



2026 Position Paper Talking Points

Introduction

- The School Nutrition Association represents 50,000 professionals nationwide who fuel student success by serving healthy school meals.
- Our programs support America's working families and provide a crucial market for US grown foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, milk and protein.

Priority Points

We're asking Congress to:

- **Increase investments in school meal programs to cover rising costs, expand scratch cooking, and provide students more fresh, local produce**
 - High costs and insufficient funds are increasingly a barrier to our efforts to further improve school meals for students.
- **Protect and expand access to healthy school meals for all students**
 - Offering free meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision cuts through red tape, eliminates unpaid meal debt and ensures all children are nourished for success.
- **Ensure updates to federal school nutrition standards are feasible for schools**
 - School meals are the healthiest meals Americans eat thanks to current federal standards. A patchwork of varying state rules will increase costs and procurement challenges.
 - USDA and Congress must ensure new federal rules are scientifically sound and operationally feasible for under resourced schools.
- ***To achieve these goals, please cosponsor the bills in SNA's Position Paper.***

Share your stories & examples related to priority issues:

Increase investments in school meal programs

Share your most compelling examples to demonstrate challenges, e.g.

- *Specific cost increases for your program (e.g. \$ or % increase for fresh produce, hourly wage changes, equipment repair/replacement cost, etc.)*
- *Disparity between reimbursement rates and your average per-meal costs*

- *Specific funding needs to expand scratch/increase local (e.g. cost estimate for required equipment/labor, price difference for local produce or fresh vs. canned)*

Supporting points/specific requests for Members of Congress

- High costs and insufficient funds are increasingly a barrier to our efforts to further improve school meals for students.
- Healthy meals cost more to prepare, but school meal reimbursement rates don't cover costs to meet nutrition standards and staff and equip our kitchens.
- Congress must increase reimbursements to ensure the financial sustainability of these critical programs.
- As we work to meet the Dietary Guidelines' recommendation to limit highly-processed foods, schools need funds to invest in equipment and infrastructure upgrades and workforce development.
- **Please support:**
 - [HR 5753](#) to increase federal reimbursement rates for school meals
 - [HR 5731](#) to fund equipment and infrastructure upgrades
 - Bills to boost local food purchases and to support workforce development

Protect and expand access to healthy school meals for all students

If your program/state offers free meals to all students, share specific examples/stories of the benefits you've witnessed, e.g.

- *Anecdotes on reduced stigma for low-income students, data on more students eating healthy meals, impacts of reduced meal debt/improved finances, examples of alleviated administrative burden enabling more staff focus on serving students, etc.*

If your program/state must charge for school meals, share stories about the challenges you've witnessed, e.g.

- *Anecdotes on struggling families who don't qualify for help, experiences of students going without, impact of unpaid meal debt on families and program/district finances, examples of stigma for low-income students.*

Supporting points/specific requests for Members of Congress

- School meals support academic achievement, student health and obesity prevention.
- Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools in high-poverty areas to offer free school meals to all students without cumbersome applications.
- CEP cuts through red tape, eliminates unpaid meal debt and ensures all children are nourished for success.
- Upcoming changes to SNAP and Medicaid will cut the number of students automatically certified for free and reduced-price school meals, forcing schools off CEP.

- **Please support:**
 - [S 3281](#) to repeal these changes
 - Bills to protect CEP and expand access to school meals for all

Ensure updates to federal school nutrition standards are feasible for schools

Highlight healthy options/positive efforts with stories to share unique complexities of school meal planning, e.g.

- *Examples of nutritious pre-prepared menu items and how they differ from commercial/retail options (WG, low-sodium/sugar, clean label, etc.)*
- *Your program's work to expand scratch and/or offer more fresh, whole local foods and challenges of those efforts (funding, staffing, equipment examples, etc.)*

Supporting points/specific requests for Members of Congress

- School meals are the healthiest meals Americans eat thanks to current standards and efforts by the K-12 food industry to remove ingredients of concern.
- We are working to expand scratch preparation but are hampered by funding, equipment and infrastructure limitations and increased needs for culinary training and staff development.
- Any new rules must ensure meal programs are permitted to serve nutrient-dense, pre-prepared foods.
- **Please support:**
 - Federal school nutrition standards that are scientifically sound and operationally feasible for our under-resourced schools
 - A patchwork of varying state rules will increase costs and procurement challenges as fewer manufacturers opt to serve the specialized K-12 market.

Additional Resources

[Increase investments fact sheet](#)

[School meal access fact sheet](#)

[Feasible standards fact sheet](#)

[Impact of H.R. 1](#)