



2019 Federal Legislative Issue Paper

The California School Nutrition Association is the organization representing more than 1,500 school foodservice professionals. Together we serve more than 6 million California school children healthy meals at schools and other sites. CSNA has always been in the forefront of improving the school health environment and supports efforts to strengthen the nutrition programs in the state and nationally.

Nutrition for All Children

As a fundamental statement of principle, CSNA believes that school meals are a nutrition program for all children. We have a great concern that it is becoming a de facto welfare program, which undermines our core belief. As recently as 1991, half of all lunches served went to children paying full price. In 2011, it was one in three. This past year it dropped further to one in four. The steep decline is due, in part, to changes in the meal pattern that children do not accept. More than two million fewer children participate today than prior to implementation of the new meal plans. It is critical that we find a balance that attracts children to the program while maintaining our commitment to healthful meals for them.

Consistent with this principle is that CSNA urges Congress recognize that many needs exist in all schools, not just high-poverty schools. To wit, the range of programs and grants for school foodservice programs should be available to all schools. For example, equipment grants are primarily targeted to schools with high free and reduced-price populations. But equipment needs exist in schools regardless of their relative affluence, and local funds are either not available or restricted for investment in cafeteria and kitchen facilities. Similarly, children in all schools benefit from programs like the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program, yet that program is only available to high need schools.

CSNA supports ensuring that all programs and funds benefit all children.

Regional Equity

CSNA is concerned that there are children who are food insecure in many parts of the country that are not eligible to receive supplemental assistance in the form of free or reduced-price meals. The underlying problem is that eligibility for assistance is based on a single national standard that does not reflect the variations in the cost of living across the nation. Not unique to California, this problem of inequity undermines the ability of schools in high cost regions to meet the nutritional needs of at-risk children. A study by the Government Accountability Office in 2014 [GAO-14-557] provides some insight into the problem, but does not fully explore the costs and benefits of indexing eligibility to reflect the local cost of living.

To address this problem, CSNA proposes that Congress authorize and appropriate funds for a multi-state pilot to evaluate regional indexing for school meal eligibility.

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The School Nutrition Environment

To maximize the effectiveness of the federal government's investment in school meal programs, the overall school environment must support health and nutrition. There are three specific ways that this may be addressed:

Congress should continue to invest in facilities that improve the quality of meals and school meal environment. We request that Congress continue to appropriate funds for equipment grants.

Congress should appropriate funds and direct USDA to improve and expand nutrition education, particularly in early childhood programs where the fundamental building blocks for lifelong healthful eating are laid. Additionally, Congress should direct the Department of Education to promote inclusion of nutrition education in early childhood curricula.

While many elements of the school environment appropriately reside at the local level, CSNA proposes that Congress direct USDA and the Department of Education to work cooperatively to ensure that the school nutrition environment support health and education. Specifically, a taskforce should look at the issue of adequate time to eat that will ensure that children have the time they need to eat the meals provided, especially fruits and vegetables that are key to healthful meals. This might include consideration of the number of students that can be accommodated in the dining area at one time so that children are not rushed out to make room for others. Also, the sequence of playtime and meal time should ensure that children use their cafeteria time for healthy eating and the socialization that occurs during that time.

CSNA appreciates Congress' commitment to child nutrition programs and looks forward to working with our Congressional delegation as legislative opportunities arise including the reauthorization of child nutrition programs that is overdue.