

Block Grants

Putting School Meals on the Chopping Block

Background:

In 1946, the federal government made a promise to America's families that students will always have access to healthy meals at school. Congress specifically designed the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs to be entitlement programs. Participating schools are "entitled" to a federal reimbursement for all meals served. Federal regulations and nutrition standards for these programs ensure meals and student access to them are consistent from state to state.

Fixed-sum block grants would eliminate these federal guarantees and the promise that America's students will have consistent access to the nutrition they need to succeed. Block grant proposals cut funds for school meal programs and nullify 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 Restrict Student Access to School Meals:

Thanks to entitlement status, school meal programs always have the necessary funding to meet students' nutritional needs. Funding fluctuates annually with the number of student meals served. When a natural disaster strikes, school enrollment increases, or a factory closes, the number of students receiving 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 eliminate that guarantee, putting America's most vulnerable students at risk. Block grants provide a finite amount of funding each year. If circumstances change mid-year, states do not receive additional funds to cover the cost of serving meals to students in need.

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schoolnutrition.org

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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). Cash-strapped school districts would be forced to cover meal program losses at the expense of academics. Further cuts would also impact hiring practices in school cafeterias nationwide.

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 on 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, and under the proposed pilot, states would be required to only serve one “affordable” meal a day to students, threatening recent national progress in expanding student access to healthy school breakfasts.

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.

***For more information,
call (301) 686-3100 and ask for the
Government Affairs and Media Relations
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Learn more at
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