

National PTA 2020 Legislative Conference

Child Nutrition Reauthorization One-pager



For over a century, National PTA has advocated for healthy and nutritious school meals. The association played a critical role in the original passage of both the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act. PTA continues to advocate for healthy foods in schools through improved nutrition standards and family engagement in the creation and implementation of local school wellness policies that address student nutrition and physical activity. Our association is deeply concerned about recent rollbacks on nutrition standards that threaten children's health and the progress made.

18.5% of children (or 13.7 million children)¹ are obese, yet 11 million children live in food-insecure households². The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA)³, the last major reauthorization of our nation's child nutrition laws, has improved nutrition standards in our nation's schools. Setting strong nutritional standards in our nation's schools is essential to combating the concerning child obesity rates while also ensuring that children at-risk of going hungry have nutritious food to eat during school, the summer months and in afterschool programs. Providing our nation's youth with healthy food options and nutrition education is key to their long-term health and success, which is why National PTA supports policies that build healthy eating habits and ensure a brighter and healthier future for our children.

As Congress considers the next reauthorization of our nation's child nutrition laws, **National PTA urges members of Congress to:**

Include effective parent and family stakeholder engagement provisions

Family engagement is critical to ensure the development of positive local school wellness policies.

- This should be accomplished through requiring **a school nutrition advisory committee at each school participating in school meal programs**, with membership of the committee including an organization that represents parents and families. The Advisory Committee should also be complimented with an **"a la carte" food advisory panel** with includes a parent representative to ensure that the nutrition value of all food served in a school is maximized.
- Lastly, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should create a **clearinghouse of nutrition best practices for school food service agencies, school districts and school meal providers** to better engage families in school meal and nutrition programs.

Boost child health by including robust school meal requirements on milk, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, calorie limits and limits on sugar and sodium

Evidence-based nutrition standards are critical to ensure school meals are a healthy part of our children's daily food intake.

- Congress should require **alignment of nutrition standards with Dietary Guidelines for Americans** for fruit and vegetables, sodium and whole grains, milk and added sugars.
- **Smart Snack standards should not be weakened** by allowing lunch items to be served a la carte every day.
- The integrity of the **Fresh fruits and Vegetables Program** should also be maintained.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief #288 <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db288.pdf>

² Feeding America; Retrieved from <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>

³ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/healthy-hunger-free-kids-act>

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- At least \$10 million in technical assistance to schools should be provided to meet school nutrition standards, including those pertaining to sodium, whole grains and sugar content.
- Lastly, Congress should require a USDA report on the agency's technical assistance efforts on sodium, whole grains and sugar content, including a report on the progress by schools to meet sodium targets and efforts by USDA to work with industry to provide products that meet the sodium, whole grains and sugar standards.

Ensure low-income and at-risk youth have access to school meals programs

Access for low-income and at-risk youth, the most likely to suffer from obesity and be food-insecure, to school meal programs must be improved.

- To foster greater school meal access, Congress should place no limits on the number of times school food authorities can reach out to families to apply for the free and reduced-price lunch program.
- School district efforts to verify children's eligibility for school meal programs must also minimize the possibility of children losing access to school meals.
- Lastly, school food authorities should reduce any barriers or burdens on families to complete an application for free or reduced school meals and encourage, through the provision of resources and support, families to complete school meal applications.

Include language from the Anti-Lunch Shaming Act (H.R. 2311/S. 1119) to prohibit the stigmatization of children who are unable to pay for meals

Children eligible for school meal subsidies who are stigmatized are less likely to participate in school meal programs.

- Congress must include provisions from the Anti-Lunch Shaming Act to prohibit school food authorities from publicly identifying, stigmatizing, or requiring students to perform any activity that is not required of other students and require that all communication related to an outstanding school meal debt to be directed solely to the student's parent or legal guardian in a manner that does not publicly identify them.

Ensure students have enough time to eat lunch by including the Healthy Meal Time Act (H.R. 5463)

- A study in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that increasing school mealtimes to at least 25 minutes results in greater consumption of fruits, vegetables and milk and reduces plate waste.

Provide grants and loan assistance to improve kitchen infrastructure and equipment

- To address the inadequacy of school kitchens and culinary equipment, Congress should increase funding for school meal kitchen equipment grants to \$35 million and lower the grant threshold from \$5,000 to \$1,000.

Ensure all child nutrition programs provide potable and safe, drinking water

- To ensure children have access to healthy drinking water, Congress should require regular water testing in schools, day-care centers and meal sites for lead contamination.