

October 20, 2022

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member John Boozman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

We, the 32 undersigned national organizations, write today urging you to expand community eligibility in the upcoming Senate version of Child Nutrition Reauthorization by including the provisions that were in the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act (H.R. 8450).

The provisions include:

- Lowering the eligibility threshold from 40% identified students to 25% identified students, so that more high-need schools can implement community eligibility;
- Raising the multiplier for federal reimbursement from 1.6 to 2.5, so that it is more financially viable for eligible schools to participate; and
- Creating a statewide community eligibility option.

Since its nationwide implementation in the 2014-2015 school year, community eligibility has been a game changer for thousands of schools across the country. It reduces administrative work for school districts; allows them to focus on providing healthy and appealing meals to students; supports working families who don't qualify for free school meals; ensures that all students have the nutrition they need to learn and thrive at school; and eliminates unpaid school meals fees.

These needed improvements are more important than ever with many school nutrition operations across the country returning to pre-pandemic procedures this school year. In addition, household budgets are still being squeezed, and families need to be able to count on school breakfast and lunch to provide nutritious meals for their children. Yet too many children are still missing out because they aren't eligible for free or reduced-price meals, even though their families continue to struggle. Some children are eligible, but stigma keeps them from participating.

Community eligibility allows more children to eat school meals and experience the education and health benefits that are linked to participating. School meals are proven to help reduce child hunger and improve students' health, academic achievement, attendance, and behavior. Studies also show children receive their healthiest meals at school, proving that school meals are one of the federal government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children.

While many of the organizations signing onto this letter have additional priorities for Child Nutrition Reauthorization and are calling on Congress to pass a reauthorization quickly to ensure that the child nutrition programs are better able to meet the needs of our nation's children, we are in strong agreement on the importance of including the expansion of community eligibility in the upcoming reauthorization.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Commodity Distribution Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Heart Association
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Bread for the World
Center for Science in the Public Interest
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Research & Action Center
FoodCorps
International Fresh Produce Association
MomsRising
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
National Association of School Nurses
National Education Association
National Farm to School Network
National PTA
National Women's Law Center
ParentsTogether Action
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
RESULTS
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)
School Nutrition Association
Share Our Strength
Solving Hunger, Tusk Philanthropies
The Education Trust
The Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
UnidosUS
Urban School Food Alliance