

# HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL COALITION

The time for nationwide **Healthy School Meals for All** is now.



## PURPOSE

The coalition will advocate and build support for nationwide **Healthy School Meals for All** so that all schools can offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all of their students.

## STATEMENT OF SUPPORT

We know that school meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are well nourished and ready to get the most out of their school day.

Research links participation in school meals to positive educational and health outcomes for our nation's children. School meals are just as important to academic success as textbooks, computers, and transportation, and all children should have access to them every school day.

As vital as the school nutrition programs are to ensuring children's access to healthy, nutritious meals, too many children in need miss out on school meals because of the programs' current structure. Many struggling families do not meet the eligibility threshold for free meals, which requires a family of four to earn less than \$37,000 annually. The current structure with some children being offered free meals or meals at a reduced price, and others paying for their meals, also leads many children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, particularly those in middle and high school, to choose not to participate because of stigma.

Providing free meals to all students, regardless of household income, would reduce stigma and ensure that all students have the nutrition they need during the school day. It would ease the pressure on families' household food budgets, allowing them to count on a nutritious school breakfast and lunch each school day to help make ends meet. It would reduce administrative work for school staff, allowing them to focus on preparing nutritious and appealing meals instead of processing paperwork. And it would eliminate unpaid school meal fees, helping to ensure that the cafeteria is a positive place for all students and ending the financial burden that school meal debt creates for school districts.

Providing school meals to all students is also critical for advancing racial equity and justice, helping to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students can access the key nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

Schools were able to offer free school meals to all their students beginning in the spring of 2020 when the pandemic began to sweep the country. Free school meals were offered to all students no matter their learning mode — remote, in-person, or hybrid — through the 2021–2022 school year, and were ended despite the ongoing need. This trial run showed how beneficial offering free meals to all students is for children, families, and schools.



# Healthy School Meals for All Coalition



## **AASA, The School Superintendents Association**

*“In order to truly teach the student, we must first meet their most basic needs. Free meals for all is the only way to ensure all students get the meals they need without stigma, administrative burden or unpaid meal debt. AASA strongly supports free school meals for all to guarantee that every student can come to class ready to learn and reach their full potential.”*

— David Schuler, Executive Director



## **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**

*“The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics strongly supports and advocates for healthful school meals. School meals are crucial in alleviating childhood food insecurity, and studies continue to show schools are the healthiest place in the U.S. for children to eat. School meals can have a positive impact by helping to reduce racial disparities in health and education, while also supporting learning, attendance, and behavior.”*

— Ellen R. Shanley, registered dietitian nutritionist and the Academy’s 2022–2023 President



## **American Academy of Pediatrics**

*“Pediatricians understand the important role that strong nutrition plays in ensuring a child can grow up healthy and thrive. It is critical that all children have access to healthy and nutritious school meals. By offering free school meals to every student, it would eliminate the stigma of being singled out for receiving assistance, help reach all families who are struggling and ensure all students can benefit from healthy and nutritious meals.”*

— Mark Del Monte, JD, CEO/Executive Vice President



A Union of Professionals

## **American Federation of Teachers**

*“In America in 2023, we should be able to ensure that no child goes hungry. Yet today, that is not the case. Kids in our public schools go hungry. It is unacceptable. We have an obligation to our children to create welcoming, safe schools where they can thrive, and that includes making sure they have everything they need to learn, be it a new book, or breakfast. We strongly support Healthy School Meals for All. It would allow tens of millions of children to get the meals they desperately need, and it makes real our commitment to our children. If we care about kids, as I have heard representatives say repeatedly these last few weeks, then Healthy School Meals for All would be passed in an overwhelmingly bipartisan manner.”*

— Randi Weingarten, President



American Heart Association

## **American Heart Association**

*“Providing healthy school meals for all students is a recipe for success that reduces food insecurity, improves children’s diets and academic performance, generates critical revenue for schools and decreases stigma. We must urgently continue our work toward ensuring every child across the country has access to the healthy meals at school that will help them thrive and put them on a path to a lifetime of healthy eating.”*

— Mark Schoeberl, Executive Vice President, Advocacy



## **Association of School Business Officials International**

*“No child should ever have to worry about going hungry, nor should any family worry about how to afford their child’s next meal, especially at school. We support a universal healthy school meals program to ensure students have access to delicious and nutritious meals so that they can grow up happy and healthy and be ready to learn.”*

— Siobhán McMahon, CAE, Chief Operations Officer



# Healthy School Meals for All Coalition



## Center for Biological Diversity

*“All children deserve healthy, culturally-appropriate and free school meals. Every Congressperson should be pounding down the doors to ensure students have the fuel they need to learn and grow.”*

— Jennifer Molidor, Senior Food Campaigner



## Center for Science in the Public Interest

*“Nationwide healthy school meals for all would eliminate stigma and guarantee that every student has access to healthy meals as part of their school day. CSPI urges Congress to ensure every child has access to free meals at school regardless of their family’s income, just as they do books and transportation.”*

— Dr. Peter Lurie, Executive Director



## Chef Ann Foundation

*“The pandemic showed us that families rely on healthy meals at school for their children, and that the income requirements for the free and reduced lunch program often miss many families in need. Healthy School Meals For All ensures all our children have access to the food and nutrition they need to thrive and meet their true potential.”*

— Mara Fleishman, CEO



## Children's Defense Fund

*“It makes no sense that everything in public school is free except the food! School meals play an important role in reducing childhood hunger, supporting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are ready to learn. Every child should have access to them every day. Providing free meals to all students, regardless of household income, would reduce stigma, ease the pressure on family budgets, and let school leaders focus on nurturing youth instead of processing paperwork. Let’s end the debate and feed the children, so young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy.”*

— Dr. Starsky Wilson, President & CEO



## First Focus on Children

*“First Focus on Children is dedicated to ensuring that all children receive free, nutritious meals at school to give every child a fair shot at a healthy life. We’re delighted to join the National Healthy School Meals for All Coalition to advocate for universal school meals that help kids stay full and focused throughout the school day. Food insecurity is specifically associated with poorer physical and mental health, lower school performance, and diminished psychosocial functioning. It’s our duty to give children the nutrition they need to succeed.”*

— Bruce Lesley, President



## FoodCorps

*“Our 2030 goal includes making sure all kids have access to nutritious school meals, free of charge. We cannot overstate the importance of allying with groups who share our vision for a more just world — one where all students know the joy and power of food.”*

— Dr. Robert S. Harvey, President of FoodCorps



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## Food Research & Action Center

*“Healthy School Meals for All would be a game changer for students, families, and schools. School meals combat childhood hunger, improve children’s health, and support academic achievement. By offering school meals at no charge, we can ensure that all children have access to the nutrition they need to learn and thrive. We are proud to be a member of this coalition. The time for nationwide Healthy School Meals for All is now.”*

— Luis Guardia, President



## MomsRising

*“School meals are essential for children’s health, well-being, and ability to learn, and they relieve stress and hardship for moms and all caregivers. We need to end the stigma, cumbersome paperwork, and school meal debt too many families are experiencing and commit to ending child hunger in America. Making healthy, nutritious school meals available to all students at no charge is one of the best ways to do that.”*

— Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, CEO and Executive Director



## National Education Association

*“No child should have to learn on an empty belly. Food insecurity can be found in every community — urban, suburban, and rural — and this crisis is particularly exacerbated in our Black, brown, and Indigenous communities. Since the USDA universal school meals waivers ended, educators across the country have witnessed an alarming rise in students going hungry. Congress can take a big step towards fixing this crisis by passing free healthy school meals for all children so they have the resources they need to grow and thrive.”*

— Becky Pringle, President



## National Farm to School Network

*“National Farm to School Network represents organizations, professionals, and community members committed to a future where all communities hold power in a racially just food system. We support Healthy School Meals for All to ensure that no child misses the nutrition they need to learn and thrive, or experiences stigma. Our partners in the cafeterias, classrooms, gardens, and farms know that how children eat, grow, and learn about food sets them up for future health and success.”*

— Miguel Villarreal, Interim Co-Executive Director



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*“Access to healthy food options is critical to a child’s well-being and academic success. And for far too many children, school meals are a necessity not a luxury and are often the most nutritious meals they receive. Students cannot learn without adequate nutrition, and no child in our nation should have to go hungry. It is urgent that Congress take action to ensure all students have access to healthy school meal programs. It is critical to their success — both in and out of the classroom.”*

— Anna King, President



## School Nutrition Association

*“With research demonstrating that school meals support children’s academic achievement, health, and wellness, it’s no surprise that such a broad range of organizations are speaking out in support of healthy school meals for all students. School nutrition professionals witnessed first-hand how free meal service combats stigma for students who rely on free meals, supports working-class families, reduces paperwork for staff, and fosters a sense of community in the cafeteria. SNA strongly supports offering free school meals to ensure all students are fueled for learning.”*

— Lori Adkins, MS, SNS, CHE, President

