



Feeding Bodies. Fueling Minds.™

2018 Position Paper

Every school day, federal child nutrition programs provide nutritious meals that are critical to the health and academic success of more than 30 million students nationwide. The federal government plays a vital role in the success of these programs: providing reimbursements for each meal served, ensuring equal access to free and reduced price meals for students in need and administering national nutrition standards.

The School Nutrition Association (SNA), representing 57,000 professionals who work on the frontlines in school nutrition programs, urges Congress and the Administration to protect students by strengthening the federal government's commitment to these programs. Congress should bolster historically under-funded school meal programs, which contribute to economic growth and national security, and USDA should continue to minimize unnecessary regulatory burdens. **SNA specifically requests that Congress:**

- 1. Oppose any effort to block grant school meal programs.** Block grants will dismantle an effective and crucial federal program, putting students at risk by cutting funds and abolishing federal standards for school meals. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) warned that block grants could “eliminate access to nutrition programs for some children and reduce it for others.” Fixed-sum block grants would leave states without adequate funds to respond to unforeseen circumstances, including natural disasters or economic recessions. Students in need would go without.
- 2. Support H.R. 3738, the Healthy Breakfasts Help Kids Learn Act, to provide 6 cents in USDA Foods (commodities) for every school breakfast served.** Currently, commodity support is only provided for school lunch. Expanding USDA Foods to support the School Breakfast Program will allow more students to benefit from a nutritious school breakfast, help schools cover rising costs and advance USDA's mission of supporting America's farmers.
- 3. Continue to monitor and support USDA's work to simplify overly burdensome child nutrition mandates to improve efficiencies and reduce costs.** Duplicative administrative requirements divert school nutrition professionals' attention from their mission of nourishing students.

USDA is modifying federal nutrition regulations to help school menu planners manage challenges and prepare nutritious meals that appeal to diverse student tastes. Overly prescriptive regulations resulted in unintended consequences, including reduced student lunch participation, higher costs and food waste. **Therefore, SNA asks Congress to monitor USDA's efforts to provide school meal program flexibility. The final rule should:**

- **Maintain the Target 1 sodium levels and eliminate future targets.** The Institute of Medicine warned that “reducing the sodium content of school meals as specified and in a way that is well accepted by students will present major challenges and may not be possible.” (*School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children, 2010*)
- **Restore the initial requirement that at least half of grains offered with school meals be whole grain rich.** The current mandate that *all* grains offered be whole grain rich has increased waste and costs and contributed to the decline in student lunch participation. Students are eating more whole grains, but schools still struggle with students' regional and cultural preferences for specific refined grains, such as white rice, pasta, grits or tortillas. The temporary whole grain waiver process is inconsistent across states, limiting the availability of waivers to struggling schools unable to meet overly burdensome application mandates.