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CCWRO New Welfare News Special Edition

The 2024 Back To School Newsletter

by Daphne Macklin

August is a busy month for all families with the beginning of a new school year, sometimes with a change in schools or a move to a new home or living situation. For families receiving various forms of public assistance an already hectic schedule will be upset and require adjustments as parents and the caretakers of young families face a frequently changing round of new challenges and old ones with a new cast of characters.

For low-income community advocates, the back-to-school season, is a chance to develop communications with both the local school and districts as well as childrens' and family advocates, especially advocates for children living with relatives, living on their own or in exceptional situations such as foster care placements or living with a disabling medical challenge including parenting a child of your own as a teen parent or as young relative caretaker of siblings.

One more thing, these programs will often change from year to year so follow up on changes even though your child(ren) may be attending the same school or district.

YOUNG CHILDREN - Major New Program

The most significant changes for young children (pre-school and primary grades) will actually start in August 2025 for SY 2025 - 2026. These changes are:

1. **Universal School Meals. (UMP) and**
2. **The Universal Kindergarten/Pre-Kindergarten Rules**

Both programs were recently enacted as law by the California State Legislature with support from Gov. Newsom, who is himself the father of school aged children. Both programs (actually three programs as the Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Transitional Kindergarten programs known by their initials as (UPK) and (UTK) are separate programs) involve heavy participation from the California Department of Education (CDE). CDE was also heavily involved in the development of the Universal Free School Meals Program (UMP). Although the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture had offered

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In this issue

Welcome to CCWRO's 2024 Back to School Newsletter. This edition includes three sections:

1. Issues concerning early childhood program participants, pre-school, TK, Kindergarten, and 1st through 3rd grades.
2. Middle grades 4th through 6th/junior high school, grades 7th or 8th (in some districts 9th graders are considered junior high pupils).
3. High school 9th or 10th through 12th grade

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a variety of programs addressing child hunger in schools; the cost of administering school nutrition programs and the shameful practice in some communities of embarrassing and humiliating children and parents who could not afford school lunch programs. Prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) some school districts had experimented with a program that provided free meals and nutrition services access when a district or particular school applied to participate in a USDA program that supported a community-based option.

The COVID 19 response to school closures and a widespread need to provide funding to feed school aged children, even those whose families qualified for the SNAP (CalFresh) program was the creation of the Pandemic EBT or P-EBT program. See the CDSS publication at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/home/pandemic-ebt#>: [add hyperlink]. The program was successful in providing additional support to Cal-Fresh families. It added a substantial amount of funding to the state-wide as well as local community economies. CalFresh households also got a special supplemented allotment during the PHE that stopped for most people in 2023.

However, P-EBT was not without its challenges including adequate access for children with disabilities or who were attending school in a different setting than a local public school. The program was also hamstrung by structural challenges such as the issuance of new identifications card issued to eligible children using the child's surname. The worse problem, for many families was that while the CalFresh program is administered through CDSS and county welfare agencies, there was little clarity about who was administering the local connections re PEBT access, **at a time when most local school district offices were closed.**

CCWRO will be following the start and operational rules for UMP as well as the UPK and UTK programs.

Other Issues

Health Care/Medi-Cal Services for Young Children

As your child approaches school age, it is important to confirm your child's eligibility for Medi-Cal or private health care. The Medi-Cal eligibility rules are explained at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Documents/Medi-Cal-Coverage-for-EPSTDT.pdf>.

Even if you believe your child has private coverage through your job or through a medical support order incident to a custody and support order issued by a California court, check to make certain. If your child does not have private medical coverage, he or she (or they) make be eligible for Medi-Cal under new rules that have a goal of cover all children under age 5 *including some undocumented minors*.

Most children 5 and under may qualify for the federal EPTSP program that critically at this time period covers necessary testing (visual and hearing) and pays for services such as speech and language therapy. It is well recognized that the sooner these services are started, the more likely they are to be effective and successful. See <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs-impact/early-periodic-screening-diagnosis-treatment>

If the children in your care have not been screened for lead in their blood, this is the time to have this done as required by the EPDST/Medi-Cal program. Some providers have discouraged parents and caretakers for having their child tested for lead exposure. You should insist. Lead exposure can impact brain development and behavioral issues. And California is notorious for not testing eligible children.

If you know your child has special medical, mental health, developmental and neurological issues, this is the time to get these matters addressed, connect the child with competent and even

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culturally sensitive care providers. Your children may qualify for services through the California Department of Developmental Services. <https://www.dds.ca.gov>

Finally, you should identify school transportation resources for your child. This varies widely throughout the state and services may vary widely in the same cities and counties. If you are new to a community or even relocating back to a place you where you have lived before, find out what is available, how services are delivered and any related costs. Sacramento Regional Transit offers free rides with appropriate identification for students under 18 (and even older in some cases).

Middle grades 4th through 6th/junior high school, grades 7th or 8th (in some districts 9th graders are considered junior high pupils).

Things to watch for, things to do, things that may be happening.

Things to watch for By the time children are past the primary grades and moving into the critical 4th through 6th grade levels, parents and child-care takers should consider shifting their concerns to the child's physical health, social interactions and experience and academic achievements and accomplishments. The developmental milestones of early childhood especially for low-income households, families with mixed immigration status, multi-generational families and family groups dealing with significant disabilities, as well as tight budgets are now part of any range of concerns during "back to school" season. The beginning of a new school year, relocation to a new school or even changing districts, like New Year's Resolutions, are a chance to consider new goals and new strategies to meet them.

Things That May Be Happening *Obesity, body image, mental health issues.* Obesity: the linked fact sheet was created by part of the National Insti-

tutes of Health as its [CALIFORNIA STATE FACT SHEET](#) on obesity in children and adolescents. As with many parts of the US about 30% of California children are obese per medical standards. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines childhood obesity or overweightness using the Body Mass Index measurement. Among children of the same age and sex, overweight is defined on CDC growth charts as an individual with "a BMI at or above the 95th percentile."¹

<https://www.feedthechildren.org/our-work/stories/the-link-between-childhood-obesity-and-poverty/#:~:text=Besides%20nutrition%2C%20physical%20activity%20is,activities%20are%20too%20often%20unaffordable.>

The causes of obesity among poor and low-income children and families are complex and schools often do not make things easier. A key concern is how weight and self-esteem issues in the pre-teen to middle grades may result in behavior changes and social influences become more important. This may show up as increased defiance of adult school authorities. This and other types of risk taking may lead to contact with the juvenile justice system and eventually the adult penal system aka the "school to prison pipeline". "Dignity In Schools" published a thoughtful article on this issue "School-to-Prison Pipeline Explained", focuses on the impacts of the "school to prison pipeline" on young men of color.

I would argue that young adolescent women regardless of race are placed at physical and psychological risks as a consequence of self-esteem and body image issues. These are linked to early and unwanted sexual contact and exploitation including unplanned pregnancies, future discrimination in the workforce given the social and often racial biases against "fat" women.

¹ BMI is the Body Mass Index measurement that considers factors such as age, gender. Body Mass Index (BMI) – for-age is a number calculated from a child's weight and height and. evaluated using an age and sex specific growth chart. BMI is a reliable indicator of body fatness for most children and teens.

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Solutions Starting a new school year is a chance to set healthy goals around food; and exercise; and school attendance and performance issues. Consider creating family mealtimes meal times that both cook and eating together; family exercise and activities (weekly trip to the farmers' market, family dance party). Look at program that rework high calorie "traditional" or "cultural heritage" foods to lower fat, sugar and salt. Chances to talk with older children will support family ties that can offset negative social influences. Broader scale solutions may include organizing the neighborhood and community to create a safe walking environment like a "walking school bus" so children are not making their way through tough areas all alone and on foot. http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/.

Also check in with school staff about how your daughter's school handles emergencies with menstrual products or a change of clothing in the event of an accident. You should do this even if you are a father.

Also get specific guidance from school authorities on clothing and grooming standards. The goal is simple: keep kids busy, get and keep them healthy and get them in their seats in their classrooms.

While this section has focused a lot on children's health consider this: most 'good' parents think that they have done their duty by going to all the well-child appointments for their infants and toddlers. Sorry but you have at least another 10 years of getting tweens, adolescents and even very young adults to see to their own physical, mental and emotional health. Might as well see to your own as well.

High School and Beyond

BTS Issues for Senior High School

Senior high school students, 10th to 12th graders and some other students with special needs or extraordinary circumstances, face a different set of challenges than younger students. Some senior high school aged students are parents themselves. A surprisingly large number of older teens are actually parenting younger siblings and half-siblings or even school aged nieces and nephews.

Older teens often assist elderly family members or their own medically fragile parents. Some become the primary caretakers for medically fragile or disabled siblings. And many adolescents with their own health challenges have experienced or are experiencing severe episodes with issues like lupus, severe injuries that are a consequences of community violence, recovery from or experiencing a recurrence of a childhood cancer or chronic physical issues such as a heart condition, eating disorders or dealing with challenges including severe chronic depression and anxiety.

For some students, schools have provided a good basic education from which they may prepare to pursue options that include post-secondary programs such as local community college and vocational programs. Many pupils with developmental and/or physical medical issues may need a formal "individual education plan" or IEP. Some youth have been incorrectly labeled as having behavioral issues that result in expulsions and assignment to a "continuation" program. These are challenges that contribute to decisions to drop out of high school or discontinue formal education and vocational training.

What many parents and students themselves do not know is that the child is entitled to either a

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formal IEP or a Rehab Act Sec. 504 accommodation. It may also be appropriate to have the child evaluated for services through the Department of Developmental Services. Many youth have managed to pass as “non-disabled” and are only diagnosed with issues such as autism spectrum disorder after they may qualify for Regional Center services. Children eligible for these services are not just the profoundly disabled but also children with less obvious or milder conditions that require appropriate accommodations. These young adults may qualify for services through the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. They may have reached the age where they can seek certain types of medical care without the involvement of a parent, i.e. psychiatric care or sexual health related care or substance abuse treatment.

Older teens are often having their first significant work experiences, which may expose them to actual physical hazards, i.e. cuts and burns if working in the food industry or psychological stresses including sexual harassment (and yes this happens to both young women and young men) or persistent exposure to adults encouraging the illicit use of alcohol and drugs including tobacco. Some adolescents are at risk of sexual exploitation because their parental home is no longer safe or in some instances no longer exists because a parent is incarcerated or a domestic partner or step-parent “wants to kid out of the house”.

Common Issues: That may involve older students include:

Changing households -- Older students should get a clear understanding of their living arrangements if they are not living with both or either of their biological parents. If you are living with another relative, i.e. a grandparent or great-grandparent, you should check with the Social Security and Veterans' Administrations to see if there are types of student and family assistance that you may now qualify to receive.

CalFresh Household Composition Issues

Under CalFresh Households and SNAP rules a household eligible for assistance is a group of individuals who both (1) purchase and (2) prepare together, like

- (a) shop together;
- (b) cook meals together;
- (c) store food in a common location; and
- (d) eat together.

This means if they purchase or prepare separately, then they are separate households.

NOTE: Any person under the age of 22 must be in the same household even if they purchase or prepare separately.

Consult with an experienced CalFresh advocate about whether a multi-generational household should apply for SNAP benefits as a single household or multiple households living at the same address. **You can also contact CCWRO at 916-736-0616.**

For more information review the LSNC on-line CalFresh informational materials at <https://calfresh.guide/households-receive-calfresh-benefits/>

CLOSING NOTES

The focus of these articles has been “Back To School” related issues focusing on TANF and other low-income households. If you have any questions about these articles contact me at Daphne Macklin, tlk-2014dlm@gmail.com.

NB: these articles were inspired by a year of education focused presentations and discussions at Legal Services of Northern California. LSC-funded programs may want to consider how education focused issues can improve school success and meaningful personal and family economic self-sufficiency.