



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Friday, May 1, 2020 is School Lunch Hero Day

San Diego County schools meet the need for child nutrition, receive grants to ramp up services

San Diego, April 28, 2020 – National School Lunch Hero Day is a chance to recognize the incredible work of the dedicated professionals who make a difference in the lives of millions of children, especially those kids relying on school meals for adequate nutrition.

It is especially important to recognize these individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they are working tirelessly to ensure that nutritious breakfasts and lunches are available for all students while schools are closed. Currently there are 177 schools throughout San Diego County providing meals for students during the pandemic. Parents with children aged 2-18 can visit and receive meals from any school providing meals, regardless of where their children normally attend classes.

When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated school closures, Nutrition Service Directors across San Diego County immediately jumped into action to develop innovative ways to continue feeding their students. In many cases, Directors have implemented new methods of serving school meals without additional funding or guidance from State or Federal governments.

One local School Lunch Hero, Gail Gousha, Child Nutrition Service Director for Escondido Union School District said, *“From the moment we heard schools were closing, we said we’d do whatever it takes to feed our kids. We trust our community and we are providing meals to parents for their children. Our goal is to keep our kiddos fed, so they can continue to play, learn, eat and grow together.”*

With classes restarting virtually across many districts this week, parents and kids are encouraged to pick up meals and thank their local School Lunch Heroes in person. From a safe distance, of course!

Opportunity to See COVID-19 School Meal Service in Action

School districts currently serving meals to their students have adopted contactless drive-thru service models that minimize exposure to faculty, volunteers and families. Currently, districts provide, at minimum, 5 breakfasts and 5 lunches per student per week. Some districts serve meals daily; others distribute several days of meals at once. Some districts have begun to provide additional meals for the weekend.

San Diego County press is invited to attend a school meal service provided by Escondido Union School District:

Mission Middle School
939 E. Mission Ave.
Escondido, CA 92025
Friday, May 1, 2020 at 10:45am

\$300,000 for School Meals from The San Diego Foundation

The transition from the cafeteria to curbside meal service requires school districts to purchase new equipment and supplies to safely and adequately serve meals to students. Through the San Diego COVID-19 Community Response Fund, The San Diego Foundation directed \$300,000 towards grants for San Diego County school districts in response to recommendations of the Hunger Free Kids COVID Response Team convened by San Diego Hunger Coalition. The Hunger Coalition is regranteeing the funds directly to district nutrition service departments, and Escondido Union School District is one such grantee. The district will receive a \$15,000 check this week to help cover costs for personal protective equipment (PPE), temperature control equipment, waxed bags for distributing meals, and additional sanitation supplies.

“We are very grateful to The San Diego Foundation. This grant will provide the needed resources to keep our employees safe and able to continue to provide nutritious meals for students during the COVID-19 crisis,” said Dr. Luis Rankins-Ibarra, the District’s Superintendent.

These grants are vital to ongoing meal services, however, school districts are in need of continued community support. Donations are accepted by all school districts; checks may be mailed to district offices care of Nutrition Services.

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San Diego Hunger Coalition is serving as an information clearinghouse and a hub for collaborative action during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our team is available for interviews, information, and to facilitate connections with any of our over 150 local hunger relief partners and their clients. Alternate school site visits may be coordinated with enough lead time.

Continually updated information on the current crisis is available at sdhunger.org/covid19 and sdhunger.org/meals-for-kids.

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