



# 2013 Legislative Issue Paper



**S**ince 1946, the National School Lunch Act has functioned successfully as a grant-in-aid program. We believe Congress has made the correct decision in exempting school nutrition programs from sequestration. We request that Congress continue to invest in our children by providing nutritious school meals under the current funding structure. It is this structure that has allowed the program to succeed and become a model for the world. With this sense of history, SNA makes the following recommendations to protect the nutritional health of our children:

1. SNA supports the elimination of the weekly limits on Grains and Meat/Meat Alternates served in the National School Lunch Program. SNA strongly urges Congress and USDA to make this temporary solution for SY 2012-2013 permanent immediately.
2. SNA urges a delay in the implementation of the School Breakfast Program modifications pending resolution of outstanding issues related to the School Lunch Meal Pattern. Upon implementation of the School Breakfast Program modifications, SNA urges the elimination of the weekly limits on Grains served in the School Breakfast Program and also recommends allowing full substitutability of Meat/Meat Alternates for Grains.
3. Section 205 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act mandates that certain School Food Authorities annually increase their paid meal prices regardless of their financial solvency. SNA asks Congress to amend Section 205 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act by narrowing Section 205 to only those School Food Authorities that have a negative fund balance at the end of the previous school year.
4. Unpaid meal charges owed to the School Food Authority by participants in the program have increased significantly. Congress should require USDA to establish a consistent national policy on how to address the debt incurred by the unpaid meal charges.

## School Nutrition Association



# Talking Points for the 2013 Legislative Issue Paper



**1. SNA supports the elimination of the weekly limits on Grains and Meat/Meat Alternates served in the National School Lunch Program. SNA strongly urges Congress and USDA to make this temporary solution for SY 2012-2013 permanent immediately.**

Weekly limits on the grains and proteins served with school lunch create significant menu planning challenges. In many cases, school nutrition professionals cannot offer healthy options like daily sandwiches (too much grain), a small side of peanut butter with celery sticks or low or non-fat cheese and yogurt on the salad bar (too much protein). By permanently eliminating weekly grain and protein limits, yet maintaining calorie limits, USDA can protect the nutritional integrity of the school lunch standards while giving cafeterias more flexibility to design healthy menus that meet standards and student tastes.

**2. School Breakfast Program Requests:**

- **SNA urges a delay in the implementation of the School Breakfast Program modifications pending resolution of outstanding issues related to the School Lunch Meal Pattern.** Many schools are still struggling to meet complex new requirements for school lunch due to cost constraints, limited product availability and other challenges. Forcing schools to meet new breakfast requirements in fall 2013, before the lunch regulations are fully understood, could result in many schools dropping the School Breakfast Program, which is critical to the academic success of all students and could especially impact children from food-insecure households.
- **Upon implementation of the School Breakfast Program modifications, SNA urges the elimination of the weekly limits on Grains served in the School Breakfast Program.** Weekly grain limits would restrict popular, healthy menu items such as turkey sausage & egg on a whole grain biscuit.
- **SNA recommends allowing full substitutability of Meat/Meat Alternates for Grains.** New nutrition standards for school breakfast require a full serving of grain to be offered every single school day. Cafeterias should have the flexibility to offer

healthy, protein-based meal choices such as a low fat cheese omelet served with a banana and milk, or a yogurt parfait served with an apple and milk.

**3. Section 205 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) mandates that certain School Food Authorities annually increase their paid meal prices regardless of their financial solvency. SNA asks Congress to amend Section 205 of HHFKA by narrowing Section 205 to only those School Food Authorities that have a negative fund balance at the end of the previous school year.**

School meal prices, just like restaurant prices, differ greatly from one community to the next. When setting these prices, school boards must take into account local food and labor costs and what families are able and willing to pay. When school meal prices increase, even gradually, many students start packing lunch or buying off the super value meal at nearby fast food restaurants. School meal programs that are financially solvent should not be forced to raise prices on America's families.

**4. Unpaid meal charges owed to the School Food Authority by participants in the program have increased significantly. Congress should require USDA to establish a consistent, national policy on how to address the debt incurred by unpaid meal charges.**

School nutrition programs have experienced an increase in the number of children who "charge" their school meals when parents fail to pay for school breakfast or lunch. As a result, some schools have accumulated substantial unpaid meal debts that can hamper their ability to meet new nutrition standards for school meals.

Currently, individual school districts must determine if students will receive alternate or unpaid meals, how many meals can be charged and how to handle meal charge debts. Congress should require USDA to establish clear regulations on how all schools must respond to requests for unpaid meals and how to manage the debt incurred by providing them.