



Feeding Bodies. Fueling Minds.™

2017 Position Paper

Every school day, school nutrition programs contribute to the health, well-being and achievement of more than 30 million students across America. To sustain this success, school meal programs require greater support.

The School Nutrition Association (SNA) represents 57,000 professionals who serve students nutritious meals while being responsible stewards of federal funds. SNA urges Congress and the Administration to bolster historically under-funded school meal programs that are struggling to manage increased food and operating costs. While school meals should continue to meet robust federal nutrition standards, requirements must be streamlined to ease regulatory burdens and preserve the financial sustainability of school meal programs. Given the reality of the federal deficit and the absence of a Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill, SNA requests that Congress:

- **Oppose any effort to block grant school meal programs.** Block grants will cut funds and eliminate federal nutrition standards for school meals. Block grant funding caps will prevent schools from serving additional at-risk students when local economic downturns or rising enrollments increase the number of children eligible for free or reduced price meals. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) warned that block grants could “eliminate access to nutrition programs for some children and reduce it for others.”
- **Support schools, US farmers and students in the next Farm Bill by providing 6 cents in USDA Foods for every school breakfast served.** Currently, commodity support is only provided for school lunch. Expanding USDA Foods to support the School Breakfast Program will allow more students to benefit from a nutritious school breakfast, help schools cover rising costs and advance USDA’s mission of supporting America’s farmers.
- **Provide schools practical flexibility under federal nutrition standards to prepare healthy, appealing meals.** Overly prescriptive regulations have resulted in unintended consequences, including reduced student lunch participation, higher costs and food waste. Federal nutrition standards should be modified to help school menu planners manage these challenges and prepare nutritious meals that appeal to diverse student tastes. In particular, USDA should:
 - **Maintain the Target 1 sodium levels and eliminate future targets.** The Institute of Medicine warned that “reducing the sodium content of school meals as specified and in a way that is well accepted by students will present major challenges and may not be possible.” (*School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children, 2010*)
 - **Restore the initial requirement that at least half of grains offered through school lunch and breakfast programs be whole grain rich.** The current mandate that *all* grains offered be whole grain rich has increased waste and costs, while contributing to the decline in student lunch participation. Students are eating more whole grain breads and rolls, but schools are struggling with limited availability of specialty whole grain items and meeting students’ regional and cultural preferences for certain refined grains, such as white rice, pasta, grits, bagels or tortillas.
- **Simplify regulations to improve efficiencies and provide \$1 million to conduct an independent study of the federal Child Nutrition Programs.** Program complexities add to school nutrition costs. Duplicative and overly burdensome administrative mandates divert school nutrition professionals’ attention from their mission of nourishing students.