

January 27, 2015

The Honorable Kevin Concannon,
Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Under Secretary Concannon:

As organizations committed to the nutritional well-being and long-term success of America's school children, we write to express our continued appreciation for your support for USDA's State Competitive Equipment Assistance Grants. These grants are critical in assisting local school food service operators in acquiring new kitchen equipment necessary to fully implement new national meal and competitive foods standards and improve food safety.

As you know, the FY 2015 Consolidated Appropriations bill recently passed by Congress includes \$25 million for the equipment assistance grants. We write to urge USDA that the process allows for all schools which can demonstrate a need for new equipment to apply, regardless of free and reduced percentages. With tighter school budgets across the country, the need is evident in all schools especially as research indicates that only 1 in 10 school districts nationwide (12 percent) has all the kitchen equipment needed to serve healthy foods. Only 42 percent of school food service directors report having budgets to purchase equipment, and fewer than half of those with any budget expect the funds to be adequate. Expanding access so that all schools with substantial equipment deficiencies can compete for a portion of these funds will help to ensure that states can address critical unmet equipment needs wherever they exist and improve the school meal environment statewide.

We look forward to your support as USDA begins to implement the new Appropriations bill to help ensure that all schools with equipment needs can apply for funds to purchase the necessary equipment to better implement the new meal standards. Much progress has already been made with USDA's equipment assistance grants, but there is still much work to do to ensure that every school has the tools it needs to serve delicious, healthy meals every day.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your continued support.

Sincerely yours,

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Heart Association
California Food Policy Advocates
The School Nutrition Association
The Pew Charitable Trusts