CALIFORNIA SCHOOL GARDEN COALITION

FACT SHEET
KIT FUNDS 2026-27

California now funds school garden education

What SFAs and community partners need to know about KIT funds

California named a new funding source for hands-on food education in school gardens. School Food Authorities (SFAs) can now use Kitchen Infrastructure and Training (KIT) funds for garden-enhanced nutrition education through their Food/Nutrition Services departments, and community-based organizations (CBOs) can partner to provide programming. **Read the announcement**.

Who's eligible

Generally: School districts
Technically: School Food Authorities (SFAs)

An SFA is a school district, county office of education, or charter school that runs both federal school meal programs: the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. Most are school districts.

KIT funds are managed by each SFA's Nutrition Services department, led by its food service director.

State law (EC 49507) calls these entities "local educational agencies (LEAs)"; in the meal program, that is an SFA.

THE KIT FUND AT A GLANCE

$500M distributed to SFAs in a one-time allocation; the funds can be used in any of the following five program areas

1. **Kitchen infrastructure that supports serving fresh, whole foods**
2. **Some staffing and training that supports serving fresh, whole foods**
   For reference, in 2022 this covered roles such as a Farm to School Coordinator and food service staff training in scratch cooking, local foods, and reducing food waste. It excluded training non-food service staff.
3. **Procurement of fresh, whole, sustainably grown CA foods**
4. **School food pantries** NEW IN 2026
5. **Hands-on food education, including activities in school gardens, on farms, and in culinary classes** NEW IN 2026

WHAT THIS MEANS

HOW FUNDS ARE RELEASED

A direct allocation by CDE formula (not a competitive grant). Every eligible SFA that opts in receives an allocation. Food service directors opt in through a short online form that includes a high-level budget.

WHO RECEIVES FUNDS

SFAs that take part in federal school meal programs. CDE allocates the money to each SFA's Nutrition Services department.

ROLE FOR CBOS

CBOs do not apply. They may partner with an SFA as a contracted provider. Contracts follow the district's own procurement rules (micro-purchase, invitation for bid, or request for proposals), and thresholds vary by district, so check with the district business office.

PROGRAM AREA 5

Funds may go to any combination of the five areas, including spending all of it on hands-on food education.

PRIORITY

Under EC 49507, funds will be distributed to all SFAs using a base allocation amount (prioritizing SFAs that did not receive the last round), with additional funding to SFAs with high percentages of free/reduced lunch students; remaining funding is distributed according to total meals served. For reference, 2022 KIT allocations gave each SFA a base of about $100K plus a share based on meal volume.

STAFFING

Because the money is one-time, permanent positions are discouraged. SFAs can use funds to hire or expand their food service staffing; continue an existing partnership with a CBO that provides school garden education; or to start a new relationship with a CBO. CBOs can help SFAs pair KIT funds with other or matching sources to sustain the program.

WHAT'S ALLOWABLE

CDE has not yet set spending criteria for program area 5 and plans a webinar on allowable costs. Until then, the 2022 and 2025 KIT guidelines are the best reference. Based on prior programming, such as the rules for using school meal funds for nutrition education, activities could be expected to connect to the school meal program, for example, providing standards-aligned school garden-based instruction focused on students growing fruits and vegetables and preparing healthy dishes that encourage healthy eating behaviors and knowledge.

STILL TO BE DECIDED BY CDE

- The allocation formula and amounts per SFA
- Which specific costs qualify, such as staff time, supplies, teacher training, or garden and farm infrastructure
- Specific reporting requirements (CDE expects more reporting than past rounds, including tracking expenditures)
- Exact opt-in and disbursement dates

PERMANENCE

Program area 5 is now permanent in state law (EC 49507) as an allowable use of KIT funds. The funding is not permanent or recurring: the $500 million is a one-time allocation, and any future round depends on a new budget appropriation. KIT has had four one-time rounds: $150M in 2021, $600M in 2022, $145M in 2025, and $500M in 2026-27.

TIMELINE

July 2026
Signed into law. **SFAs can begin planning for next year's programming.**

Fall 2026
CDE determines how the funds will be allocated and other administrative procedures

By December 2026 (target)
CDE sends the opt-in request to SFAs

First half of 2027 (expected)
Funds allocated to SFAs that opt in; exact dates set by CDE

June 30, 2030
Deadline for SFAs to encumber funds (signed contracts or purchase orders in place)

June 30, 2031
Final report due describing how funds were spent

As of October 19, 2026. Watch CDE's Nutrition "What's New" and the KIT page for updates.

Funding is a result of the California School Garden Coalition's 2026-27 advocacy campaign with the leadership of Senator Sasha Renée Pérez