

# Block Grants

## *Putting School Meals on the Chopping Block*

### **Background:**

Since 1946, the federal government has provided students consistent access to healthy meals at school. Serving more than 30 million students each day, the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs are critical to children's health and academic success, contributing to economic growth and national security.

Congress specifically designed these programs as "entitlements" to provide participating schools a reliable source of funds to serve all students in need. Schools receive a federal reimbursement for each meal served.



Fixed-sum block grants would eliminate this guarantee, dismantling an effective federal program. Block grant proposals would harm students by cutting funds for school meal programs and nullifying crucial federal mandates, including nutrition standards and student eligibility rules for free and reduced price meals.

*Block grants break the promise that America's students will have consistent access to the nutrition they need to succeed.*

### **Block Grants Harm Students:**

Thanks to entitlement status, school meal programs currently have the necessary funding to meet students' nutritional needs. Funding fluctuates annually with the number of student meals served. When unforeseen situations occur – i.e. natural disaster strikes, school enrollment increases, or a factory closes - the number of students eligible to

receive free and reduced price meals increases. Schools can serve more students knowing their reimbursement will rise to cover the added cost.

Fixed-sum block grants provide a finite amount of funding each year. If circumstances change mid-year, states do not receive extra funds to cover the cost of serving meals to additional students in need. Cash strapped school districts would be forced to either cover meal program losses at the expense of academics or limit free and reduced price meals for students, putting America's most vulnerable students at risk. Schools would abandon efforts to expand school breakfast service, proven to support academic achievement, since increasing student participation would increase costs.

***In a September 2015 report, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office warned that: “block grants that are smaller than the funding that current legislation would provide would probably eliminate access to nutrition programs for some children and reduce it for others. Such grants would also leave the programs unable to respond automatically to economic downturns.”***

### **Block Grants Slash Funds for School Meals:**

The 2016 House-proposed block grant pilot would have slashed funds for school meal programs through an immediate funding cut and the elimination of annual adjustments, which help schools keep pace with rising costs. The proposal could have resulted in a crippling 12% funding cut after three years, according to an [analysis](#) by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).

History demonstrates that block grants shrink available funding over time, severely limiting a program’s ability to serve Americans in need. A CBPP [analysis](#) of 13 major housing, health, and social services block-grant programs reveals that combined funding for the programs declined by 26 percent — or \$13 billion in 2016 dollars — from 2000 to 2016. Notably, when adjusted for inflation, funding under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant has plummeted by 32 percent, despite population growth.

### **Block Grants Abolish Crucial Federal Standards:**

Block grants void federal rules that ensure the uniformity and consistency of school meal programs across the nation. States could set their own rules dictating which children are eligible for free or reduced price meals, restricting access for low income children currently enrolled in the program. States could abandon all federal nutrition mandates, compromising the quality and variety of school meals.

Block grants could void Buy American mandates and impact USDA Foods assistance for school meal programs, which have supported America’s farmers and introduced students to a wide variety of healthy US grown foods.

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