

June
2021

Edition No. 70
06.16.2021

POLICY UPDATE



04.26.2021 COVID-19 Nationwide Waivers Extended for 2021-2022 School Year

The Biden Administration [announced the extension](#) of several COVID-19 waivers to ensure students can continue to safely receive free school meals through the 2021-22 School Year. All schools in States that opt in are permitted to serve and claim meals through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) through the 2021-22 School Year. The waivers also allow schools to continue receiving the higher per-meal reimbursement rate offered under the Summer Food Service Program. Further, USDA is issuing a nationwide waiver to allow schools to utilize specific meal pattern flexibilities. Read more in [SNA's press release](#). View the complete list of USDA's [Child Nutrition COVID-19 waivers](#).

04.27.2021 House Appropriations Subcommittee Holds FNS Budget Priorities Hearing

The U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies [held a hearing](#) on USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) priorities for Fiscal Year 2022. During the hearing, Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Service Stacy Dean testified before the Subcommittee concerning FNS's budget and policy priorities. In [her testimony](#), she expressed support for expanding USDA's Farm to School Program. She also stated FNS would be examining current administrative requirements for school districts and nutrition standards during the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR).

04.27.2021 Federal Register: School Meals Operations Study

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published the Federal Register [notice](#), "Agency Information Collection Activities: School Meals Operations Study: Evaluation of the COVID-19 Child Nutrition Waivers and Child Nutrition Programs." This comment collection seeks input from State agencies and school food authorities (SFAs) on disaggregated administrative data and information on the continued use and effectiveness of COVID-19 waivers. All comments are due by June 21, 2021.

04.28.2021 Biden Administration Publishes Proposal to Expand School Meals Access

The White House announced President Biden's proposal to allow more schools to participate in the essential Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) as part of [The American Families Plan](#). CEP allows qualifying schools and districts to serve free school breakfast and lunch to all students, and this proposal would significantly increase the number of students with access to school meals. This proposal would also expand [direct certification](#) with Medicaid for free and reduced-price meals, as well as a proposed demonstration to provide additional funding to schools exceeding school meal standards. Read SNA's [full press release](#).

05.03.2021 SNA Submits Comment on Team Nutrition Database

SNA submitted its comments on the Federal Register [notice](#), "Agency Information Collection Activities: Team Nutrition Database." This comment collection is regarding the Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) Team Nutrition Database, which is used to communicate releases and publish updates for Team Nutrition resources. Read SNA's [full comment letter](#).

Questions or comments?

Send them to SNA's Government Affairs Associate, Hailey Frye, at hfrye@schoolnutrition.org

05.05.2021 FNS Published 2021 Appropriations and Child Nutrition Program Memorandum

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published the [memorandum](#), "Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021-Effect on Child Nutrition Programs." This memorandum serves as a notice to State Agencies and child nutrition program operators regarding specific sections of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. Specifically, it allows for substituting vegetables for fruits under the School Breakfast Program (SBP). In addition, it prohibits districts from using any funds to procure poultry products from the People's Republic of China and allows schools to offer low-fat 1% flavored milk under the NSLP and SBP. State agencies are required to distribute this memorandum to program operators and are encouraged to contact their regional FNS office with any questions.

05.05.2021 USDA Secretary Vilsack Speaks on Child Nutrition at White House Press Briefing

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack spoke during a [White House press briefing](#) concerning food and nutrition security. During this briefing, Secretary Vilsack outlined several critical investments USDA is looking to make for child nutrition and food security under [the American Families Plan, including permanently expanding Pandemic EBT](#). He stated, "we are going to make permanent this incredible and historic effort to feed kids during the summer months... We're also extending, with this effort, the opportunity to impact free school meals in high-poverty school areas by focusing on the Community Eligibility Program...And finally, we're going to invest a billion dollars, with Congress's help and assistance, in trying to figure out strategies that will improve, even more than we already have, the nutritional value and quality of the meals that youngsters receive in schools." Read the White House's [full press release](#).

05.10.2021 SNA Joins Allied Groups on Letter to USDA on Expanding Direct Certification

SNA, along with 10 other organizations, including the School Superintendents Association and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, signed on to an allied letter by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack. This letter encourages USDA to extend and expand the Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid, as proposed in the American Families Plan. Evaluating Direct Certification using Medicaid helps to enroll children for free or reduced-price school meals automatically. [Read the full letter](#).

05.10.2021 Federal Register: Data Collection on FNS User Access Request Form

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published the [Federal Register notice](#), "*Submission for OMB Review; Comment Request*." This comment collection seeks input from Food and Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNCS) employees, contractors, State Agencies and Food Banks who seek access to FNCS systems through the FNS User Access Request form. All comments regarding this notice are due June 9, 2021.

05.11.2021 Federal Register: P-EBT Proposed Information Collection

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published the [Federal Register notice](#), "*Agency Information Collection Activities: Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer*." This proposed collection invites State Agencies and administrators to submit comments relating to the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) and the reporting burden associated with administering the program. All comments regarding this notice are due July 12, 2021.

05.12.2021 House Education and Labor Subcommittee Holds Hearing on FNS Priorities

The U.S. House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services held the hearing, "*Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service*." During the [hearing](#), Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Service Stacy Dean testified before the Subcommittee concerning the policies and priorities for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). In her [testimony](#), she described a few of FNS's new priorities, including expanding the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to more high-poverty schools, focusing on elementary students. In addition, FNS is also looking to make permanent the nationwide Summer Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)

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program and expand direct certification for school meal programs to children that already participate in Medicaid. [Watch the full Subcommittee hearing.](#)

05.19.2021 Senator Ernst Sends Letter to USDA Regarding Meat Alternatives in Schools

Senator Joni Ernst (IA-R) sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack concerning the service of meat alternatives as part of school nutrition programs. In this letter, Senator Ernst outlined the recent expansion of meat alternatives, specifically the recent certification of Impossible Foods' meat alternative products as part of the Child Nutrition Labeling Program. In addition, she listed the health benefits of natural meats and proteins and how these recent actions are "disincentivizing the consumption of meat, at the expense of our nation's animal agriculture workers, rural communities, and livestock producers." Read Senator Ernst's [full press release](#).

05.21.2021 Federal Register: Non-Competitive Technology Innovation Grants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published the Federal Register [notice](#), "Child Nutrition Programs: Non-Competitive Technology Innovation Grant Funding." This notice [announced](#) the availability of non-competitive technology innovation grants, which may be distributed to any eligible State Agencies that administer Child Nutrition Programs, and requests comment on this non-competitive approach. All comments regarding this notice are due June 21, 2021.

05.27.2021 Senate Agriculture Committee Holds Hearing on USDA General Counsel Nominee

The U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry held a hearing to consider the nomination of Janie Simms Hipp to be General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In her [written opening statement](#), U.S. Senator and Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (MI-D) states that Hipp would "have a hand in the implementation of programs that make sure families have enough to eat, kids get healthy meals in school, farmers have the tools they need to address the climate crisis." Watch the full Senate hearing [here](#).

05.28.2021 President Biden Releases 2022 Fiscal Year Budget Request

President Biden released his Fiscal Year 2022 [budget request](#). The budget includes \$27.9 billion for USDA, a nearly 17% increase from FY2021. The [fact sheet](#) states the budget will "provide critical nutrition assistance to families who need it most and expand access to healthy meals to the Nation's students."

06.01.2021 SNA CNR Task Force Issues Recommendations

SNA's Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) Task Force has finalized [recommendations](#) for the Association to share with Congress as they work to reauthorize the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA). In March, SNA convened a diverse group of school nutrition operators, State agency and industry members to examine every aspect of HHFKA, gather input, discuss concerns and identify potential solutions to ensure the continued success of school meal programs. The final Board-approved [recommendations](#) cover a broad range of topics, ranging from expanding access to school meals through universal meals and increasing reimbursement rates, to addressing meal pattern challenges and reducing the complexity of reporting requirements.

06.09.2021 SNA Comments on COVID-19 School Meal Operations Study

SNA submitted comments in response to the USDA FNS Federal Register [Comment Request](#), "*School Meal Operations Study: Evaluation of the COVID-19 Child Nutrition Waivers and Child Nutrition Programs.*" In the comment letter, SNA encouraged USDA to recognize and adjust for abrupt changes in traditional school meal operations due to the pandemic crisis. Without national coordination, each local educational agency has implemented best practices and actions to address their needs and address safety and social distancing protocols. SNA recommends that FNS convene a commission to evaluate the processes and methods used during this emergency health crisis and develop a national playbook on operating school meal service programs in various emergencies. Read the [full comment letter](#).

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06.09.2021 USDA Withdraws Proposed Rule on Categorical Eligibility in SNAP

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) [withdrew a Proposed Rule](#) on Categorical Eligibility in SNAP. This [Proposed Rule](#), originally published on July 24, 2019, limited states' ability to participate in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to determine eligibility for SNAP. SNA previously submitted [comments](#) regarding this Proposed Rule, specifically outlining concerns that it would result in many children losing access to free school meals and some schools losing access to recently implemented programs under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). SNA was also concerned that school nutrition professionals would be burdened with substantially increased workloads and costs from outreach, paperwork and processing of applications for impacted families.

06.10.2021 House Education and Labor Subcommittee Holds Hearing on CNR Priorities

The U.S. House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services held the [hearing](#), "*Ending Child Hunger: Priorities for Child Nutrition Reauthorization.*" During this hearing, Committee Chair Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) stated, "we have the opportunity to rethink our child nutrition programs to provide every child with the healthy food they need to succeed in school and throughout life" and "to make these flexibilities permanent to ensure kids have access to healthy and nutritious meals year-round." Watch the [full Subcommittee hearing](#).

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