

401 Golden Shore, 5th Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802-4210

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Steve Relyea
Executive Vice Chancellor
and Chief Financial Officer

562-951-4600
srelyea@calstate.edu

December 1, 2021

Nancy Skinner
Joint Legislative Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 5094
Sacramento, CA 95814

Gabriel Petek
Legislative Analyst Office
925 L Street, #1000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Keely Bosler, Director
Department of Finance
State Capitol, Room 1145
Sacramento, CA 95814

Erika Contreras
Secretary of the Senate
State Capitol, Room 3044
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cara L. Jenkins
Legislative Counsel
State Capitol, Room 3021
Sacramento, CA 95814

Sue Parker
Chief Clerk of the Assembly
State Capitol, Room 3196
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CalFresh Outreach & Application Assistance (AB 85)

This report highlights efforts to address students' basic needs insecurities across the 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) system from May 2021 through October 2021, with an emphasis on CalFresh outreach and application assistance.

In late February 2021, a legislative package of immediate actions was passed to expedite the distribution of relief funds to individuals, families, and businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this, the CSU received a one-time allocation of \$1.3 million to increase CalFresh outreach efforts and application assistance for students through the Amended Budget Act of 2020 (AB 85). CalFresh is the largest food assistance program in the state and provides eligible individuals and families with funds to afford nutritious food. CalFresh outreach and application assistance is a core activity of supporting students' basic needs in the CSU. In alignment with Graduation Initiative

CSU Campuses
Bakersfield
Channel Islands
Chico
Dominguez Hills
East Bay

Fresno
Fullerton
Humboldt
Long Beach
Los Angeles
Maritime Academy

Monterey Bay
Northridge
Pomona
Sacramento
San Bernardino
San Diego

San Francisco
San José
San Luis Obispo
San Marcos
Sonoma
Stanislaus

CSU Report: CalFresh Outreach & Application Assistance

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2025, access to programs and services such as this one support students' wellbeing so that they can be more active, engaged learners. The one-time allocation of \$1.3 million provided to the CSU allowed campuses to expand existing activities, programs, and services to enroll eligible students into this important food assistance program. As a result of the state's financial support, the CSU reached 42,589 students (from May 2021 – October 2021). In addition, 12,007 students applied for CalFresh benefits during this same timeframe.

The bill language requires the CSU to provide a report by December 1, 2021, to include information on the method of the distribution of funds, how funds were used, and how many students applied for CalFresh as a result of the funded activities.

Should you have any questions about this report, please contact Nichole Muñoz-Murillo, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Advocacy and State Relations at (916) 445-5983.

Sincerely,



Steve Relyea
Executive Vice Chancellor and
Chief Financial Officer

SR:dr

Full report posted to <https://www.calstate.edu/legislativereports/>

c: Members, California State Legislature
Members, Joint Legislative Budget Committee
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Jeni Kitchell, Executive Budget Director
Lea Jarnagin, Interim Systemwide Director, Student Wellness & Basic Needs Initiatives

California State University
CalFresh Outreach & Application Assistance (AB 85)
A Report Pursuant to the Budget Act of 2020 (SB 109)
December 1, 2021

Summary

This report highlights efforts to address students' basic needs insecurities across the 23 campuses of the California State University (CSU) system from May 2021 through October 2021, with an emphasis on CalFresh outreach and application assistance. In late February 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law a comprehensive legislative package of immediate actions designed to expedite the distribution of relief funds to individuals, families, and businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this, the CSU received a one-time allocation of \$1.3 million to increase CalFresh outreach efforts and application assistance for students through the Amended Budget Act of 2020 (AB 85). Campuses were provided with funding based on a calculation that took into account infrastructure needs and the number of students likely eligible for CalFresh. The AB 85 bill language requires the CSU to provide a report by December 1, 2021, to include information on the method of the distribution of funds, how funds were used, and how many students applied for CalFresh as a result of the funded activities.

CalFresh is the largest food assistance program in the state and provides eligible individuals and families with funds to afford nutritious food. CalFresh outreach and application assistance is a core activity of supporting students' basic needs in the CSU. In alignment with Graduation Initiative 2025, access to programs and services such as this one support students' wellbeing so that they can be more active, engaged learners. The one-time \$1.3 million provided to the CSU has allowed our campuses to expand existing activities, programs, and services to enroll eligible students into this important food assistance program. As a result of the state's financial support, the CSU reached 42,589 students (from May 2021 to October 2021). In addition, 12,007 students applied for CalFresh benefits during this timeframe.

Background and Overview

The success of college students can be derailed when they face uncertainty in meeting their basic needs (CSU Comprehensive Study of Student Basic Needs, January 2018). In concert with its multi-year strategic effort to support student success, Graduation Initiative 2025, the CSU identified the promotion of student engagement and wellbeing as one of six guiding pillars to increase retention and graduation. This pillar includes implementing a number of out-of-classroom supports (including basic needs services) and stipulates that, in conjunction, campuses should:

1. Ensure services are easy for students to identify, locate, and access.
2. Ensure that campus communications normalize the use of services as a strategy for student success.
3. Employ efficient and consistent methods of communication campus-wide to ensure services are widely known and easily referred to; and
4. Work to identify and secure ongoing resources over time to sustain services to support student success.

The CSU has been proactive and innovative in using the funding allocated via AB 85 to expand and support campus CalFresh outreach and application assistance efforts.

Funding Distribution Method

In March 2021, Student Wellness & Basic Needs Initiatives—on behalf of the Office of the Chancellor—

worked with campus staff members to understand campus technology infrastructure needs related to CalFresh outreach and application assistance efforts. It was determined that each campus needed additional technology-related resources to expand CalFresh efforts and ensure that staff was equipped to support students one-on-one who were applying for CalFresh benefits. As such, each campus was provided with \$7,652.26 to be used for technology and infrastructure. Additional supplemental funding was provided to each campus based on the number of Pell-eligible students (using the following funding scale):

Funding Scale: Number of Pell-Eligible Students	
<i>Number of Pell-Eligible Students</i>	<i>Funding Amount</i>
< 1,000	\$ 4,000
1,001 – 5,000	\$ 20,000
5,001 – 10,000	\$ 40,000
10,001 – 15,000	\$ 60,000
15,001 – 20,000	\$ 80,000

This supplemental funding calculation utilized the number of Pell-eligible students due to the correlation between Pell eligibility and CalFresh eligibility factors.

In total, \$1,300,000 was distributed to campuses (the total allocation provided to the CSU). Funds were distributed to the campuses in late April 2021 via Cash Posting Order (CPO) for immediate use. The chart below summarizes the amount of funds provided to each campus.

Campus	General Funding (Scale)	Technology & Infrastructure	TOTAL FUNDING
Bakersfield	\$ 40,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 47,652.17
Channel Islands	\$ 20,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 27,652.17
Chico	\$ 40,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 47,652.17
Dominguez Hills	\$ 60,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 67,652.17
East Bay	\$ 40,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 47,652.17
Fresno	\$ 80,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 87,652.17
Fullerton	\$ 80,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 87,652.17
Humboldt	\$ 20,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 27,652.17
Long Beach	\$ 80,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 87,652.17
Los Angeles	\$ 80,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 87,652.17
Maritime	\$ 4,000	\$ 7,652.26	\$ 11,652.26
Monterey Bay	\$ 20,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 27,652.17
Northridge	\$ 80,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 87,652.17
Pomona	\$ 60,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 67,652.17
Sacramento	\$ 80,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 87,652.17
San Bernardino	\$ 60,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 67,652.17
San Diego	\$ 40,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 47,652.17
San Francisco	\$ 60,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 67,652.17
San José	\$ 60,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 67,652.17
San Luis Obispo	\$ 20,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 27,652.17
San Marcos	\$ 40,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 47,652.17
Sonoma	\$ 20,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 27,652.17
Stanislaus	\$ 40,000	\$ 7,652.17	\$ 47,652.17
	\$1,124,000	\$ 176,000	\$ 1,300,000

Description of Programs/Activities Funded

To promote CalFresh and support students applying for benefits, campuses were actively involved in funding the following priorities.

General Funding

The supplemental funds provided to the campuses supported myriad activities and priorities to expand CalFresh outreach and support students applying for benefits. In general, these funds were primarily used to fund student employees who often served as front-line staff and provided outreach and application assistance to their peers, as well as to fund new professional staff members focused on CalFresh activities. It also allowed the campuses to increase their reach with the use of promotional materials, including banners, tablecloths, and other CalFresh-branded items including:

- CalFresh promotional signs, posters, postcards, pamphlets, and other printed material
- Recipe books
- General outreach events
- Reusable grocery tote bags

The items purchased with these funds helped strengthen educational outreach efforts to assist students in better understanding the benefits, application process, and ease of getting CalFresh assistance. In addition, efforts were expanded to reduce stigma and barriers associated with applying for CalFresh.

Technology & Infrastructure

To expand outreach, campuses invested in technology equipment such as laptops/tablets, printers, docking stations, and other essential equipment. This allowed campus staff to host outdoor outreach events and to reach students via various electronic modalities. In addition, this equipment increased efficiency and security. Technology funds also provided an opportunity for campuses to purchase equipment to help with screening students for CalFresh eligibility, thus being able to provide quick responses and support to students. The equipment automatically reconfigured staff members' approach to forward-facing sign-ins for students, improving service times and empowering students to be self-sufficient within the application process. Other items purchased include the following:

- Cell phones for quick communication with students
- Laptop charging carts to have laptops readily available for screening students
- Subscription service to allow for scheduling of student meetings
- Subscriptions for digital outreach and promotion of CalFresh
- Hotspots to ensure continuity of internet service

Successes, Challenges, and Opportunities for Growth

Across the CSU, the \$1.3 million funding allowed campuses to reach many more students than in previous years. During a difficult time for many of our students, promoting CalFresh and providing application assistance was instrumental for many students' success. Partnerships with financial aid staff allowed basic needs staff to connect with more eligible students and facilitate applications. In addition, the funds allowed the campuses to expand their staff and therefore their capacity to reach more students in need.

The immediate campus efforts to support students and promote CalFresh are worthy of praise. In a short amount of time, campuses mobilized their teams to expand their reach and ensure that students were supported with their CalFresh application. Unfortunately, however, we are unable to report on the exact number of students whose CalFresh applications were approved. This is due primarily to the fact that the application system does not track college enrollment. It is therefore a recommendation that the legislature work with the California Department of Social Services to ensure that this level of data is collected *and* shared with the three segments of public higher education. Having access to this information will show the true impact of campus' CalFresh outreach and application assistance efforts.

Number of Students Served

The one-time \$1.3 million funding provided to the CSU has allowed our campuses to expand existing activities, programs, and services to enroll eligible students into this important food assistance program. As a result of the state's financial support, the CSU reached 42,589 students (from May 2021 to October 2021). In addition, 12,007 applied for CalFresh benefits during this same timeframe. It is important to note that this figure represents the number of students who applied for CalFresh with the direct support of a campus staff member. As such, it is highly likely that many more students applied for CalFresh on their own. At this time, the CSU does not have access to data that speaks to the number of CalFresh applications from college students that were approved by the California Department of Social Services.

Impact and Importance of Funds

The state's financial support to address the food disparities among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic was instrumental and advances the mission of Graduation Initiative 2025. During a very difficult time for many individuals, access to nutritious food allowed our college students to remain

engaged in their coursework. This level of outreach and support has been key to the success of many students. As this work continues, the CSU will continue to support more students so that they continue their educational journey and graduate. The California State University, Office of the Chancellor—and the 23 campuses of the CSU—is appreciative of the financial support from the legislature that allowed campus staff members to support thousands of students during an incredibly important period of time.