

2018

SNA Policy Statements



SCHOOL
NUTRITION
ASSOCIATION



2018 Public Policy Statements

STUDENT ACCESS TO HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS

SNA supports providing all students free school meals.

Research shows school meals contribute to the health, attentiveness, behavior and academic success of students. To maximize student achievement, SNA believes all children require equal access to nutritious school meals as part of the total educational experience through universal meal programs.

Providing school meals at no charge will remove long-standing barriers, including the cumbersome free and reduced price meal application process and the persistent stigma that many students associate with receiving meal assistance. Students from working families, struggling to afford reduced or full price school meals, will receive the nutrition they need to succeed. Allowing all students to receive free meals will level the playing field, making the cafeteria an extension of the classroom. Students will spend less time in line and have more time to eat their meals, so they come to class well-nourished and ready to learn. By eliminating the burdensome application process, the school nutrition department will have more time and resources to invest in nutritious meals.

Until universal school meals are available nationwide, efforts must be made to remove barriers and extend student access to nutrition programs. Congress should preserve the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows schools serving predominately low income communities to offer free meals to all students without an application. Direct certification should be maximized and consideration given to other cross certification or third-party income eligibility certifications.

The efficiency and effectiveness of school nutrition programs must be regularly evaluated with the goal of reducing barriers and supporting best practices for expanding student access. Factors to assess include the meal service environment, including seating capacity and time in line; use of innovative service models such as breakfast in the classroom, second chance breakfast and grab and go carts; school day schedules designed to ensure students have sufficient time to participate in meal programs; as well as efforts to minimize the complexity of the income verification process and overcome language/literacy challenges.





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ACCESS TO ALL CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

To ensure all students have access to the nutrition they need to succeed, SNA supports granting every school nutrition program the ability to participate in all federal child nutrition programs.

Low income families, whose children need access to all federal child nutrition programs, live in every school district across the country, but only those districts that meet specific, complex income eligibility requirements can offer services such as the Summer Food Service Program and Afterschool Meals. As a result, needy students living in higher income communities are unfairly penalized and denied equal access to supplemental meals and snacks that support healthy development and academic achievement.

The need for equal access to these programs has deepened as more parents work multiple jobs to support the family and rely on school-sponsored afterschool programming. Excluding various school districts, or individual schools within a district, from participation does a disservice to these households. Children attending those schools should have the opportunity to receive nutritious meals throughout the school day as part of the educational process.

USDA should encourage school districts to participate in federal child nutrition programs through ongoing outreach efforts. All members of the school community should support and encourage students and their families to utilize school nutrition programs.



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SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM FUNDING

SNA calls for sustainable School Nutrition Program funding and entitlement status to protect student health and educational achievement.

School meal programs are funded through federal and state reimbursements for meals served and through cafeteria sales. These programs must operate as businesses and remain financially self-sufficient without relying on local school district funds. As such, reimbursements must be adequate to cover all of the costs associated with preparing and serving meals that meet regulatory requirements.

The history of the federal school nutrition programs clearly demonstrates that adequacy of funding directly influences: quality of programs, willingness of schools to participate in the programs and levels of student participation. Today, school meal programs are struggling to manage increased food and operating costs associated with regulatory requirements. To preserve the financial sustainability of school meal programs which support student achievement, Congress must bolster these historically under-funded programs.

To ensure America's students have consistent access to the nutrition they need to succeed, Congress must also protect entitlement status for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.



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NATIONAL NUTRITION STANDARDS

SNA supports consistent nutrition standards, based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, for all school meals and snacks.

Children’s basic nutritional needs are the same whether they live in Florida, South Dakota or California. To foster proper development and lifelong healthy eating habits, SNA supports consistent nutrition standards, based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, for all school meals and snacks throughout the country.

Some states have passed additional regulations for school food, resulting in standards that vary from one area to another and may not be science based. These varying standards also increase costs for the program, as the school foodservice industry must prepare multiple versions of the same menu items to meet different specifications.

National nutrition standards, in place through the entire campus during the entire school day, promote the consumption of a variety of foods and beverages from all food groups. Federally reimbursable meals and snacks should be the primary source of foods and beverages offered at schools. Every effort should be made to offer and promote healthy choices, while keeping school menus appealing to children. Since foods must be consumed to provide nutrients, menu changes must be responsibly and practically implemented to ensure student acceptance. Meals should contain age appropriate calories and variety of foods to support growth, development and healthy weight.



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PROGRAM SIMPLIFICATION

SNA supports program accountability and practical regulations that enhance school nutrition programs for students while limiting the administrative burden on the School Food Authority (SFA).

School nutrition professionals are responsible stewards of taxpayer funds. SNA strongly supports program accountability while seeking a realistic balance between regulatory compliance and the primary goal of ensuring students' nutritional needs are met. Regulations should enhance school nutrition programs, focusing on what is best for children and achievable by the SFA, while being timely and responsive to program needs.

School nutrition program regulations should be carefully reviewed with the goal of simplifying and streamlining complex regulatory requirements and easing administrative burdens on SFAs and State Agencies. For example, school nutrition programs must submit multiple applications on behalf of a single child who qualifies for multiple child nutrition programs (e.g. school meals, afterschool snacks and summer feeding). USDA should establish a seamless application and reimbursement process to minimize time-consuming paperwork and ensure eligible children receive all the assistance they need to succeed. Involving school nutrition professionals in the writing, interpretation and periodic review of regulations will strengthen and improve programs in the local school.



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AGRICULTURE PARTNERSHIPS

SNA supports the long-standing link between school meal programs and the American farmers who supply foods and beverages for schools. Congress should strengthen support for domestic agricultural markets by expanding USDA Foods to serve the School Breakfast Program.

SNA supports America's agriculture community in its efforts to provide school nutrition programs with a safe and nutritious food supply through flexible and efficient procurement and delivery systems. The nation's agricultural community has been an integral part of school nutrition programs since their inception in 1946, and SNA strongly supports this link continuing.

Through the USDA Foods program, school nutrition programs have benefited from a steady supply of high-quality 100% American grown foods. As school meals have evolved to meet updated nutrition standards, American growers have supported this transition, supplying USDA with more fruits and vegetables, lean protein foods, low-fat dairy foods and whole grains.

With research affirming the importance of breakfast to academic success, school nutrition programs have worked to increase student access to healthy school breakfasts. Expanding USDA Foods to support the School Breakfast Program would sustain this effort, ease the burden on financially strapped meal programs and advance USDA's mission of supporting America's farmers.





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NUTRITION EDUCATION

SNA advocates for collaborative efforts, including a commitment of federal funds, to design and implement a comprehensive, coordinated nutrition education program and curriculum to support students.

Nutrition education is an important component and essential building block for the development of life-long healthy eating habits and overall health. School nutrition programs invest significant time and resources to ensure school meals meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and contribute to a healthy diet. To encourage consumption of school meals, school nutrition programs should be regularly and consistently supplemented with a coordinated, federally funded nutrition education program. The school cafeteria should be a classroom, and school nutrition professionals are eager to partner in developing effective nutrition education curriculum to help achieve this goal.



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SNA POLICY STATEMENTS

SNA develops policy statements on key topics related to school nutrition programs from funding to program complexity and universal student meals. Proposed policy statements only become official SNA positions after review by SNA's Committees and approval from the SNA Board of Directors.

Our policy statements:

- Communicate SNA's position on key topics related to School Nutrition Programs.
- Help guide SNA's position on legislation and regulations.
- Are used to write testimony and statements on child nutrition programs/issues.
- Highlight the latest news on specific child nutrition issues.
- Are the source of information for reference and resource information for Federal, State and the public, such as infographics, fact sheets and Position Papers.

Learn more about SNA's policy statements and how you can use them (PDF).

SNA's public policies are reviewed annually, and updated as needed. Policy Statements can be found on the SNA website at: <http://schoolnutrition.org/2018policystatements>

2017 POLICY STATEMENTS

20171: Student Access to Healthy School Meals

20172: Access to All Child Nutrition Programs

20173: School Nutrition Program Funding

20174: National Nutrition Standards

20175: Program Simplification

20176: Agriculture Partnerships

20177: Nutrition Education

Questions about statements? Email us.



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ACRONYMS

CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
DOE	U.S. Department of Education
HHFKA	Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act
LEA	Local Education Agency
LWP	Local Wellness Policies
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SFA	School Food Authority
SNA	School Nutrition Association
SFSP	Summer Food Service Program
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture