

2024

# SNA Public Policy Statements



**SCHOOL  
NUTRITION  
ASSOCIATION**

**Feeding Bodies. Fueling Minds.™**

## STUDENT ACCESS TO HEALTHY MEALS

### **SNA supports offering healthy school meals to all students at no charge.**

Research shows children eat their healthiest meals at school, and these meals are proven to support learning, boost test scores, improve attendance and classroom behavior, and contribute to students' overall health and wellness. SNA believes, in order to maximize student achievement, all children require equal access to nutritious school meals as part of their educational experience.

Offering school meals at no charge will remove long-standing barriers, including the cumbersome free and reduced price meal application process and the persistent stigma many students associate with receiving meal assistance. Students from working families, struggling to afford school meals or too ashamed to complete the application, will receive the nutrition they need to succeed. Unpaid meal debt will no longer burden families or school district budgets.

By eliminating the burdensome application process, the school nutrition department will have more time and resources to invest in preparing nutritious meals and serving students. Allowing all children to receive healthy free meals will level the playing field, making the cafeteria an extension of the classroom. Students will spend less time in line and have more time to eat their meals, so they come to class well-nourished and ready to learn.

***Until school meals are available at no charge nationwide, Congress must work to remove barriers and expand student access to nutrition programs.*** Congress should:

- Expand the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows schools serving predominately low income communities to offer free meals to all students without an application.
- Eliminate the reduced price category, allowing reduced price eligible children to receive free meals.
- Increase the income eligibility threshold for free school meals.
- Make permanent the Direct Certification with Medicaid pilot program.

Additionally, school nutrition program efforts to expand access and improve the meal service environment should be supported, including implementation of breakfast in the classroom, second chance breakfast and grab-and-go service, as well as school day schedules designed to minimize time in line and ensure students have sufficient time to participate in meal programs and eat their meals.



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## ACCESS TO ALL CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

**To ensure all students have access to the nutrition they need to succeed, SNA supports granting every school nutrition program the ability to participate in all federal child nutrition programs.**

Low income families, whose children need access to all federal child nutrition programs, live in every school district across the country, but only those districts that meet specific, complex income eligibility requirements can offer services such as the Summer Food Service Program and Afterschool Meals. As a result, needy students living in higher income communities are unfairly penalized and denied equal access to supplemental meals and snacks that support healthy development and academic achievement.

The need for equal access to these programs has deepened as more parents work multiple jobs to support the family and rely on school-sponsored afterschool programming. Excluding participation for various school districts, or individual schools within a district, does a disservice to these households. Children attending those schools should have the opportunity to receive nutritious meals to support their education.

Congress should grant all schools access to these critical programs and allow for non-congregate meal service nationwide to expand access to healthy meals for families in need. All members of the school community should support and encourage students and their families to utilize school nutrition programs.



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## SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM FUNDING

**SNA calls for sustainable School Nutrition Program funding and entitlement status to protect student health and educational achievement.**

School meal programs are funded through federal and state reimbursements for meals served and through cafeteria sales. These programs must operate as businesses and remain financially self-sufficient without relying on local school district funds. As such, reimbursements must be adequate to cover all the costs associated with preparing and serving meals that meet regulatory requirements.

The history of the federal school nutrition programs clearly demonstrates that adequacy of funding directly influences quality of programs, willingness of schools to participate in the programs and levels of student participation. Today, school nutrition programs are struggling to manage increased food and operating costs. To preserve the financial sustainability of school nutrition programs which support student achievement, Congress must bolster these historically under-funded programs.

To ensure America's students have consistent access to the nutrition they need to succeed, Congress must also protect entitlement status for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.



## SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS

**SNA supports school nutrition standards that are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, promote continued consumption of healthy school meals and are consistently achievable for schools nationwide.**

Since passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, school nutrition professionals have worked tirelessly, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), to improve the nutrition and quality of school meals. They reduced sodium, calories and fat, and introduced students to whole grain foods, larger servings and a wider variety of fruits and vegetables, and low-fat and fat-free milk. Research shows students eat their healthiest meals at school thanks to these efforts. SNA calls on Congress and USDA to help schools maintain that success and continue to promote school meal consumption.

Long-term school nutrition standards must not contribute to a decrease in the number of students choosing to eat school meals. USDA data show that between 2012 and 2019, during implementation of updated nutrition standards, average daily lunch participation dropped by more than two million students daily, despite an increase in student enrollment during the same time period. Students' tastes will not adjust to meals meeting even stricter school nutrition standards when there are no mandatory nutrition standards in place for the commercial market or other federal nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Frontline school nutrition staff often witness food-insecure children choosing not to eat at all if the meal is not familiar or appetizing to them. Since schools are the healthiest place Americans eat, a further drop in student meal participation would be contrary to goals of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Furthermore, as many school nutrition programs confront regional supply chain, staffing and cost challenges, USDA must ensure long-term standards are consistently achievable in schools nationwide.



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## PROGRAM SIMPLIFICATION

**SNA supports program accountability and practical regulations that enhance school nutrition programs for students while limiting the administrative burden on the School Food Authority (SFA).**

School nutrition professionals are responsible stewards of taxpayer funds. SNA strongly supports program accountability while seeking a realistic balance between regulatory compliance and the primary goal of ensuring students' nutritional needs are met. Regulations should enhance school nutrition programs, focusing on what is best for children and achievable by the SFA.

School nutrition program regulations should be carefully reviewed with the goal of simplifying and streamlining complex regulatory requirements to support efficient, cost-effective operations and ease administrative burdens on SFAs and State agencies. USDA should establish a seamless program application and reimbursement process to minimize time-consuming paperwork and ensure eligible children receive all the assistance they need to succeed. Involving school nutrition professionals in the writing, interpretation and periodic review of regulations will help ensure their success.



## AGRICULTURE PARTNERSHIPS

**SNA supports the long-standing link between school meal programs and the American farmers who supply foods and beverages for schools. Congress should strengthen support for domestic agricultural markets by expanding USDA Foods to serve the School Breakfast Program.**

SNA supports America's agriculture community in its efforts to provide school nutrition programs with a safe and nutritious food supply through flexible and efficient procurement and delivery systems. The nation's agricultural community has been an integral part of school nutrition programs since their inception in 1946, and SNA strongly supports this link continuing.

Through the USDA Foods program, school nutrition programs have benefited from a steady supply of high-quality, American grown foods. As school meals have evolved to meet updated nutrition standards, American growers have supported this transition, supplying USDA with more fruits and vegetables, lean protein foods, low-fat dairy foods and whole grains.

With research affirming the importance of breakfast to academic success, school nutrition programs have worked to increase student access to healthy school breakfasts. Expanding USDA Foods to support the School Breakfast Program would sustain this effort, ease the burden on financially strapped meal programs and advance USDA's mission of supporting America's farmers.



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## NUTRITION EDUCATION

**SNA advocates for collaborative efforts, including a commitment of federal funds, to design and implement a comprehensive, coordinated national nutrition education program and curriculum to support students.**

Nutrition education is an important component and essential building block for the development of life-long healthy eating habits and overall health. School nutrition programs invest significant time and resources to ensure school meals are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and contribute to a healthy diet. To encourage consumption of school meals, school nutrition programs should be regularly and consistently supplemented with a coordinated, federally-funded nutrition education program. The school cafeteria should be a classroom, and school nutrition professionals are eager to partner in developing effective nutrition education curriculum to help achieve this goal.





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## SNA POLICY STATEMENTS

SNA develops policy statements on key topics related to school nutrition programs, from funding to program complexity and universal student meals. Proposed policy statements only become official SNA positions after review by SNA's Committees and approval from the SNA Board of Directors.

Our policy statements:

- Communicate SNA's position on key topics related to School Nutrition Programs.
- Help guide SNA's position on legislation and regulations.
- Are used to write testimony and statements on child nutrition programs/issues.
- Highlight the latest news on specific child nutrition issues.
- Serve as the source of information for federal and state legislation.

Questions about statements? Email us at [advocacy@schoolnutrition.org](mailto:advocacy@schoolnutrition.org).

