



# 2021 Position Paper

School nutrition professionals mobilized immediately when the [pandemic](#) closed school doors nationwide, and despite challenges, they continue to ensure student access to healthy school meals. Through the extension of [federal waivers](#), school breakfast, lunch, summer meals and afterschool meals have offered a lifeline for families struggling with economic uncertainty or the challenges of balancing work and distance learning. These programs, [proven](#) to fuel student success and combat child hunger and obesity, will be critical to our nation's recovery. *To support the health and achievement of America's students and ensure the financial sustainability of school meal programs, the non-profit School Nutrition Association (SNA) calls on Congress to:*

**Permanently expand the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to offer all students meals at no charge as an integral part of the educational experience.** *Universal meals will:*

- Provide all students equal access to school breakfast and lunch and eliminate any stigma or barriers for students to benefit from these meals. Nutritious school meals are [proven](#) to support learning, improve attendance and classroom behavior and contribute to overall health and wellness.
- Ensure no child goes hungry during the school day or accrues [unpaid meal debt](#), a burden on families and school district budgets.
- Eliminate the costly, time-consuming meal application and verification process, and streamline paperwork and reporting requirements. Parents won't have to worry about complicated meal applications, and school nutrition professionals can focus on nourishing students. [Learn more.](#)

**Provide emergency financial relief directly to School Food Authorities (SFAs).** COVID-19 school closures and the higher costs of serving meals during the pandemic have crippled school meal program budgets. A recent SNA [survey](#) revealed extensive financial losses, with a harrowing 62% of school nutrition directors anticipating a loss for School Year 2020/21, and an additional 28% of respondents unsure of what to expect. Meal program losses will cut into education budgets, impeding efforts to meet the needs of students and jeopardizing progress in school nutrition programs. While emergency funds provided in the December 2020 stimulus bill will help offset some of the losses accrued last school year, these funds are insufficient to ensure the financial sustainability of school meal programs moving forward. [Learn more.](#)

**Preserve USDA Foods entitlements and State Administrative Expense (SAE) funds, impacted by COVID-19.** School meal programs depend heavily on USDA Foods to reduce meal costs and offer students a wide range of U.S. grown foods. USDA Foods entitlements and SAE funds are based on school meal participation data. With participation drastically down due to COVID-19 school closures, Congress should direct USDA to utilize Fiscal Year 2019 participation data when calculating future entitlement and SAE fund values. [Learn more.](#)

**Reduce regulatory and administrative burdens.** Overly complex federal regulations divert resources from the mission of serving students. They also impede efforts to quickly and creatively respond to student needs in times of emergency. Congress should direct USDA to implement the recommendations of the congressionally-mandated [Child Nutrition Reporting Burden Analysis Study](#). Preserving flexibility on [whole grain, sodium and milk regulations](#) will continue to ease menu planning and procurement challenges. [Learn more.](#)