



**SCHOOL
NUTRITION
ASSOCIATION**

Making the right food choices, together.

**2010 SNA Legislative Issue Paper
Talking Points**

TOP PRIORITIES

INCREASE FUNDING FOR CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS:

- **Expanding the “free” meal category to families with incomes below 185% of poverty, or \$40,793 for a family of four (Eliminating the reduced price category):**

Economic conditions have forced more families to rely on free and reduced price school meals. However, reports from across the country indicate that some students are going without school meals because too many of these families cannot afford the reduced price charge of 40¢ for each school lunch.

As USDA cites rising food insecurity among America’s families, Congress has a moral imperative to ensure hungry children have true access to healthy school meals.

- **Increase the per meal reimbursement by 35 cents per meal:**

The current Federal reimbursement of \$2.68 for a “free” school lunch falls far below the average cost to produce a school meal, which includes not just the cost of the food, but also expenses such as labor, equipment, supplies and rent.

At the start of the 2008-2009 school year, SNA determined the average cost to prepare and serve a school lunch that meets federal nutritional standards was \$2.92. Since that time, financially strapped child nutrition programs have continued to experience rising costs for everything from employee benefits to food and supplies.

To maintain the quality of school meals and offer students an even greater variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, Congress must increase the Federal reimbursement by 35 cents per meal.

CONSISTENT NATIONAL NUTRITION STANDARDS FOR ALL FOOD SOLD IN SCHOOL:

Children’s basic nutritional needs are the same whether they live in Florida or California and whether they are sitting down for snack time or lunchtime. To meet the nutritional needs of America’s children, SNA urges Congress to require a national nutrition standard, based on

the Dietary Guidelines and in accordance with recommendations of the Institute of Medicine, to govern the sale of all foods and beverages sold on the school campus during the school day.

School nutrition programs are deeply committed to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In fact, the recommendations recently issued by the IOM benefited from SNA's own Recommendations for National Nutrition Standards.

- SNA specifically supports ending the “time and place” rule and requiring a la carte and competitive foods to meet the Dietary Guidelines. Under current federal law, the school lunch and breakfast programs must meet the goals of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, but food and beverages sold outside the school cafeteria are not required to meet these nutritional guidelines. This inconsistency between foods sold inside and outside the cafeteria sends a mixed message to students, seriously undermining nutrition education efforts.
- Some individual states and school districts have passed their own regulations for school food, resulting in standards that vary wildly from one locality to another and may not be based on sound nutrition science. Multiple standards increase the cost of the program, as the school foodservice industry must manufacture multiple versions of the same product to meet this wide variety of nutrition standards.

INDIRECT COSTS:

- School nutrition programs nationwide struggle to cover rising indirect costs that exceed the food service operations' fair share – expenses like electricity and janitorial services which benefit both the foodservice program and the school. The method used to calculate how much the school meals program owes the district for these expenses varies from one locale to the next. As school district budgets have tightened, many school nutrition programs have experienced escalating indirect charges, and in some cases, these indirect costs can seriously impact the effectiveness of the federal child nutrition programs.
- SNA urges Congress to require the Secretary of Agriculture to determine which school expenses and indirect costs can be paid for with school foodservice funds.

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES:

FUNDING:

Community Eligibility: The cumbersome application process for free and reduced price meals can serve as a barrier to access for children who are eligible for these meals. Congress should expand access to school meals for at-risk children by granting automatic, community eligibility for universal free meals in high poverty school districts.

10 cents in Commodities for School Breakfast: The National School Breakfast Program is critical to maintaining the health and well-being of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals, and it provides students with the fuel they need to improve memory, test scores,

school attendance and cut down on visits to the school nurse. To expand this critical program, SNA urges that 10 cents be provided in USDA commodities for each school breakfast served.

Expand after school and summer meal programs: Hunger doesn't end when the school bell rings or when the school year ends. To ensure hungry children have access to the food they need to succeed in and outside of school, Congress must expand after school and summer meals programs.

Equipment Assistance: Child nutrition programs operate on tight budgets with limited financial reserves to cover the substantial cost of commercial grade equipment. Many school kitchens make due with antiquated, unreliable or inadequate equipment, which in many cases restrict them from cooking more meals from scratch and refrigerating or preparing more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Congress must reinstate equipment funding for all school districts.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS:

Food Safety: Food safety is the highest priority for school nutrition professionals, and schools have the best safety record in the foodservice industry to prove it. USDA must take steps to strengthen recall and food safety communications and bring this system into the digital age.

Nutrition Education: A critical step in addressing childhood obesity is teaching children the basics of healthy eating. The school cafeteria should be a classroom in this regard, and school nutrition programs can be a partner in developing effective nutrition education curriculum.

Technology: Child nutrition programs strive to ensure free and reduced meal benefits reach only those children eligible to receive them. However, the cumbersome administration process for child nutrition programs makes errors inevitable. USDA must increase the availability of technology and encourage its comprehensive use to simplify the administration of these programs and improve financial accountability.

Application and Reimbursement: In some cases, school nutrition programs must submit multiple applications on behalf of a single child who qualifies for multiple child nutrition programs (e.g. school meals, after school snacks and summer feeding). USDA should establish a simplified seamless application and reimbursement process to minimize time consuming paperwork and ensure eligible children receive all the assistance they need to succeed.

Direct Certification and Verification: SNA looks forward to working with USDA to maximize the use of direct certification and verification so at risk children have immediate access to child nutrition programs.