Food Security and the Early Care and Education Community

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A recent fact sheet from Nourish California found that...

• More than 3 in 5 California families with young children ran out of food in the last twelve months.
• Child care programs that are open today are trying to make up the difference for income loss due to decreased enrollment while facing increased costs, including the cost of food.
• Leaders need to make critical investments to support child care meal service as part of COVID-19 relief and ongoing efforts to help stabilize the state’s child care infrastructure.

Connecting Food Security and Child Care

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in San Francisco City & County Participation (as of 2019)

- 378 (44%) family child care homes (FCCs)
- 240 (75%) child care centers

CACFP helps, but misses the mark on fully funding food security in our high-cost county. We need reform at a federal level, and gap funding at state or local levels.

A September 2019 study revealed that the estimated benefit of infusing $423,446* of local funds to bring 25% new FCC providers on the CACFP by covering the gap between Tier II and Tier I rates would mean:

- 696 more low-income children per day would receive healthy meals, and
- Another $467,443** in federal dollars will be brought into San Francisco’s economy.
Connecting Food Security and Child Care

Children’s Council has made progress in screening families for food insecurity and continues to refine processes to standardize data collection (using the 2-question screener).

- Of the subsidy families screened, over 55% “sometimes” or “often” worried that food would run out
  - We can estimate over two thousand families in San Francisco receiving child care subsidies sometimes or often worried they would run out of food
- Nearly 5% of subsidized families often ran out of food

Children’s Council’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) serves 172 family child care providers and 1,226 children in San Francisco.

- Enrollment in child care and CACFP have gone down in the pandemic, as well as attendance of enrolled children

The pandemic has disrupted this food security blanket for many families that cannot afford to have changes in how they feed their children.
What does this look like in San Francisco?
COVID-19 Impact on the ECE Community

When the pandemic sent much of the Bay Area home on March 16th, the rippling impacts of closing child care, even temporarily, was top of mind.

Other than the health and safety of our community, our immediate concerns were:

- with families confronting the loss of child care, which for some provide the primary nutritious meals for their young child. For already financially vulnerable families, what impact would Shelter in Place have on their tables at meal time? For families suddenly experiencing economic hardship, where would they find the resources to cope?

- the impact of closure on the businesses of family child care educators. How would our network of providers cope with the financial losses associated with Shelter in Place? In addition to loss of tuition, what would the consequences be of the loss of additional funding sources, including CACFP meal reimbursements?
Children’s Council of San Francisco Provider Meals Pilot Project

The goal of this initiative was to support families (and providers!) with additional meals during this unprecedented public health crisis. Our hope was that this funding would ease mealtime pressures on families with the help of child care providers.

After surveying our community of over 240 educators, with particular focus on equity zones identified by the San Francisco Department of Public Health, 14 child care providers that participate in Children’s Council’s CACFP program agreed to shop, prepare, and package meals for 118 families for four weeks.
Child care providers were asked to prepare three meals a week for each family (plus a snack if budget allowed).

1 x Breakfast (examples: box of whole grain cereal/milk or non-dairy/fruit; congee and fruit; hot cereal and fruit; etc.)

2 x Main meal (examples: soup/fruit; noodles/pasta/fruit; beans, rice, vegetables, meat [chicken, tofu, etc.], fruit)

Snack (examples: combination of fruit, vegetables, whole grain bread/crackers, pretzels, cheese, yogurt)
Each educator was provided with the following supplies:

- Reusable and compostable containers for meal distribution
- A cooler bag for each family to ease meal pick up
- A check for 
  - $55/family (including the provider)/week to use for groceries for four weeks
  - $250 for food storage and cooking supplies (bins for bulk foods, pans, pots, etc.)
- A PPE kit that included masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, disinfectant, and soap
Participating providers were asked to continue to follow CACFP guidelines regarding meal pattern, sugar and salt content, whole grains, and milk variety when preparing meals.
Each provider was able to determine on their own how to distribute meals to the participating families. For some this meant all at the same time each week, for others, it was easier to distribute each meal individually, three times a week.

Providers were reminded to practice normal CACFP food safety guidelines along with COVID-19 safety guidelines, issued by San Francisco’s Department of Public Health, to protect themselves and their families.
Each child care educator was asked to submit the following via email each Friday to help ensure program integrity throughout the pilot:

- Photos of cooking/food packaged for pick up/family pick up/family meal time
- Weekly menu
- Names of children participating in this program
"Between having a newborn and COVID-19, I was ordering all of my groceries online, which was always a challenging experience. Either items were out of stock or the wrong items were delivered - there was always something. But my mom, the head chef in our program, was never phased, she always had delicious solution. When shelter in place began, families asked my mom for her recipes, many desperate to keep some normalcy, and good eating, happening in their homes. My mom’s constant refrain 'I have no recipe, I put all of my love into my cooking!'. And, this is exactly what she does. We couldn't be luckier to have not only the biggest hearted person in our lives, but the best chef too. People always say she is a miracle worker, she’s able to get children to eat amazing veggies, protein and grains, when at home, they barely eat a thing. This funding helped my mom continue to feed the children in our program and their families too!"

“My kids will only eat greens when their provider cooks them, so we are so glad she could send some home with us!”
Participating families were very appreciative and grateful for the meal support during these difficult times. The nutritious family meals helped them out financially but also lessened the stress of food shopping and gave some quality family time for a few weeks during a very bleak period in the pandemic: they had to learn how to manage time with their jobs, grocery shopping, and help their other school age kids with distance learning. During the Provider Meals project, they were excited to receive homemade, delicious, and wholesome meals with fresh fruits and vegetables, and whole grains, and at the same time, they also learned about healthy meals and good nutrition.

In addition, the provider’s family and 5 kids (from 20 months to 12 years old) all participated in small ways preparing these meals together. They benefited by spending time together as a family working on the project, and they enjoyed sharing the meals because the family would normally only do big batches of cooking for special celebrations like Chinese New Year. It was an awesome experience for the provider, her own family, and everyone involved at her end.
As a licensed child care provider in the Bayview since 1981, I’ve always loved to cook, so the children I care for get the same nutritious homecooked meals that my children and my grandchildren love. I like to cook a diverse array of meals for my kids. Some staples include stuffed bell peppers, homemade cornbread, mashed potatoes, and several different ground turkey recipes.

When it became clear that the virus was easily transmitted and was particularly dangerous for older adults, I made the reluctant decision to close my doors to the five children in my care, which, as expected, was financially devastating and quickly depleted my financial safety net. What I did not expect was the lack of motivation that I would have without having my daily routine in place with the kids in my house.

The families would call me weekly to see if I was opening back up. Some took off work or school to watch their children while others found relatives to provide care. It was tough on the families and children who were used to me and my routine.

Cooking for my child care was a big part of my own routine that was missing. Cooking for my families not only allowed me to have a sense of normalcy, but I wanted to ensure the children were able to get back something they enjoy as well. It was an opportunity to not only continue to feed the children but give the entire family a well-balanced meal during these difficult times.
Impact

• Child care educators were excited to have the flexibility to feed the families in their networks, as well as their own, with healthy food that they knew the kids would be excited to eat.
• Most, if not all, educators reported distributing extra meals and/or snacks, or they continued beyond our pilot on their own.
• At least 1,400 meals were distributed over four weeks via 14 child care programs.
• 118 families benefited from weekly meals.
• Healthy food was distributed to families across 94124, 94134, 94115, 94112, and 94116.
Benefits of this model

- Families and educators both appreciated being able to get/provide food for the entire household so families could avoid multiple stops
- Prepared, ready-to-eat meals were a hit with busy families juggling the pandemic’s impacts
- Flexibility to serve multiple meals in one pick-up
- Meals were culturally responsive/healthy food that families knew kids would enjoy
- Child care educators fed their families as well as their care network, activating the child care program as a community hub
Funding and Advocacy

Federal/State:

• Stimulus Bill Dec. '20 included $1B for California via Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), $300M pre-allocated in FY20-21 State Budget; $700M still TBD
• Biden's Proposed Stimulus Jan '21 $4B+ more for early care and education (ECE)
• Newsom's budget included good, but somewhat mixed signals around early childhood investments

Local:

• 'Baby' Prop C dollars are partially flowing (due to SF's recent Prop F authorization) as of Jan. 1 – Office of Early Care & Education + First 5 SF are making allocations, and trying to navigate local budget cuts while expecting federal/state funding flows to increase. Full release of 'Baby' Prop C dollars likely, despite appeals moving through court system.
• OECE/First 5 SF does understand families' basic needs come first as a pre-requisite to early learning and nurturing care, but local CACFP operational infrastructure in SF can lose significant capacity due to closures and therefore reduced administrative dollars unless we act now.
Connecting Food Security and Child Care

A 2017 report by USDA Economic Research Service concluded that child nutrition programs, including CACFP, were associated with significantly lower rates of food insecurity for households with children.

A 2019 study commissioned by DPH about CACFP in home-based child care settings (FCCs) determined key innovations needed to be:

1. Federal advocacy efforts are required to lower the administrative burden for child care providers participating in CACFP. Many opt out because of past knowledge of administrative requirements to get reimbursed for meals.

2. Fresh marketing is needed to recruit new sites, and to recapture those who have given up on the system in the past. New digital methods for securing reimbursements have reduced some administrative burdens of the past.

3. The City & County of San Francisco should augment the CACFP reimbursement rates to meet regional market costs of food, as an efficient and effective way to increase food security for families with young children, as well as for child care providers themselves.
What’s next?

Priority need: City revenue to support initiatives that utilize the child care infrastructure to increase food security for families in San Francisco with children under age 5
- Proposition F funds are a possible source
Thank you!

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