



# 2020 Position Paper

Research shows school meals support academic achievement, obesity prevention and overall student health by improving children's diets and combatting hunger. School meals are as critical to learning as teachers and textbooks. School Nutrition Association (SNA) has long supported offering healthy school meals to all students at no charge, as an integral part of their education. On behalf of school nutrition professionals and the students they serve, SNA calls on Congress to work toward this long-term goal by preserving the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and taking the following additional steps:

## Increase Student Access to School Breakfast and Lunch:

- **Eliminate the Reduced Price category (ERP).** Students whose families earn between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level qualify to receive reduced price meals. However, some of these students go hungry during the school day or accumulate unpaid meal debt because many families struggle to afford the reduced price co-pay. Allowing these vulnerable children to receive free school meals will ensure consistent access to the nutrition they need to succeed, while reducing growing unpaid student meal debt and easing administrative burdens.
- **Expand Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced Price Meals (DCM-F/RP) to all states.** Allow all states to use Medicaid data to automatically certify eligible students for free and reduced price meals. Direct certification eliminates the school meal application requirement for needy families, reduces paperwork and processing for schools, improves certification efficiency and accuracy and decreases unpaid meal debt.
- **Urge the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Department of Education, in collaboration with School Food Authorities (SFAs), to develop guidance on ensuring students have adequate time to eat healthy school meals.** Short lunch periods are a concern – especially for millions of food-insecure children who depend on school meals. To increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, which take longer to consume, and to minimize food waste, schools must provide students adequate “seat time” in the cafeteria.

## Strengthen School Meal Programs:

- **Preserve USDA's 2018 final rule *Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium Requirements*.** This final rule preserves strong standards for school meals, including calorie and fat limits, Target 1 sodium reductions and mandates to offer students a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grain options and low fat or fat free milk.
- **Increase USDA Foods (commodities) support for the School Breakfast Program (SBP).** The FY 2020 Agriculture Appropriations Bill contains \$20 million for breakfast commodities. Increasing USDA Foods support for SBP 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.
- **Support USDA's ongoing effort to streamline overly complex child nutrition programs.** Streamlining regulations will minimize costs, allowing school nutrition professionals to invest time and resources toward better serving students.