

# PROTECT SCHOOL MEALS!

## Allow schools to prepare healthy meals students will eat

Federal child nutrition programs provide 30.3 million lunches and 13.5 million breakfasts to students each school day. The School Nutrition Association (SNA) represents more than 55,000 professionals who prepare these meals.

*SNA supports strong federal nutrition standards for school meals, including calorie limits and mandates to offer a greater quantity and variety of fruits and vegetables. However, some of USDA's regulations go too far, driving up costs and waste and causing many students to swap healthy school meals for less nutritious options.*

Under the new standards

**1.4 million**  
**fewer children**  
choose school lunch each day.<sup>1</sup>



**92% of school nutrition operators**  
**report rising costs pose a**  
**“serious” or “moderate” challenge.<sup>3</sup>**



The financial impact of the new rules is crippling some meal programs and **limiting their ability to invest in menus** that can entice students back to the cafeteria.

More than half of school nutrition operators anticipate their **\$ program expenses will exceed revenue for the 2014-15 school year.**

**Only 18% anticipate their programs will break even.<sup>3</sup>**

Under these new rules,  
**school districts must absorb**  
**\$1.2 billion**

in new food and labor costs  
in Fiscal Year 2015 alone.<sup>2</sup>

Mandating that students must take a fruit or vegetable with every meal **increases waste by 100%<sup>4</sup>**  
**with an estimated**  
**\$684 million**  
**thrown away each year**



*During Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2015, Congress has the opportunity to protect school meal programs and help students adjust to and accept healthy changes in the cafeteria. [Turn the page to learn how.](#)*

<sup>1</sup> USDA NSLP Participation Data

<sup>2</sup> USDA's Final Rule

<sup>3</sup> SNA's Position Paper Survey, 2014





<sup>4</sup> Public Health Nutrition, 2013



# 2015 POSITION PAPER

## Reauthorization of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

*As Congress considers Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2015, SNA members will share their expertise and commitment to these key principles:*

-  **Ensure** students have access to nutritious, appetizing meals;
-  **Promote** healthy school environments;
-  **Simplify** regulations and provide flexibility to maximize efficiency and ease administrative burdens;
-  **Restore** financial sustainability of meal programs, which operate independent of school district budgets.



*Rick Brady*

***In addition, SNA advocates for the following actions:***

**Increase the per meal reimbursement for school breakfast and lunch by 35 cents to ensure School Food Authorities (SFAs) can afford to meet federal requirements.**

Since passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the new standards and rising food and labor costs have drastically increased the cost of preparing school meals, threatening the financial sustainability of meal programs. When these programs can't cover their costs, school districts must pick up the tab, to the detriment of all students.

Prior to implementation of any new legislation and regulations, Congress should provide full funding to cover all related costs identified through economic analysis.

**Maintain the Target 1 sodium level reductions and suspend implementation of further targets.**

Schools made significant reductions to the sodium in school meals to meet Target 1, effective July 2014.

The Institute of Medicine warned that

***“reducing the sodium content of school meals as specified and in a way that is well accepted by students will present major challenges and may not be possible.”<sup>5</sup>***



***This healthy meal exceeds Target 2 sodium limits.***

Naturally occurring sodium in milk, meats and other foods will force schools to take healthy choices off the menu. The meal pictured, including a turkey wrap and low sodium green beans, was prepared with USDA Foods and exceeds Target 2 limits.

<sup>5</sup> School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children

**Grant individual SFAs the authority to decide whether students are required to take a fruit or vegetable as part of a reimbursable meal.**



***Students' waste at one school***

SNA supports *offering* a greater variety and quantity of fruits and vegetables. However, the requirement that students *must take* a ½ cup with every single breakfast and lunch has increased waste and costs, leaving schools with less funding to invest in more expensive, appealing choices such as berries and kiwi.

School nutrition professionals know best whether this mandate has been beneficial or detrimental for their students.

**Restore the initial requirement that at least half of grains offered through school lunch and breakfast programs be whole grain rich.**

Students are eating more whole grain breads and buns in school, thanks to the 2012 mandate that half of all grains offered with school meals must be whole grain rich. However, the 2014 mandate that *all* grains must be whole grain rich has increased waste and contributed to the decline in student lunch participation. Challenges include limited availability of acceptable whole grain specialty items, higher costs and regional preferences for certain refined grains.

Schools should be permitted to serve white rice or tortillas on occasion, just like most families do.

**Allow all food items that are permitted to be served as part of a reimbursable meal to be sold at any time as an a la carte item.**

The *Smart Snacks in School* rule forced schools to take healthy school meal options off a la carte menus, unnecessarily limiting student choices and reducing revenue for meal programs. For instance, 2 oz. eq. of USDA's reduced sodium ham – without bread, cheese or condiments – nearly surpasses the sodium limit for entrées. Even side salads have taken a hit since low fat dressing often exceeds sodium limits.

**Modify Section 205, Paid Lunch Equity of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, by exempting SFAs that had a positive fund balance at the end of the previous school year.**

School meal prices, just like restaurant prices, differ from one community to the next, as schools take into account local food and labor costs and what families are able to pay. Section 205 required many SFAs to increase their paid meal prices regardless of local conditions.

When meal prices increase, even gradually, lunch participation declines. Congress should permanently narrow Section 205 to apply only to SFAs with a negative fund balance.

**Provide program simplification.**

As Congress drafts and USDA implements 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization, prompt action must be taken to simplify child nutrition programs and ease administrative burdens on SFAs and State Agencies. The overwhelming complexity of program regulations and administrative requirements is unnecessarily hindering efforts to better serve students.

<b>New Nutrition Standards</b>  <i>School Nutrition Association supports mandates shaded in green and opposes mandates shaded in red.</i>	<b>Implementation School Year for National School Lunch Program (L) and School Breakfast Program (B)</b>				
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2017/18	2022/23
Offer both fruit and vegetable daily	L				
Fruit/Vegetable quantity increase	L		B		
Offer vegetables subgroups weekly (dark green, red/orange, legumes)	L				
Students must take a fruit or vegetable with each reimbursable meal (1/2 cup min)	L		B		
Half of grains must be whole grain rich	L	B			
All grains must be whole grain rich			L/B		
Calorie ranges	L	B			
Saturated fat limit (no change)	L/B				
Zero grams of trans fat per portion	L	B			
Sodium limits: Target 1			L/B		
Target 2				L/B	
Final target					L/B

Federal Sodium Reduction Mandates			
Grades	Target 1 (July1, 2014)	Target 2 (July1, 2017)	Final Target (July1, 2022)
Reimbursable School Breakfasts			
K-5:	≤ 540	≤ 485	≤ 430
6-8:	≤ 600	≤ 535	≤ 470
9-12:	≤ 640	≤ 570	≤ 500
Reimbursable School Lunches			
K-5:	≤ 1,230	≤ 935	≤ 640
6-8:	≤ 1,360	≤ 1,035	≤ 710
9-12:	≤ 1,420	≤ 1,080	≤ 740
Competitive Foods (a la carte, vending)			
Entrées: ≤ 480 mg			
Snacks/Sides: ≤ 230 mg (≤ 200 mg by July, 2016)			

National School Lunch Program: USDA Participation Data				
Fiscal Year	Average Participation			
	Free	Reduced Price	Full Price	Total
Millions				
2012	18.7	2.7	10.2	31.7
2013	18.9	2.6	9.2	30.7
2014	19.1	2.5	8.7	30.3
Change	+0.4	-0.2	-1.5	-1.4



For more details, visit  
[SchoolNutrition.org/PositionPaper](https://www.schoolnutrition.org/PositionPaper)



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