



# 2022 Position Paper

Throughout the pandemic, nutritious school meals have [contributed to student achievement](#), supported America's families and provided a critical safety net during economic hardships. With the help of [federal child nutrition waivers](#), school nutrition professionals have ensured safe and consistent access to healthy meals for students. School meal programs now endure acute supply chain, labor, financial and regulatory [challenges](#) and require Congress and USDA's continued support. *To promote the health and success of students and ensure the sustainability of school meal programs, the non-profit School Nutrition Association (SNA) urges Congress to:*

## **Extend pandemic-related child nutrition waivers through School Year (SY) 2022/23**

Persistent national supply chain disruptions and labor shortages have severely impacted the financial and operational sustainability of school meal programs. Widespread [issues](#) with discontinued menu items, shortages and higher prices are already wreaking havoc on the SY 2022/23 bid process. To plan for next school year, school nutrition programs and their suppliers urgently need the assurance of waiver extensions through SY 2022/23.

*Make the following **permanent** changes to Child Nutrition Programs:*

- **Increase National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program (NSLP/SBP) reimbursements.**

During the pandemic, free meals have been reimbursed at the higher Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) rate. However, in a November 2021 [SNA survey](#), only about half of school meal program directors indicated that the SFSP reimbursement rates sufficiently covered the costs of producing school breakfast and lunch, including food, labor, supplies and pandemic costs. Returning to NSLP/SBP reimbursement rates would increase meal program losses and cut into education budgets, impeding efforts to meet the needs of students and jeopardizing progress in school nutrition programs.

- **Expand NSLP/SBP to offer healthy school meals for all students at no charge to support academic achievement.**

Students, families and school meal programs alike have reaped the benefits of offering equal access to free school meals during the pandemic and through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). [Research](#) shows students receive their healthiest meals at school, and school meals are [proven](#) to support learning and improve attendance and classroom behavior. No child goes hungry during the school day or accrues [unpaid meal debt](#), a burden on families and school district budgets. School nutrition professionals can focus on nourishing students and spend less time on paperwork and reporting requirements.

- **Ensure future nutrition standards are achievable and keep students eating and enjoying school meals.**

Current school nutrition standards require meals to offer fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein, and limit calories, saturated fat and sodium. These rules have ensured students receive their healthiest meals at school, as [research](#) shows. USDA recently [issued](#) new transitional standards through SY 2023/24 and will propose long-term nutrition rules this fall. Future rules will only succeed if students continue to consume school meals. Congress and USDA must work with school nutrition professionals to guarantee the long-term standards are both achievable and acceptable to students.

- **Reduce regulatory and administrative burdens.**

Overly complex federal regulations divert resources from the mission of serving students and impede efforts to quickly and creatively adapt meal services during emergencies. Congress should direct USDA to implement the recommendations of the congressionally-mandated [Child Nutrition Reporting Burden Analysis Study](#) and the forthcoming Government Accountability Office (GAO) study of [USDA Foods in Schools](#).