



NSBA Advocacy Institute 2017 CALIFORNIA BACKGROUND

Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (PL 111-296), the last reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act (CNA), included the most significant changes to school nutrition programs in more than 15 years. The requirements of the Healthy Kids Act were intended to align school meals with federal dietary guidelines and recommendations from the Institute of Medicine.

The CNA put in place a number of program improvements that support the academic achievement and overall health of our students. However, in order to maintain the progress that has been made in providing students with nutritious meals and snacks, opportunities for physical activity and safe and supportive learning environments, the following components must be maintained through the reauthorization process:

- **Expanded access** – The simplification of the direct certification process, the automatic certification of foster children and the establishment of community eligibility have enabled school districts and county offices of education to serve more students with nutrition needs while, at the same time, lessening the application and enrollment burdens on school staff and parents.
- **Equity in school lunch pricing** – By requiring schools to assess and address gaps in the price students are charged for paid meals relative to free and paid meal reimbursement rates, and setting revenue expectations for non-reimbursable foods sold at schools, the Act is helping schools strengthen program transparency and efficiency.

Currently, the CNA allows for local flexibility and community-level decision-making. Reauthorization presents an important opportunity to build on these positive changes and to ensure that federal law appropriately addresses shortcomings in law and policy. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act expired on September 30, 2015; however, school children will continue to receive school meals as long as federal funds are available.

The most significant challenges in implementing the Act have come from the establishment of national nutrition standards. There has been inherent tension in the desire to have a national baseline when the needs and contexts of communities are so different.

Bills to reauthorize CNR were considered in both the House and Senate last year. Both bills took steps to 1) increase flexibility for whole grain content and sodium reduction targets, 2) increase stakeholder engagement (including school boards) and 3) reduce fraud, waste and abuse. CSBA

supports these proposed changes and urges the new Congress and the Administration to enact a bipartisan child nutrition reauthorization that provides flexibility and relief for school districts and/or county offices of education to administer school meal programs by increasing reimbursement levels and other federal funds to cover the cost of compliance and/or provide local education agencies with the authorization to make implementation feasible within available federal resources.

Further, the implementation or expansion of the Child Nutrition Act by Congress and the Administration should not result in re-directing state and local funds from instruction to the school food authority or impose additional costs on schools.

TALKING POINTS:

- **Congress should respect local school governance in expanding child nutrition programs by providing additional flexibility and enacting legislation that is cost-neutral to local education agencies by increasing reimbursement levels and other federal funds to cover the full cost of compliance and/or enacting a statute that makes implementation feasible within available federal resources.**
- **The implementation or expansion of the Child Nutrition Act by Congress and the Administration should not result in re-directing state and local funds from instruction to the school food authority or impose additional costs on local education agencies.**
- **Maintain the authority granted to USDA regarding the establishment of nutritional standards for all foods sold in schools, while establishing clear expectations for easing administrative burdens and maximizing program flexibility and efficiency. The complexity of current regulations and program requirements often hinders local efforts to serve California's our most needy students.**
- **Require targets for sodium level reductions and whole grain offerings that reflect best practices as well as the lessons learned about regional food preferences, reasonable transition timelines and other challenges.**
- **Help schools, districts and county offices of education reduce program waste and costs, both of which have significantly increased under the Act, by increasing local flexibility in setting policies that currently require students to take a fruit or vegetable with each meal and dispose of it if not consumed during lunch. This limits the ability of schools to make healthy food options available to students throughout the school day.**
- **Because child nutrition outside of the school day is also of critical importance, CSBA supports efforts to strengthen the Child and Adult Food Care Program, including proposals to expand the program to cover three meals per day and reducing the eligibility test to 40 percent of residents living below the poverty line.**

INFORMATION POINT:

- Last year's House proposal (HR 5003) included an onerous provisions that would have increased the poverty threshold for districts to participate in community eligibility for school meals from 40 to 60 percent. The community eligibility provision allows schools, districts and county offices of education with high poverty rates to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students and eliminates the burden of collecting household applications to determine eligibility for school meals, relying instead on information from other means-tested programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
- Be sure to let your Representatives know the impact of increasing the poverty threshold and how many fewer children would be served.
- Check with your school district and/or county office of education to determine what other program changes would help implement a successful food services program.