



2023 Position Paper

Talking Points

Research shows students eat their healthiest meals at school; these meals support learning and combat child hunger. We're asking Congress to address economic and regulatory challenges that threaten the sustainability of school meal programs in our community and nationwide.

Make permanent the reimbursement rate increases provided in the bipartisan Keep Kids Fed Act:

- Inflation, supply chain disruptions and labor shortages have squeezed school meal program budgets. Increasing costs are a challenge for our programs.
 - *Share specific examples of cost increases for your program (e.g. \$ increase in key items, labor costs, etc.)*
- These financial pressures show no signs of easing.
- Meal programs are expected to be self-sustaining, covering costs with federal reimbursements and cafeteria sales.
- We can't afford to lose the additional reimbursements Congress provided this school year. The extra 40 cents per lunch & 15 cents per breakfast expire June 30.
- School meal program losses will cut into education budgets, limiting funds for learning, and jeopardize our ongoing efforts to improve meal service for students.
- **Refer to [Reimbursement Rate Fact Sheet](#) for more information.**

Offer healthy school meals for all students at no charge:

- Giving students equal access to free school meals ensured every student was nourished and ready to learn.
- School districts that must now charge for meals have seen increases in unpaid meal debt – a burden on families and school district budgets.
 - Many families that don't qualify for free school meals are still struggling to make ends meet.
 - Application forms only collect income data and don't account for expenses like medical bills or rent increases.
- Permanently providing equal access to nutritious school meals at no charge will support academic achievement and foster healthy eating habits for all students.

- Many students are now going without healthy school meals. Schools that charge for meals have seen a drop in meal participation and an increase in stigma for low-income students who depend on these meals.
 - *Share stories about struggling families/food insecurity in your district and/or challenges with unpaid meal charges, FRP app collection, participation drop.*
- No child should go hungry during the school day.
- We support any effort to expand access to free school meals.
- *If asked about the cost of universal:*
 - The Congressional Budget Office has not provided a cost estimate, but ensuring America's children are nourished and ready to learn is invaluable.
- **Refer to [Meals for All Fact Sheet](#) for more information.**

Ensure USDA maintains current nutrition standards, rather than implement additional, unachievable rules:

- Research shows children eat their healthiest meals at school, since school meals offer fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat milk.
- We significantly cut sodium, calories and fat in meals to meet *current* standards.
- Persistent labor shortages and supply chain issues have limited the availability of highly specialized K-12 menu options and our capacity to meet any additional nutrition rules.
 - *Share examples of product & labor shortages for your program.*
- We also know that some food-insecure children will choose not to eat at all if the meal is not familiar or appetizing to them.
- To keep students eating healthy school meals, USDA should maintain current standards.
- **Refer to [Nutrition Standards Fact Sheet](#) for more information.**

Regulatory burdens:

- Unnecessary administrative burdens divert resources from our mission of serving students.
- Overly complex federal regulations hamper efforts to quickly respond to student needs, particularly in times of emergency.
 - *Provide examples of time lost to paperwork.*
- USDA should streamline regulatory burdens on child nutrition programs by implementing recommendations from the congressionally-mandated [Child Nutrition Reporting Burden Analysis Study](#) and the forthcoming [USDA Foods study](#).
- **Refer to [Regulatory Burden Fact Sheet](#) for more information.**