

Encourage USDA to return to the five-year Administrative Review (AR) Cycle for School Food Authorities (SFAs) that consistently operate in compliance.

School nutrition professionals strive to be responsible stewards of federal funds and welcome efforts to ensure school meal programs fully comply with regulatory requirements. However, SFAs and State agencies alike have struggled to manage increased workloads under the shorter review cycle mandated under The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. These administrative burdens hinder efforts to improve school meal programs for students.

For SFAs, the AR process is so cumbersome that school nutrition directors spend days compiling data and completing pre-review paperwork, plus additional days for the on-site review and follow up. Layered on top of monthly and annual reporting requirements and additional audits and inspections, these administrative mandates take substantial time away from the mission of serving students. Many school districts table significant program improvements, like launching a new breakfast in the classroom or farm to school initiative, until after their “AR year.”

Meanwhile the shorter review cycle forces State agencies to divert substantial staff time and travel budgets to more frequent reviews. With resources stretched thin, many State agencies have reduced training sessions and other support for SFAs.

A five-year cycle for SFAs consistently in compliance will maintain accountability by focusing on the *quality* of reviews over the *quantity*. State agencies will have more time to conduct thorough reviews and more resources to provide SFAs support and technical assistance. School nutrition directors will spend less time at their desks and more time in the cafeteria interacting with students and staff.

“High-risk” SFAs that do not comply with the regulations should undergo ARs on a more frequent basis to help bring them into compliance with federal mandates. State agencies should collaborate to ensure “risk factors” for establishing the frequency of administrative reviews are as consistent as possible to promote a high operational standard across the country.

Learn more at
schoolnutrition.org

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