2020 Position Paper
Talking Points

School meals are as critical to learning as teachers and textbooks. SNA urges Congress to increase access to healthy school meals to support student achievement.

Eliminate the Reduced Price category (ERP).

- Some students who qualify for reduced price meals go hungry during the school day or accumulate unpaid meal debt because their families can’t afford the reduced price co-pay.

- Families earning 130 - 185 percent of the poverty level still struggle to make ends meet.
  - Current income threshold for a family of four: $33,475 to $47,638

- 30 cents per breakfast/40 cents per lunch adds up quickly, forcing parents to make tough decisions about whether their children will receive healthy school meals.

- More than 936,000 students approved for reduced price lunches did not receive them on the average school day in FY 2019.
  - Share stories of RP families in your community struggling to afford the copay, incurring debt, skipping meals.

- By eliminating the reduced price category, Congress can ensure at-risk students have consistent access to healthy school breakfast and lunch to support academic success.

Refer to ERP fact sheet for more information.

Expand Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced Price Meals (DCM-F/RP) to all states.

- Through direct certification, income-eligible students are automatically certified to receive free or reduced price school meals based on their families’ participation in other means-tested assistance programs.
• The direct certification process:
  o Spares low-income parents a cumbersome, unnecessary application process.
  o Cuts paperwork, processing and administrative costs for schools, allowing us to focus on serving students.
  o Reduces school meal certification errors and improper payments.

• Students in 19 states have benefited from a demonstration adding Medicaid to the list of programs used for direct certification.
  o If your state has Medicaid direct certification, share examples of how it has benefitted students in your district/state.

• To increase access to free and reduced price meals for eligible students, Congress should allow all states to use Medicaid data for direct certification.

Refer to Direct Certification fact sheet for more information.

Urge the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Department of Education, in collaboration with School Food Authorities (SFAs), to develop guidance on ensuring students have adequate time to eat healthy school meals.
• School breakfast and lunch programs support obesity prevention, student health and academic achievement. Students must have enough time to consume these meals.

• School meals include more fresh produce, and these high-fiber, crunchy foods take more time to eat.

• Research shows students with shorter lunch periods ate fewer fruits, vegetables, milk and entrees.
  o Share examples of increased waste/decreased consumption in your cafeterias due to short lunch periods.

• To promote healthy eating, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends ensuring students have at least 20 minutes to eat lunch after being seated.
  o Discuss how your program minimizes long lines for students (e.g. grab-and-go options/hallway kiosks/cashier training) and the challenge of rapidly serving large numbers of students in overcrowded schools.

Refer to Time to Eat fact sheet for more information.
Preserve USDA’s 2018 final rule Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium Requirements.

- Under current, and recently proposed flexibilities, school meals are still healthy meals that meet calorie, fat and sodium limits and offer students fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

- School meal flexibility does not compromise the progress we’ve made for our students.

- **Whole grains:** A majority of the grains schools serve are whole grain rich. The flexibility simply gives us a little leeway on specific foods that students just weren’t eating, often due to regional and cultural preferences.
  - Provide examples from your program (e.g. preferences for flour tortillas/biscuits/white rice, challenges with whole grain pastas, etc.)

- **Sodium:** Schools significantly reduced the sodium content of school meals to meet Target 1 and are working toward Target 2 reductions. Even the Institute of Medicine warned that meeting later targets may not be possible given naturally occurring sodium in foods and other challenges.

- **Milk:** Schools continue to meet calorie, fat and sodium limits for school meals, so any nutrient changes resulting from the addition of flavored 1% milk are offset in other parts of the menu.

- Updated nutrition standards for school meals have been a tremendous success overall, but these three specific rules contributed to declining lunch participation, higher costs and food waste.

- The final rule is helping us manage these challenges and prepare nutritious meals that appeal to diverse student tastes.

Refer to [Final Rule fact sheet](#) for more information on the current flexibilities; see the next page for talking points on recently proposed flexibilities.

Increase USDA Foods (commodities) support for the School Breakfast Program (SBP).
- Research shows school breakfast consumption improves student behavior, attendance and performance on standardized tests.
• Expanding USDA Foods will support America’s students and farmers and help schools reduce food costs.
  o *Share examples of how USDA Foods at breakfast would help you improve menus and allow more students to benefit from nutritious school breakfast (e.g. freeing up funds to invest in breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go, offering a wider variety of U.S. grown foods).*
  o *Share examples of healthy commodity foods you would like to serve at breakfast.*

• USDA estimated that meeting updated nutrition standards for school breakfast would increase expenses by **27 cents per breakfast**, yet schools received no additional funding to implement the standards.
  o *Provide examples of breakfast costs from your program.*

Refer to [USDA Foods fact sheet](#) for more information.

**Support USDA’s ongoing effort to streamline overly complex child nutrition programs.**

• Streamlining overly complex rules will reduce costs and allow us to spend more time focused on improving menus and interacting with students in the cafeteria.

• USDA’s recently published proposed rules will ease burdensome administrative requirements and simplify meal service, while ensuring students continue to receive nutritious school meals.

• The proposal continues to protect current calorie and fat limits, which guarantee school meals do not contribute to obesity.

• The rule maintains vegetable portion sizes and mandates that schools offer dark leafy greens, red/orange vegetables and legumes every week.
  o *Provide examples from your program of how proposed rule would help and to combat the myth that schools will just serve more potatoes and pizza (e.g. the opportunity to serve more local/seasonal produce from other subgroups).*
  o *If your program would utilize proposed breakfast flexibilities, discuss how and why (e.g. increased protein options, challenges with waste in grab and go programs)*

Refer to [Streamline Programs fact sheet](#) for more information.