



## MINNESOTA SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION 2014 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE PAPER

The Minnesota School Nutrition Association members are actively committed and involved in providing the nutritional support for the overall health and well-being of Minnesota school children. We recognize, understand and accept the significance of providing appealing, wholesome meals for fueling both physical growth and student achievement. The Minnesota School Nutrition Association members request your support and endorsement for the single, significant issue for the 2014 Minnesota Legislative Session listed below:

**School Lunch:** MSNA members are requesting expanded access to free school lunch by eliminating the 40 cent fee currently paid by working class poor families for a reduced-price lunch.

- For a relatively small cost (about \$3.5 million per year), legislators can lift a burden for working poor families and ensure that children have daily access to appealing, healthy school lunches. School Districts will also benefit from relieving the heavily regulated program from an additional administrative burden of collecting the 40 cent fee for reduced-price lunches.
- Eliminating the fee for reduced-price lunch will help close the achievement gap. Students who regularly participate in school meal programs enjoy better physical and mental health and stronger academic performance and demonstrate better behavior than children who do not participate.
- It will help our State leverage additional federal funds. Cost pressures on school nutrition programs are increasing due to changes in federal requirements for school meal programs. Raising lunch participation by eliminating the fee for reduced-price lunches would boost economies of scale, making it a bit easier for school nutrition programs to cover costs.
- In 2003, under Governor Pawlenty, Minnesota eliminated the 30 cent fee collected for a reduced-price breakfast, which helped to increase access to and participation in the most important meal of the school day. Many families eligible for reduced-price meals cannot understand why school breakfast is free but school lunch is not.
- Minnesota has a national reputation for being a trail blazer in education and in providing outstanding student nutrition programs. This school year Vermont became the first state to provide state funding to eliminate the 40 cent fee for reduced-price lunch. If Vermont can do it, Minnesota can, too.