YOUTH SUCCESS

CAMPAIGN 4KIDS
Endorsed by Colorado's Kids

TO ENSURE THAT EVERY CHILD GRADUATES PREPARED FOR SUCCESS IN COLLEGE, THEIR CAREER, AND LIFE, WE MUST GUARANTEE ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS THAT ARE SAFE, SUPPORTIVE, AND INCLUSIVE.

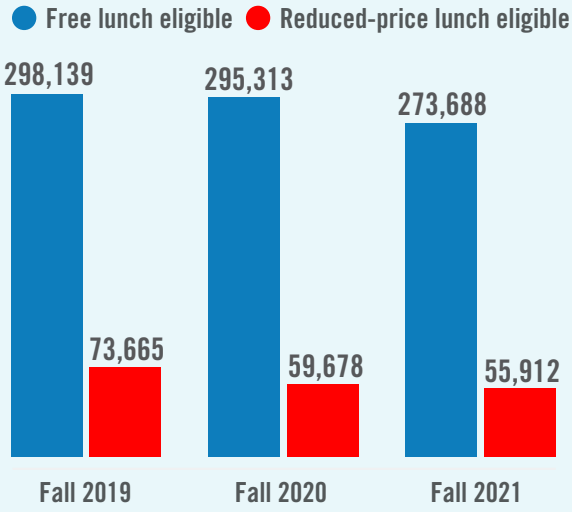
SCHOOL FINANCE

Adequate education spending ensures kids and families can access important learning resources such as targeted interventions, competitive salaries for teachers, and critical support services at school. As we evaluate the pandemic's impacts on learning opportunities, it will be especially important to make targeted investments in students experiencing the most barriers to opportunity, including our students living in poverty.

Colorado has an opportunity to make changes to our 30-year-old school finance formula. This inequitable formula sends significantly more money to wealthy, well-resourced districts – approximately three times the amount we spend to support students living in poverty. Because this formula relies on parents submitting free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) forms, it has led to inaccuracies in student count numbers and public education funding.

FALL 2021 STUDENT ENROLLMENT DATA INDICATE A SECOND YEAR OF A LIKELY UNDERCOUNT OF FRL-ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

FALL COUNT OF COLORADO PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS ELIGIBLE FOR FRL, FALL 2019-FALL 2021



Source: Colorado Department of Education, Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility by District, 2019-2021.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

School climate encompasses several aspects of a student's experience at school, including their own engagement and sense of belonging; school safety and discipline practices; social emotional learning; and culturally responsive education. Research indicates that students are better able to learn when they feel safe and supported by peers and adults – a connection that also acts as a protective factor against youth and adolescent school-based violence and suicide.

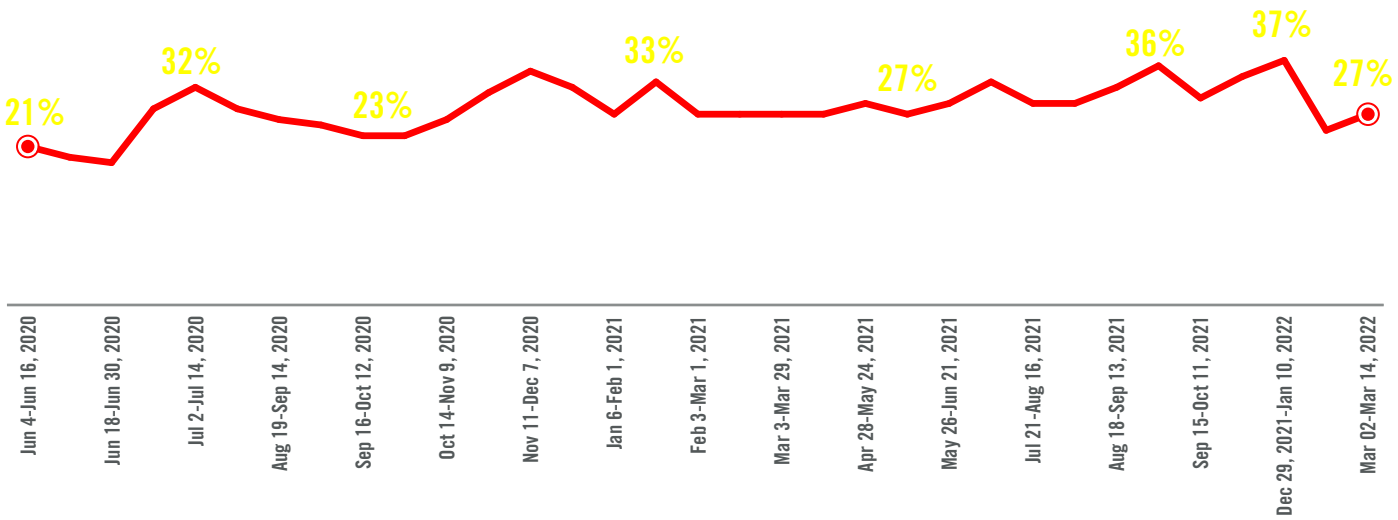
The COVID-19 pandemic has created many new challenges for our public school students, who have experienced massive disruptions in their social, emotional, and academic learning. Recent data show that while 90% of students reported feeling safe in their school, only 65% reported feeling like they belong at their school. Even fewer LGBTQ+ youth reported a sense of belonging, and LGBTQ+ youth were also more likely to report being bullied at school. In addition, students of color were also more likely to report being treated badly or unfairly at school in the previous 12 months because of their race. **Colorado must prioritize the creation of safe, healthy and inclusive learning environments by investing in comprehensive support that is responsive to both students' and educators' social and emotional needs.**

SCHOOL MEALS

School breakfast and lunch are a critical source of high-quality nutrition for kids and contribute to better grades, higher attendance rates, and higher graduation rates. For two school years during the pandemic, Congress approved waivers and funding to ensure that all public school students could access free meals. Unfortunately, free meals for all expire at the beginning of the 2022 school year, and families will be required to submit free and reduced-price (FRL) meal applications yet again.

AT SOME POINTS DURING THE PANDEMIC, NEARLY TWO IN FIVE COLORADO HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN REPORTED THEIR KIDS WERE NOT EATING ENOUGH BECAUSE FOOD WAS UNAFFORDABLE.

PERCENT OF COLORADO HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN WHERE CHILDREN WERE NOT EATING ENOUGH BECAUSE FOOD WAS UNAFFORDABLE, JUNE 2020—MARCH 2022



Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020-2022.

Colorado can ensure kids receive the nutrition they need by supporting important investments in school breakfast and lunch. In this year's election, Colorado voters will have the option to fund school meals for all children in participating public schools beginning as soon as the 2023-24 school year. We know that universal meal programs reduce stigma, save families money, and lighten the administrative burden for schools. We also know that children are among the populations most affected by food insecurity. The Children's Campaign is a proud supporting member of the Healthy School Meals for All Coalition working to pass this program.

For more information, go to www.cokidsvote.org. Follow our KidsFlash blog for more weekly updates on issues relating to kids and families across Colorado at bit.ly/joinkidsflash. Contact info@coloradokids.org with any questions.

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