

# California's Healthy School Food Pathway

A midpoint summary of evaluation findings

## Executive Summary

California has outlined a vision for the school food system that supports children's health while leveraging synergistic relationships with the state's agriculture and workforce development priorities.<sup>1,2,3</sup> To make progress toward this vision, the state budget has included historic investments totaling more than \$2.2B in school food program operations, infrastructure, labor, and procurement since 2021. As the ultimate implementers of school meal programs, the school food workforce is integral to the success of any effort to change school food. Due to a history of underinvestment, the school food workforce requires additional training, skillbuilding, and support to help California realize its school food vision.<sup>4</sup>

The **Chef Ann Foundation** developed the **Healthy School Food Pathway (HSFP) Program** to provide career development opportunities for the school food workforce. HSFP supports aspiring and existing school food professionals to gain the skills they need to establish and manage successful K-12 scratch-cook meal operations by offering three sequential components:

- A seven-week Pre-Apprenticeship focused on foundational skills
- A nine-month Apprenticeship offering in-depth training and hands-on experience
- A 13-month Fellowship focused on leadership development and advanced culinary training for leaders in school food change

This midpoint evaluation report summarizes findings from participants, alumni, and district leaders from 2022-24 across all three HSFP components, with a focus on short-term outcomes. Meaningful changes were observed in participant knowledge and competencies across all three program components.

- Pre-Apprentices had statistically significant gains in school food knowledge, with 58% increasing or sustaining a high pre/post assessment score.
- Apprentices demonstrated an increase in average self-reported competency scores across each of the 29 domains.
- Fellows experienced significant improvements in knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy across each of the 18 competencies over the course of the program.

**Most participants reported using what they learned in HSFP regularly**, with 77% of Pre-Apprentices, 71% of Apprentices, and 93% of Fellows using what they learned at least weekly. **Program satisfaction was high among nearly all respondents**: 93% of Pre-Apprentices, 100% of Apprentices, and 100% of Fellows reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with HSFP and reported substantial impacts on their careers.

---

1 [Ag Vision for the Next Decade: Growing opportunity for California](#)

2 [Planting the Seed: Farm to School Roadmap for Success](#)

3 [California Master Plan for Career Education](#)

4 [Hungry for Good Food Jobs: Food Service Workers in Public Schools](#)

Districts participating in HSFP also reported positive program perceptions: **an overwhelming majority (94%) of district leaders reported satisfaction with their participation.** Many also noted that the program improved leadership development (94%), culinary skills (90%), technical skills and knowledge (89%), morale and engagement (85%), staff capacity (74%), and new hiring or promotion of staff (43%).

HSFP is advancing the field of school food service by empowering professionals, supporting meal programs, and promoting improved eating opportunities for students. By delivering a promising workforce development program for school food professionals, HSFP is building a vital foundation in support of California's school food system investments and vision.

"This is THE best professional development experience I have ever had. I don't want to be "dramatic" but this program was life changing. School food is amazing but it is hard. I left more confident in my ability to be a director but also with a clearer vision of the kind of program I want to create."

– Pre-Apprentice

"I loved this program from inside/out and would do it again. It gave me a confidence in what I am doing. [...] I found a community where people care about school nutrition, who fight for healthy food, who love their job and are not embarrassed to tell the world 'I am a kitchen lady.'"

– Apprentice

"The Fellowship is the single best way of helping those who are the most dedicated to school food that I have found so far. I feel incredibly lucky that I was able to be a part of this first cohort!"

– Fellow



SCAN CODE  
FOR FULL  
REPORT

