

# CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION

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Healthy nutrition is an essential building block of a healthy childhood, so First Focus Campaign for Children advocates based on the idea that no child in our nation should go hungry, and every child should have access to healthy and nutritious food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports that one in every five households with children is classified as food insecure, posing a serious threat to the healthy development and academic performance of 15 million children in America.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act (CNR) provides resources for several of the federal child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program, and Special Milk Program. This is critical to the more than 53 million children who get much of their daily nutrition (half of their daily calories for many kids) at school.

Congress is set to reauthorize these essential programs for kids for the first time since the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010, which is set to expire on September 30, 2015. It is important to examine the progress that has been made over the last five years as well as the opportunities for improvement in this year's reauthorization to ensure that children have access to healthy meals at school.

## Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) has made significant improvements to the nutritional value of meals America's children eat in school. With one in five at risk of hunger and one out of every three children in America overweight or obese costing the United States \$190.2 billion to treat, these standards ensure that children have access to healthy and nutritious food during the school day. As a result, students have healthy options available at breakfast and lunch, as well as in any vending machines found in schools. Research shows they are working as intended and are popular amongst both students and parents.

- A recent poll conducted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation showed that **9 out of 10 Americans support national nutrition standards**, with 86 percent saying they should be strengthened or stay the same. The poll also showed a dramatic uptick in the belief that school meals are excellent or good, up to 70 percent from 26 percent in 2010.<sup>2</sup>
- Studies from the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health<sup>3</sup> and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation<sup>4</sup> show that **the vast majority of students like the new school meal options**.
- Polling from The Pew Charitable Trusts, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the American Heart Association show **72 percent of parents support strong nutrition standards** like the ones enacted by the HHFKA.<sup>5</sup>
- According to a recent study from the Harvard School of Public Health, **children are eating 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit** under the HHFKA standards.<sup>6</sup>

## Priorities for a New Reauthorization

**Maintaining Nutrition Standards.** The Obama Administration and the 114th Congress are making the reauthorization of child nutrition programs a priority for the coming year. In the reauthorization process, it is of the utmost importance to the health and well-being of America's children that Congress maintains the types of strong nutrition standards implemented under the HHFKA. USDA reports that 95 percent of all school districts nationwide had implemented these standards as of May 2015, illustrating that they are being embraced nationwide.

**Expanding Summer Nutrition Programs.** In addition to maintaining the current nutrition standards, this year's reauthorization opens the door for important improvements to the effective, but underutilized, Summer Nutrition Programs. While over 30 million children rely on the National School Lunch Program on the average school day (over 21 million eligible for free and reduced-price lunch), the Summer Nutrition Programs reach only about one in six of those students (2.8 million).<sup>7</sup> In order to ensure that all children receive nutritious meals year round, Congress should take the following steps to improve the Summer Nutrition Programs:

- **Reduce barriers to service for community-based organizations:** This year's reauthorization should reduce community eligibility for summer meal sites from 50 to 40 percent of the area's children receiver free or reduced-price lunch. This change is in line with federally funded summer education programs and will increase access for communities with significant numbers of low-income families but lower levels of concentrated poverty.
- **Provide Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards to low-income families:** Summer EBT cards can provide extra support for low-income families during the summer months. Families will receive \$150 for each child who is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch during the school year and can use the cards to buy food at local stores. A USDA pilot project showed that severe food insecurity for children in families participating in the Summer EBT card program dropped by 33 percent.<sup>8</sup>
- **Fund transportation grants for increased access:** There are many barriers low-income children face when trying to access summer meals, and transportation continues to be a problem for many families, especially in rural areas. Grants should be provided to communities attempting to improve access to summer meals through innovative approaches like mobile meal trucks.

Child nutrition programs continue to be a key support in reducing hunger and improving the health and well-being of millions of low-income children in America. The HHFKA has made great strides in ensuring access to healthy food for all children, regardless of income. With the array of child nutrition programs set to expire, America cannot afford a step backwards. First Focus Campaign for Children supports efforts to maintain science-based nutrition standards and strengthen proven initiatives like Summer Nutrition Programs.

**Improving the Child and Adult Care Food Program.** No child in our nation should go hungry, and every child should have access to healthy and nutritious food. That is why we support expanding the CACFP as Congress considers the CNR. First Focus Campaign for Children has endorsed specific legislation to expand the program, introduced by Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) as The Access to Healthy Food for Young Children Act of 2015 (S. 1833) and in the House by Representatives Elise Stefanik (R-NY) and Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), titled The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act (H.R. 3886).

Currently, the CACFP is helping to alleviate food insecurity for more than 3.3 million children (and 120,000 adults) who receive nutritious meals and snacks each day in day care and childcare settings. Housed at USDA in the Food and Nutrition Service, CACFP is a fairly small federal nutrition program, yet it meets the needs of some of our youngest and neediest children. It provides a little over \$3 billion for monthly reimbursements, training and technical assistance, nutrition education, and food safety information to child care centers, Head Start Programs, family child care homes, homeless shelters and afterschool programs for snacks and meals served to children. Generally, children under the age of 12 are served, but homeless shelters and afterschool programs can serve children 18 and under.

Under the legislation introduced in Congress, the program would:

- **Reach more children by reducing the area eligibility:** The legislation reaches more children by reducing the area of eligibility from 50 percent to 40 percent, providing them with healthy CACFP meals and snacks because child care providers would be eligible for higher reimbursement.
- **Provide low-income children with an additional healthy meal:** The legislation also provides reimbursement for a third meal in a day for children in care for longer than eight hours a day, which will lead to healthier outcomes for children, as parents work long hours.
- **Encourage participation for more child care providers:** The legislation would increase reimbursements for meals that directly improves nutritional value of foods served in child care. It would also reduce paperwork by allowing an additional meal without obtaining additional applications (like the same option in the school meal programs).

## References

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err194.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://ww2.wkkf.org/2015schoolfoodpoll>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://sph.berkeley.edu/atkins-center-study-students-prefer-new-healthier-school-meals>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25045934>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/multimedia/data-visualizations/2014/parents-support-healthier-school-food-standards>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/school-meal-standards-increase-fruit-and-vegetable-consumption>.

<sup>7</sup> [http://frac.org/pdf/summer\\_meals\\_act\\_one\\_pager.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/summer_meals_act_one_pager.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ops/summer-electronic-benefit-transfer-children-sebtc>.