demonstrate her views of how this program would help those who experience shame the most. Drawing from her personal experience, she is also aware of how others “need to understand” what stigma and shame around poverty look like. This quote exemplifies how stigma and shame are experienced by both the parent or guardian and the student, who is required to bring money to pay for a meal and the consequences they face if they are unable to pay. Interviewee B shared a similar view of how students experience shame and stigma because of the payment method, also building off of the hunger messaging:

So yes, everybody wants to eradicate hunger in the world. But I think it's also important to embrace our differences. And without, like, shaming children and not feeding them in school because their parents haven't paid their bill or I'm just not okay with that. You know, and I actually think that's probably huge for the kids that have to go to school and don't have to feel different. (Interviewee B)

Interviewee N also shared a personal experience with enrolling her children in school meals programs when she enrolled them in a charter school. Charter schools often have different

school meal programs, and were not previously held to the same standards as public schools, which has since been changed with the passage of AB1871, which required charter schools to provide at least one meal at free or reduced-price cost to “needy” students. Here she shares how she felt about her children, and other charter school students, not being able to purchase school lunch:

And so the lunches there were \$5 and so I couldn't pay the lunch. And my kids were they wanted to have the lunch. Sometimes they have pizza, sometimes they have and so that was a difficult situation in I know that I wasn't the only one there was a lot of kids that were not being able to eat their lunches there. And the although I send lunch to my kids, there were other kids who had sit on the benches and not eat lunch and be together. And the kids weren't allowed to share lunch. So it was a very difficult situation for a lot of kids who were participating on, or attending schools in charter schools- (Interviewee N)

This story reflects how shame and stigma impacts multiple groups as well as how policy has worked to address those issues in the past. A program can easily be evaluated for the effects it has on school meal participation or nutrient intake using quantitative methods, but asking if a program created less shame or stigma is more nuanced, potentially bordering on unethical due to the traumatic nature of those experiences and the inability to standardize definitions for stigma and shame. The stigma and shame associated with poverty is a sociocultural issue, one which affects more than just students, parents and guardians also feel the effects at home, and teachers in the classrooms. As Jessica Bartholow shared of students who might take food without paying,²⁰ “that we shame them, we send we send school officers to their homes, we turn them into collections, we hand stamp them, you know, there are still very few states throughout the

²⁰ Because they are hungry and taking extra servings and/or unaware that their parents or guardians have not paid off their account balance.

country that have passed legislation against lunch shaming, the USDA had the opportunity to decide not to do not to allow for lunch shaming, and they chose not to..." (Jessica Bartholow).

Groups affected by economic struggles were also centered in interviewees responses. For parents who are economically burdened, interviewees believed that without worrying about paying for school meals, parents would be able afford other necessities or even "other things like books, clothing, and recreational sports, you know maybe these children can join groups they weren't able to because you know, soccer is really expensive," (Interviewee B). Outside of economic strife, interviewees saw benefits for families in mental resiliency "because parents don't have to think about what the kid's gonna take to school or struggle with morning routines,"(Interviewee N). Understanding parents' busy schedules contributed to the idea that the USMP would help everyone, with Jessica Bartholow saying:

And then also, we believe that it helps you know, families who aren't in economic strife, but whose lives are really busy and complicated because they have kids. And, you know, this is just helpful. We believe that it would help the school environment and the and the classroom environment for everyone, if a meal is given to anybody who needs it, rather than people who pay for it, it would reduce red tape and allow people's time to be freed up nutrition workers time were freed up to focus on nutrition, and good eating and food preparations...So we believe that overall, everybody, everybody benefits from school meals for all. (Jessica Bartholow)

The understanding of the systems which created hunger, stigma, and economic strife allowed interviewees to then center those who were affected most. Needy or disadvantaged groups are often centered in communications and campaigns, but interviewee responses demonstrate a shift in how groups are centered. The quote which exemplifies this shift that interviewees had when considering who the USMP states "the only way to feed all of the kids who are hungry, is to just feed all the kids," (Interviewee L). With this recognition of how the

USMP could help not only hungry students, but everyone, interviewees demonstrate how the views and values of those involved in policy can drive change.

“Not Going Back to Normal” - Optimism and a Positive View of the Future

Similar to thinking at a systems level and addressing the needs of those most affected first, optimism requires a knowledge of the existing structures and how groups are affected by those structures. Where optimism differs is how it is used to imagine a positive vision of the future for all. The feeling that united all interviewees was a sense of optimism when imagining how the USMP would create significant changes for students and beyond, and how big of a win its passage became. Optimism is no stranger to politics. Candidates perpetually ask voters to imagine better and brighter futures, often using “hope” in their messaging. Outside of thinking at a systems level and understanding how to center the needs of one group to benefit multiple, an important factor in creating equity through policy lies in the enduring optimism of advocates and legislators and the ability to envision positive futures. This sense of optimism was apparent in every interview when imagining what impacts the USMP will have for students and beyond. Here, the interviews produce an examination on the ways in which optimism and visions of a positive future act as a driver for systems to be challenged and incremental changes to occur.

Optimism is reflected in earlier quotes where interviewees ideate on the impacts the USMP will have, but it is also present in the hopes that interviewees have for the program. For example, Interviewee Z, who works for a member organization of the School Meals for All coalition, expressed that she hoped “that every single student in California can walk into their cafeterias during breakfast or lunch, and access a quality meal that makes them feel good,” believing that access to meals would also improve their education and health outcomes

(Interviewee Z). Hopes were expressed by other interviewees in regards to helping relieve administrative burdens for school staff, for a “ripple effect” that would go on long past program implementation, for more federal funding through Build Back Better, even a hope that the USMP would not have to be defended because it was at risk of being cut (Interviewees R, L, Jessica Bartholow). Thinking outside of the direct goals of the program and towards how it can become a permanent, sustainable fixture in the state and potentially at the federal level was a skill and ideology that all interviewees held. This shared ideology of imagining positive futures among interviewees demonstrates how necessary optimism is when working in policy, and how it can drive significant change. Even when faced with decades of incremental progress, bills that have passed and died, funding that exists and then disappears, there are coalitions such as School Meals for All, and champions such as Sen Skinner who persist with determination to work towards the future they imagine.

Some of the clear ways in which optimism can provide hope for future policy came from Jessica Bartholow and Interviewee L, who works in policy research on a national scale. Jessica Bartholow reflected on feelings of victory, saying:

And you know, it was just like, this incredible moment where we knew, you know, we had put together a really great campaign addressing the really, you know, chronic needs of kids, but also crisis level needs of kids, you know, where hunger was at its peak during the, during the COVID recession, and, and, you know, it was just like, the anti-hunger community was coming up out of this horrible moment of COVID, hunger being so high and demoralizing. And everybody came together to do this really hard thing. -Jessica Bartholow

These feelings of optimism also came along with a recognition from interviewees that, while the pandemic wanes, the rest of the nation may be thinking of “going back to normal” in

their daily lives but that will not be the case in terms of school meals. A majority of interviewees shared thoughts similar to Interviewee L, who stated

And to not go back to normal, you know, to say that we're never going to go, that it's never going to be ok to turn children away again. Because we know that the kids [who] don't eat without these policies are the children of immigrant household, the children who may be, you know, low income, but still above the federal thresholds. -Interviewee L

This refusal to go back to normal was also recognized by interviewees as significant systems change, with Interviewee L again demonstrating this view best, saying “everyone just gets to eat and there's no judgement. I mean, it's just such a beautiful thing to see where you've just removed this really powerful, toxic element that, you know, we all grew up with,” (Interviewee L). While hope and optimism help advocates and legislators work for change, it is also bolstered by victories. In this case the removal of the toxic element, which can refer to the enrollment processes and tracking requirements of programs, helps Interviewee L and others who shared similar sentiments to envision what can come next.

There is still a grounding in reality however, which was expressed when interviewees were asked about potential implementation struggles. Along with the many issues this program could address were the many issues that could arise in its implementation, whether anticipated or not. Shaming was an unforeseen consequence of the Free and Reduced-Price meal program, and the possibility for another issue to arise is not completely out of the ordinary. Interviewee N recognizes that even through this win is historic “There's a lot of work that remains to be done to actually translate the transformative policy vision of free meals into sustainable on the ground reality,” (Interviewee N). Other interviewees shared sentiments of the work left to be done when discussing implementation challenges, which included: kitchen infrastructure, staff training, labor costs, farm to school initiatives, school meal times (Interviewees L, Z,F, R). There are

countless unknowns in the implementation process of any program, especially one being implemented at the state level, but optimism allows for those working in policy to communicate their positive visions of the future to encourage voters and elected officials alike to align with their values, which in turn creates the possibility for an equitable future to be created with policy.

The concept of targeted universalism as studied by John A. Powell provides a lens with which the interview data can be analyzed. This concept centers positive futures as a means to demonstrate the advancement in our society's understanding of equity and the ways in which policy both follows and leads cultural values. Moving past targeted programs and understanding issues instead with a systemic lens allows for the imagination of an equitable future where Powell also emphasizes the importance of belonging. Targeted universalism recognizes the need for novel policy approaches, which move past previous work such as that of Susan Fainstein who defines equity as inherently redistributive (Fainstein 2010). Redistribution can work for policy areas addressing economic areas, but cannot offer a framework as to how use policy to create sustainable, equitable programs.

When used in policy, Powell and other scholars outline a six-step process to realize targeted universalism and belonging. The steps are: establish a universal goal, assess performance relative to the goal, identify performance differences between goal and overall population, assess and understand the structures, and develop and implement targeted strategies. This thesis has loosely followed this process to evaluate the capacity of the USMP to provide equity- identifying anti-hunger goals, reviewing school meals have addressed it, understanding the systems which control it and who is most affected by the system, and finally envisioning what a program to address this goal will accomplish. Shifting towards targeted universalism allows for a common language to be introduced and adopted into the political vernacular.

The primary three themes presented from the interviews became different to differentiate as they are all intertwined in minute, yet significant ways. Challenging systems and centering those who have been most affected relies on a certain type of unrelenting optimism that the future will be brighter. What becomes unique in this regard is that an individual can understand the complications of a system, but choose to center a different aspect of this. This is common in previous legislative work, which can only focus on one aspect at a time such the policies reviewed in the legislative history. Even though hunger was at the forefront of these previous policies, the choice of the USMP to center hungry students by feeding all students demonstrates a marked shift in how policy has been written previously. I never explicitly asked interviewees about equity, and only 2 interviewees ever mentioned the term, yet all interviewees were still united by the themes presented. Their responses then reveal how equity is understood in policy, in this case specifically the anti-hunger and education policy areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

I began this capstone project focused on how a solution came to be. I knew that understanding the history of a significant program such as the USMP would prove difficult, but the project quickly grew and I uncovered how many powerful structures are related to school meals. This project serves as an example of how complex any work in equity will be. By using California as a case study, I was able to explore larger systems which influence and are influenced by cultural norms occurring at both the federal and state levels, displaying how each are intertwined. Broadly, this project allowed me to understand how policy can work to advance equity, along with its limitations.

Although California is the first state to guarantee all K-12 students receive two meals a day at no cost, the program needs to leverage federal funding to be fully sustainable for the future. Understanding the systems at play also revealed how the USMP navigated the traditional state legislative process to obtain funding first, then rely on a trailer bill to produce the language. These strategies are crucial to consider if this program is to be replicated by other states and even nationally. Interviews elucidate how knowledge of systems works to create avenues for changing them, in addition to how personal beliefs and cultural norms motivate and drive policies. The narratives provided by interviewees allow for a more nuanced view of how equity exists in the school meal space, showing how personal and professional experiences impact choices and motivations. The shared understanding of how a meal should be considered a necessary tool for education spoke to how a single Senator can disseminate a message and the importance of how that message is understood by other supporters. This changed how interviewees understood the education system, and opened the door for other initiatives down the line. With meals considered as important as a textbook or desk, the case for extending meal times, improving nutrition, and improving school kitchen infrastructure can follow suit.

Equity has become part of our vernacular, but even with its prevalence, a universal definition is difficult to find. The concept of equity often shifts depending on the area of focus, but is united in an understanding that groups which have been oppressed (primarily those of African American and Hispanic descent but including other groups of color as well) must now be at the center of the society we envision for the future. This country began with centering the needs of white men, but after hundreds of years of incremental changes at the national level, we are advancing towards including the narratives of many groups when envisioning the future. As Tyack and Cuban note, policy is constantly adapting to the values of society, and with societal

values shifting towards equity, it is necessary that policy follows. Because equity does not have a standard definition, the means of achieving it cannot be standardized. This means that novel and unique approaches are necessary to continue to challenge systems and work towards reform that aligns with the equity values we now hold. Targeted universalism fills the gap in novel policy approaches, as it presents a process by which policymakers can replicate to realize the positive visions of the future. By applying the framework of targeted universalism to the process of the USMP, I present the potential for other programs and policies which use targeted universalism to achieve equity.

Throughout this research process, I understood how the views of legislators and advocates can advance equity through policy, and while optimism is a key factor in creating equity, there are also limitations. Prominently, the reliance on the perfect timing can severely limit how equity is advanced in other areas. While the USMP was able to capitalize on timing with the environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the elected official in office, this will not be true for other areas. Additionally, to utilize targeted universalism systems must be challenged and changed, and the pandemic has also revealed just how deep these systemic issues run. Although the USMP is a huge win, it represents a rather small issue area among systemic issues. Therefore, addressing other issues will likely require an even longer process of incremental changes and the right mix of timing and supporters to create significant change. Luckily the importance of equity is not likely to wane soon, but advocates and legislators working in other issue areas must act fast while the moment is still here.

The significance of my project capitalizes on timing as well, and contributes to the field of Urban and Public Affairs and beyond. For the field of Urban and Public Affairs, my thesis project demonstrates the advantages of combining the methods of legislative history and semi-

structured interviews to evaluate policies and programs alike. This approach to research, while complicated at times, combines the theoretical and applied, allowing for more novel approaches to be identified. For the anti-hunger community, this project provides the first comprehensive legislative history of school meal legislation which led to the USMP. This resource is invaluable as it can help continue the work in this area by educating future advocates and legislators. For the academic community, this project serves as one of the few case studies to examine how targeted universalism can be applied, as well as fill the gap in scholarly conversations which did not address how the views of legislators and advocates influence equity initiatives in policy.

It is worth noting again how much change has been made over the past few decades. So far policy has created the direct certification system, improved nutrition standards, required that schools serve meals, nutritionally adequate meals to be exact, prohibited schools from denying or delaying food to any student. The following recommendations have been informed by data collected through the legislative history and interview process, and with them I present ways to continue moving forward with the goals presented by interviewees, consider the possibility of replication, and propose future advocacy efforts.

#1 Policy: Sustainable Funding for the Future

The passage of AB130 provided \$650 million of funding to implement a state-wide USMP. This is a large sum of money, but in comparison with other education programs receiving over \$3 billion it is really just a start. The funding is also not guaranteed at this moment, and the success and future of the USMP will depend on implementation and program evaluation. California's budget surplus was a key aspect to obtaining funding, but relying on a stable economy is not the best way to ensure a program's sustainability.

To create a more sustainable funding model for the USMP, it is crucial to also obtain secure, predictable, supplementary funding from the federal government that does not rely on the economy of the state. One salient option was presented by Jessica Bartholow, who used the COVID-19 emergency funding provided to schools to frame the USMP. She explained that, for the past two years, schools has essentially already been operating a USMP because the federal government has been providing reimbursements for all meals to all students. Rather than creating a new school meal program, the USMP was simply preventing this program from going away. The Build Back Better plan is already attempting to address school meals, but focusing on nutrition standards. Instead, I would recommend that an expansion of the CEP be implemented, allowing more schools to apply and creating a more streamlined process.

#2 Replication: A Model for Other States and Considerations for a Federal USMP

The feasibility of California's USMP to be replicable for other states or at the federal level depends largely on timing, legislative calendars, and funding. Even though it is a politically diverse state, California is often seen as a progressive leader in the political space. Nearly all interviewees noted that the timing and motivations to pass AB130 and push for the USMP were fueled by California's drive continue to be a leader. In fact, the School Meals for All Coalition used the fact that California could be the first when gaining support for the USMP. For timing, policies reviewed in the legislative history and sentiments revealed by interviewees demonstrate the unique opportunity that California was in to pass AB130, and again the budget surplus played a huge role as well.

For other states, a budget surplus and legislative calendars may hinder their ability to pass the appropriate legislation to move towards a state-wide USMP. California politics is unique in

that State Senate and Assembly members work full time on legislation, whereas other states do not have this opportunity. As the fifth largest economy in the world, California is also more likely to have budget surpluses more often than other states. For other states to achieve sustainable funding for a program, Propositions to alter tax structures may need to be changed to funnel more funding to education and school meals.

The continuation of federal supplements presented by Jessica Bartholow is also applicable for other states to consider replicating California's model. If other states had a guaranteed source of funding from the federal government, then creating a funding system for the rest of the program may be an easier task. Additionally, California's public education funding system as it was reviewed in the legislative history is important to compare to other states when considering how to create a funding stream for a state-wide USMP.

#3 Improving Procurement

Obtaining sustainable funding and working towards future goals of the USMP will require strong advocacy and coalition work. Improving purchasing the distribution of food in the school food system and increasing lunch minutes are two primary objectives to work towards. Along with the School Meals for All coalition, the California Food for California Kids coalition, and the Center for Good Food Purchasing have the potential to advance both of these goals. Unlike the USMP, hunger messaging is not useful to lead with, as improving food sourcing and increasing meal times don't exactly address hunger. Instead, coalitions must consider what other issues can drive their campaigns.

The Center for Good Food Purchasing is a nationwide initiative to incentivize school and institutions to purchase food that promotes equity, accessibility, and transparency (Center for

Good Food Purchasing). Interviewee G works with one of the California member organizations on advancing Good Food Purchasing initiatives through advocacy efforts. The focus on equity, accessibility, and transparency are outlined in a thorough road map which also reviews other areas that could be impacted by such a program. This coalition is already doing a lot of work towards implementing good food purchasing measure through policy, but the messaging may be too broad at this moment. Unlike the USMP, which was able to lead with hunger, it is difficult to define what “good food” really is. Coalitions likely already recognize that it may take decade to fully achieve their goals, just at the USMP took decade of small steps. But with organized communication and strong leading message, coalitions have the opportunity to advance change that promotes equity from a systemic level.

#4 Rethinking School Staff Labor and Kitchen Infrastructure

The implementation of the USMP also relies on the ability of schools to produce nutritionally adequate meals that meet nutritional guidelines. As a reminder, these meals cannot be reimbursed if they don't meet requirements. The funding of the USMP also included money for schools who lack the adequate infrastructure to produce such meals, but several interviewees noted that this would need to be expanded. This is only one small step towards successful implementation. Therefore, I propose an expansion of funding to be allotted to schools to build out their infrastructure. Because scratch-cooking is not yet a priority of these meals, early uses of this funding will likely take the form of warming cabinets and minimal cooking equipment. But with other coalitions working towards advancing scratch cooking in cafeterias, this has the potential to advance to more professional cooking equipment.

In this case, infrastructure does not only include equipment, but staff time as well. It was noted by interviewees A and B that there are issues with positions available in nutrition services. These positions are often listed as .4 or .7 FTE, which limits an employee's access to benefits. Additionally, the hours of these jobs can be odd, sometimes occurring for a few hours in the afternoon. This is another area which will require significant changes, but it is worth to note in this space as it is connected to kitchen infrastructure. Similar to the USMP, a way to improve both of these measures would be to work incrementally. This could look like first expanding nutrition services hours to allow for more time to cook, then moving towards improving cooking equipment, then finally with providing adequate resources for both areas with stable work hours and professional-level kitchens.

Each of these recommendations further demonstrates how food systems issues become so intertwined and the need for advancement to happen together. The pathway to and the creation of the USMP illuminated the complexities of work in the food systems. Even though the USMP is specific to the education system, the ways it is tied to issues such as labor, production, procurement, and nutrition emphasize how much impact a single program and policy can make. As the result of small, incremental changes which centered groups most affected by oppressive systems, the USMP serves as an example of the potential of policy to advance equity.

Works Cited

- Adams, J. S. (1963). Toward an understanding of inequity. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 47, 422-436.
- Akin, John S., David K. Guilkey, and Barry M. Popkin. (1983). "The school lunch program and nutrient intake: a switching regression analysis." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 65, no. 3: 477-485.
- Andreyeva, Tatiana, and Xiaohan Sun. (2021). "Universal School Meals in the US: What Can We Learn from the Community Eligibility Provision?" *Nutrients* 13 (8): 2634. doi:10.3390/nu13082634.
- Bardach, Eugene, and Eric M. Patashnik. (2010). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. Sixth Edition CQ Press: Washington DC.
- Bartfield PhD, Judith S., Lawrence Berger PhD, and Fei Men PhD. (2020). "Universal Access to Free School Meals through the Community Eligibility Provision Is Associated With Better Attendance for Low-Income Elementary School Students in Wisconsin." *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 120 (2): 210–18. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2019.07.022.
- Blondin, Stacy A, Holly Carmichael Djang, Nesly Metayer, Stephanie Anzman-Frasca, and Christina D Economos. (2015). "'It's Just so Much Waste.' A Qualitative Investigation of Food Waste in a Universal Free School Breakfast Program." *Public Health Nutrition* 18, no. 9 1565–77. doi:10.1017/S1368980014002948.
- "Bill Text - AB-1871 Charter Schools: Free and Reduced-Price Meals." 2022. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB1871.
- "Bill Text - SB-138 School Meal Programs: Free and Reduced-Price Meals: Universal Meal Service." 2022. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB138#:~:text=The%20bill%20would%20authorize%20a.a%20very%20high%20poverty%20school.
- "Bill Text - SB-364 Pupil Meals." 2022. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB364.
- "Bill Text - AB-1385 School Meals." 2022. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=200520060AB1385.
- "Building Back Better with School Meals | Food and Nutrition Service." 2022. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/building-back-better-school-meals>.

- “California SB250 | 2017-2018 | Regular Session.” 2022. *LegiScan*.
<https://legiscan.com/CA/text/SB250/id/1652810>.
- CA Budget Committee. “Bill Text - AB-130 Education Finance: Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill.” (2022)
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB130.
- CA Dept of Education. 2022. “Local Control Funding Formula - Allocations & Apportionments.” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/>.
- CA Dept of Education. (2022) “NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns - Healthy Eating & Nutrition Education (CA Dept of Education).” <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/smi.asp>.
- CA Dept of Education. 2022. “State Meal Program - School Nutrition.” 2022.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/stm.asp#:~:text=California%20Education%20Code%20Section%2049550,adequate%20meal%20to%20each%20needy>.
- CA Dept of Education. 2022. “National School Lunch Program - School Nutrition.”
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/nslp.asp>.
- “Child Nutrition COVID-19 Waivers | Food and Nutrition Service.” 2022. Accessed May 3.
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-disaster-assistance/fns-responds-covid-19/child-nutrition-covid-19-waivers>.
- Crepinsek, Mary Kay, Anita Singh, Lawrence S. Bernstein, and Joan E. McLaughlin. (2006). “Dietary Effects of Universal-Free School Breakfast: Findings from the Evaluation of the School Breakfast Program Pilot Project.” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106, no. 11: 1796–1803. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2006.08.013>.
- Cohen, Juliana F. W., Amelie A. Hecht, Gabriella M. McLoughlin, Lindsey Turner, and Marlene B. Schwartz. (2021). “Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review.” *Nutrients* 13, no. 3 (March): 911. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030911>.
- Cohen, Juliana FW, Scott Richardson, Ellen Parker, Paul J. Catalano, and Eric B. Rimm. (2014). “Impact of the new US Department of Agriculture school meal standards on food selection, consumption, and waste.” *American journal of preventive medicine* 46, no. 4: 388-394.
- Devaney, Barbara, and Thomas Fraker.(1989). “The Dietary Impacts of the School Breakfast Program.” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 71, no. 4: 932-948.
- Dunn, Megan. 2022. “Demographic Changes in Employment during the COVID-19 Pandemic : Spotlight on Statistics: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.” Accessed May 3.
<https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2022/demographic-changes-in-employment-during-the-pandemic/home.htm>.

- ED100. (2022)“8.1 Spending: Does California Spend Enough on Education?” 2022. <https://ed100.org/lessons/californiaskimps>.
- ED100. (2022)“8.4 Prop 13 and Prop 98: Then and Now.” <https://ed100.org/lessons/prop13>.
- ED100. 2022. “8.5 Local Control Funding Formula: LCFF Dictates How State Funds Flow to School Districts” <https://ed100.org/lessons/lcff>.
- EdSource. (2009). “Proposition 98 Sets Minimum Funding Guarantee for Education. “Policy Brief. Clarifying Complex Educational Issues, March. <https://edsources.org/wp-content/publications/PolicyBriefR3.pdf>.
- Fainstein, Susan S. 2010. *The Just City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fleischhacker, Sheila, and Elizabeth Campbell. (2020). “Ensuring Equitable Access to School Meals.” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 120 (5): 893–97. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2020.03.006.
- Foundation, The Annie E. Casey. 2020. “Equity vs. Equality and Other Racial Justice Definitions.” *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*. August 25. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/racial-justice-definitions>.
- Federal Register. “Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines.” March 20, 2021. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/20/2020-05982/child-nutrition-programs-income-eligibility-guidelines>.
- Food Research & Action Center “Benefits of School Lunch.” Accessed December 12, 2021. <https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch>.
- Foundation, The Annie E. Casey. 2020. “Equity vs. Equality and Other Racial Justice Definitions.” *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*. August 25. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/racial-justice-definitions>.
- Gottlieb, Robert, and Anupama Joshi. 2010. *Food Justice*. Food, Health, and the Environment. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Government Accountability Office. (2014) “School Lunch: Implementing Nutrition Changes Was Challenging and Clarification of Oversight Requirements Is Needed.” Program Analysis. United States Government Accountability Office, January.
- Hecht, Amelie A., Elizabeth A. Stuart, and Keshia M. Pollack Porter. (2022). “Factors Associated with Universal Free School Meal Provision Adoption among US Public Schools.” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 122 (1): 49–63. doi:10.1016/j.jand.2021.06.282.

- Holt-Giménez, Eric. (2001). "Food security, food justice, or food sovereignty." *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability* : 309-330.
- Kerssen, Tanya. 2022. "A Roadmap for the Post-Pandemic Food System We Need." *Center for Good Food Purchasing*. Accessed March 23. <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/good-food-roadmap/>.
- Kids Data. "Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price School Meals." (2021). Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/518/school-meals/trend#fmt=675&loc=2&tf=10,110> .
- Legislative Analyst's Office. 2022. "The 2021-22 Spending Plan: Proposition 98 and K-12 Education." <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4466#:~:text=K%2D12%20Proposition%2098%20Funding,2020%E2%80%9121%20Budget%20Act%20level>.
- Legislative Analyst's Office. 2022. "The 2022-23 Budget: Fiscal Outlook for Schools and Community Colleges." <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4473>.
- Legislative Analyst's Office. 2022. "The 2022-2023 Budget: Overview of Proposition 98 Proposals." <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/education/2022/The-2022-23-Budget-Overview-of-Proposition-98-Proposals.pdf>.
- Levine, Susan, and De Gruyter. 2011. *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program*. <http://ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/login?url=https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400841486>.
- McLaughlin, Joan E., Lawrence S. Bernstein, May Kay Crepinsek, Lynn M. Daft, and J. Michael Murphy. (2002). "Evaluation of the School Breakfast Program Pilot Project: Findings from the First Year of Implementation. Nutrition Assistance Program Report Series."
- McLoughlin, Gabriella M., Julia A. McCarthy, Jared T. McGuirt, Chelsea R. Singleton, Caroline G. Dunn, and Preety Gadhoke. (2020). "Addressing Food Insecurity through a Health Equity Lens: A Case Study of Large Urban School Districts during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Urban Health* 97 (6): 759–75. doi:10.1007/s11524-020-00476-0.
- Mozer, Lauren, Donna B. Johnson, Mary Podrabsky, and Anita Rocha. 2019. "School lunch entrées before and after implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of (2010)." *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 119, no. 3: 490-499.
- National Center for Education Statistics. "Digest of Education Statistics, 2016." Accessed October 4, 2021. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_204.10.asp.
- No Kid Hungry. "Community Eligibility Provision | Center for Best Practices." (2022) [http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/community-eligibility-provision#:~:text=The%20Community%20Eligibility%20Provision%20\(CEP\)%20is%20a%20special%20school%20meal,at%20no%20cost%20to%20them](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/school-breakfast/community-eligibility-provision#:~:text=The%20Community%20Eligibility%20Provision%20(CEP)%20is%20a%20special%20school%20meal,at%20no%20cost%20to%20them).

- Pew Research Center. (2019)“Domestic Policy: Views of Taxes, Environment, Health Care.” *U.S. Politics & Policy*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/12/17/7-domestic-policy-taxes-environment-health-care/>.
- Public Policy Institute of California. (2022)“California’s Political Geography 2020.” <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-political-geography/>.
- Poppendieck, Janet. (2010). “School Food 101.” *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*. 26-45. Berkeley: University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.
- powell, J. A, Ake, W., & Menendian, S. (2019). Targeted Universalism: Policy & Practice. *UC Berkeley: Othering & Belonging Institute*. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9sm8b0q8>
- Ralston, Katherine, Constance Newman, Annette Clauson, Joanne Guthrie, and Jean Buzby. 2008. “The National School Lunch Program: Background, Trends, and Issues.” USDA Economic Research Service.
- Samuels, Sarah E., Krista S. Hutchinson, Lisa Craypo, Jason Barry, and Sally L. Bullock. (2010). “Implementation of California State School Competitive Food and Beverage Standards.” *Journal of School Health* 80 (12): 581–87. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2010.00545.x.
- “School Meal Math – And Some History – Nourish California.” 2022. <https://nourishca.org/fresh/blog-category/school-meal-math-and-some-history/>.
- Schwartz, Amy Ellen, and Michah W. Rothbart. (2020) “Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance.” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 39, no. 2: 376–410. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22175>.
- Smith RDN, CDN, Katherine, Ethan A. Bergman PhD, RDN, FADA, FAND, Tim Englund PhD, Dana Ogan MS, RDN, and Mary Barbee MS, CN. (2016). “School Lunch Quality Following Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act Implementation.” *Journal of Childhood Nutrition and Management* 40 (1).
- Spruance, Lori, Nhi Tran, Spencer Clason, Abby Nixon, Jordyn Burton, Marti Woolford, Shaelyn Hill, Mark Lavering, and Emily Patten. (2021). “Strong Anti-Shaming Policies Are Not Related to Amount of Unpaid School Meals.” *Journal of Child Nutrition & Management* 45 (2): 42–55.
- Taber, Daniel R., Jamie F. Chriqui, and Frank J. Chaloupka. (2013). "State laws governing school meals and disparities in fruit/vegetable intake." *American journal of preventive medicine* 44, no. 4: 365-372.

“The End of School Lunch Shaming?” 2022. *Food Research & Action Center*.
<https://frac.org/blog/end-school-lunch-shaming>.

Turner, Lindsey, Joanne F Guthrie, and Katherine Ralston. (2019). “Community Eligibility and Other Provisions for Universal Free Meals at School: Impact on Student Breakfast and Lunch Participation in California Public Schools.” *Translational Behavioral Medicine* 9 (5): 931–41. doi:10.1093/tbm/ibz090.

Tyack, David B, and Larry Cuban. 1997. *Tinkering toward Utopia A Century of Public School Reform*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

USDA ERS “National School Lunch Program.” 2021. Accessed November 15, 2021.
<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/>.

USDA FNS. “National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Fact Sheet | USDA-FNS.” (2021). Accessed September 29, 2021. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/nslp-fact-sheet>.

US Legal, Inc. “Omnibus Bill Law and Legal Definition.” (2022)
<https://definitions.uslegal.com/o/omnibus-bill/>.

Walker, Richard A., and Suresh K. Lodha. (2016). *The Atlas of California: Mapping the Challenge of a New Era*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.

Wojcicki, Janet M., and Melvin B. Heyman. (2006). “Healthier Choices and Increased Participation in a Middle School Lunch Program: Effects of Nutrition Policy Changes in San Francisco.” *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 9: 1542–47.
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2005.070946>.

Woodward-Lopez, Gail, Janice Kao, Kristin Kiesel, Markell Lewis Miller, Maria Boyle, Soledad Drago-Ferguson, Ellen Braff-Guajardo, and Patricia Crawford. (2014). “Is Scratch-Cooking a Cost-Effective Way to Prepare Healthy School Meals with US Department of Agriculture Foods?” *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 114 (9): 1349–58.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.05.002.

Woodward-Lopez, Gail, Wendi Gosliner, Sarah E. Samuels, Lisa Craypo, Janice Kao, and Patricia B. Crawford. (2010). “Lessons Learned From Evaluations of California’s Statewide School Nutrition Standards.” *American Journal of Public Health* 100 (11): 2137–45.
doi:10.2105/AJPH.2010.193490.

Yon PhD, Bethany A., Sarah A. Amin PhD MPH, Jennifer C. Taylor MS, and Rachel K Johnson PhD MPH RD. 2016. “School Nutrition Directors’ Perspectives on Preparing for and Implementing USDA’s New School Meal Regulations.” *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management* 40 (1).

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Hello! Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me about California's new Universal School Meal program. I appreciate all of the work you and [insert organization] are doing to improve the school food environment for school staff, students, and their families.

My name is Rebecca, I am a second-year graduate student at the University of San Francisco in the field of Urban and Public Affairs. I'm interviewing people to help me conduct research for my thesis that tries to understand the impact of the recent passage of the Universal School Meals legislation [or AB130 depending on Interviewee]. I want to discover, more specifically, how the USM will affect the California education system in the classroom and cafeteria and beyond the walls of the school. My interest in this topic stems from 6+ years of working in the food justice and community health space. I reached out to you because I felt that your [list specific experiences] with [insert org name here] and your knowledge around this subject [the legislative process, advocacy surrounding AB130, etc] could provide my capstone project with rich narrative surrounding the California school food system and AB130.

I anticipate this interview will last between 45-60 minutes. We will be focusing on the legislative process of the passage of AB130 and what the upcoming implementation of its Universal School Meal program could mean for students in K-12 public and charter schools.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you may skip it. You may also choose to end the interview at any time.

It would be helpful to my project if we could record our meeting today. Is it okay if I record you? In the project, your answers will be anonymous. I will only include high level summary or short quotations, but no identifying details (your name or position) will be attached to this information.

Do you have any questions for me about the process before we begin?

RQ: How did California legislators and advocates view AB130 as affecting equity in K-12 classrooms? [for reference only, not to be shared in interview]

Interview Questions

1. Can you share a brief background about your role and how you became involved in the legislative/advocacy process for AB130/the USMP?

2. For legislators-Could you explain your role in the passage of AB130?
 - a. For advocates/advocacy orgs- Could you explain your primary advocacy objectives for AB130?
 - b. What are a few specific items of legislation that you believe were important in the passage of AB130?
3. What did AB130 look like in its early stages or in different items of legislation, and how does what passed differ from that original proposal? Were there any specific points of contention?
4. During that legislative/advocacy process, what issues did you imagine the Universal School Meal program could address?
5. Who did you imagine it would impact the most? Why?
 - a. Note: Consider probing for community, school, family, and student levels
6. Optional: How do you feel that a universal approach will affect those groups (mentioned above)? Probe for:
 - a. Students
 - b. Families
 - c. School staff
 - d. Legislators and advocates
 - e. Note: consider probing for groups mentioned in previous question
7. What are the ideal goals and outcomes of the USMP/AB130?
 - a. For groups mentioned in Q6?
 - b. For everyone?

8. What are some challenges you think the Universal School Meals program may face in its implementation?
 - a. Can you provide an example of what one of those challenges might look like?
Can you give me a hypothetical problem?
9. California is the first to pass state-wide USM legislation, should this be used as a model for other states to pass a Universal School Meals program?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. What would need to be changed so that California's model would work in other states? Can you name 2-3 specific portions of the legislation or process that would need to be addressed differently in other states.

Thank you so much for speaking with me today. I appreciate that you took time out of your day to participate in this interview. Everything that you shared with me today is valuable to my research project. I will be sending you a follow up email with a brief description of my project. Please feel free to forward it to any other contacts you think could speak to this subject. I would be happy to share what I have found with you. If you'd be interested, I can follow up once my project is complete. Thank you again for your time today, and have a great week!