

Principles for Reauthorizing Child Nutrition Programs

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Congress is reauthorizing child nutrition programs, and the Senate may move forward with a bill this fall. These are our principles for reauthorization and building on the success of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFK).

MAINTAIN HEALTHY NUTRITION GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL MEALS

- ▶ HHFK Act guidelines have increased children’s access to healthy foods, helped address nutrition shortfalls, and cultivated healthy eating habits in children. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported this year that by the 2014-15 school year, the nutritional quality of school meals had increased by more than 40 percent.
- ▶ Over 90 percent of schools are meeting the updated nutrition standards for reducing sugar, sodium and fat and increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, according to USDA.

PROTECT AND EXPAND COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY FOR UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS

- ▶ The HHFK Act improved children’s access to crucial school meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP); more than 24,000 schools in high-poverty areas now offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to students without collecting and processing individual school meal applications.

ENSURE VERIFICATION PROCESS WORKS FOR SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

- ▶ Reauthorization should protect eligible children’s access to school meals by leveraging additional opportunities to directly certify low-income children for free school meals.
- ▶ Reauthorization should ensure that any changes to the process of verifying eligibility do not cause eligible children to lose school meal benefits or increase administrative burdens for schools.

TRAIN AND SUPPORT SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

- ▶ Reauthorization should include ongoing professional development and training for school food service staff at no cost, during regular, paid working hours that maximizes hands-on training where appropriate.

PROVIDE ADEQUATE EQUIPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- ▶ Schools need updated kitchen equipment and infrastructure in order to serve healthy meals in a cost-effective manner.
- ▶ Reauthorization should include expanded grants and low- and no-interest loans for school kitchen equipment and infrastructure, and technical assistance to school districts in upgrading their kitchen facilities.

INCREASE ACCESS TO OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

- ▶ After-school and summer nutrition programs provide meals and snacks at schools, parks, recreation centers, nonprofit organizations, and other sites in low-income communities and serve primarily low-income children, combining meals with educational, enrichment, and recreational activities.
- ▶ Increasing access to summer food and other out-of-school time programs that are connected to these enrichment activities should include improving area eligibility so more low-income children can receive meals during the summer and after school.