

Child Nutrition Reauthorization



Our nation’s child nutrition programs play a critical role in fighting hunger, promoting health and wellness, and preparing students to learn. The National Education Association (NEA) recommends building on the successes of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFK) by ensuring reauthorization of child nutrition programs that include the following priorities.

Maintaining Healthy Nutrition Guidelines for School Meals

Maintaining the healthy guidelines set by the HHFK for school meals is a top priority for NEA. These nutrition standards have had widespread, positive impacts on children’s access to healthy foods during the school day. In fact, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports that over 95 percent of schools are successfully meeting the updated nutrition standards that reduce sugar, sodium and fat, and increase the intake of fruits and vegetables.

Training and Supporting School Food Service Professionals

NEA members, including nearly 500,000 Education Support Professionals (ESPs), many of whom are food service professionals, see the benefits of child nutrition programs on a daily basis. These professionals prepare school meals, maintain a safe and healthy learning environment, and help students learn about and practice healthy nutrition and eating habits. We strongly support the continued inclusion of required ongoing professional development and training that is:

- ▶ Provided to food service managers and staff at no cost, and scheduled during regular, paid working hours;
- ▶ Offered in a format that is accessible – hands-on training should be maximized - and effective for the ESPs and appropriate to the subject matter; and
- ▶ Inclusive of knowledge and skills needed for scratch cooking using raw ingredients, and for incorporating farm-to-school programs into school nutrition programs, in addition to training on general nutrition.

Providing Adequate Equipment and Infrastructure

Schools need updated kitchen equipment and infrastructure in order to serve healthy meals in a cost-effective manner. Reauthorization should include significant financial support for school kitchen equipment and infrastructure in the form of both grants and low- and no-interest loans, and technical assistance to school districts in upgrading their kitchen facilities.

Strengthening Out-Of School Time Meals Programs

Summer meals and afterschool snack and dinner programs see to it that children are well nourished when not in school and help ensure that they arrive at school healthy and ready to learn. Progress has been made in raising enrollment rates for Summer Food Service Programs (SFSP) in some states, but much work needs to be done to make sure that children have sufficient food and nutrition in the summer months to maintain their health and help avoid summer learning loss. At present, only 16 percent of low-income students participating in the National School Lunch Program receive meals through summer meals programs. To increase participation and strengthen the summer meals program, Congress should:

- ▶ Lower the area eligibility test to 40 percent of area children living in poverty in order to increase participation;
- ▶ Provide funds for transportation. Site sponsors, especially in rural areas, attribute low participation to a lack of transportation and the rising costs of transportation. Funds should be provided for the transportation of meals to children and the transportation of children to feeding sites;
- ▶ Allow year round meals by streamlining coordination between afterschool and summer food programs; and allow all sites to serve a third meal.

Expanding the Farm-to-School Program

Expanding the Farm-to School Program beyond existing K-12 schools to include early education and summer meal sites would provide students more access to healthy, locally-sourced foods, as well as educational enrichment opportunities like school gardens, cooking lessons, and field trips to local farms.

Ensuring Verification Process Works for Schools and Students

The bill passed by the Senate Agriculture Committee significantly increases the number of free and reduced-price school meals applications to be directly verified by schools. This could lead to eligible children losing benefits and create a significant administrative burden for many schools at the same time that they are beginning to implement the newly-passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This plan should be scaled back, or at a minimum phased in, with these additional local responsibilities in mind, and allow significant time to be implemented successfully.