



## 2015 Positions for Child Nutrition Reauthorization

The Urban School Food Alliance (The Alliance) was created by school food professionals in 2012 to address the unique needs of the Nation's largest school districts. The Alliance allows the districts to share best practices and leverage their purchasing power to continue to drive quality up and costs down while incorporating sound environmental practices. The six founding cities, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Dallas and Orlando, together offer service in over 4,500 schools to 2.8 million children daily. This translates to over 500,000,000 million meals a year.

The Alliance shares the goals of the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act to serve healthy, balanced meals to children that include fresh fruits, vegetables, lean protein, low fat dairy and whole grains in school. We agree serving healthy meals is the right thing for growing children to support healthy bodies and minds. All the districts in the Alliance have successfully implemented the meal guidelines and have been proactive in working together to share our strengths to improve the value and quality of our districts' meal, nutrition and wellness programs.

As an innovative, action-oriented set of school food operators, we suggest three revisions during the Child Nutrition Reauthorization of 2015. These three revisions further support school children nationwide, which in turn supports the interests of all Americans.

- 1) Significantly **invest** in farm economies and children by **increasing the USDA food dollars spent** by school districts.
- 2) **Expand non-congregate feeding opportunities** to increase access to food.
- 3) Provide meals to children as part of their instructional day by implementing **"Free" Meals for All service**.

These requests are described in more detail below:

### 1) Increase "the USDA Food "Commodity" Dollars Invested

Each year the United States Department of Agriculture apportions commodity dollars to School Food Authorities (SFA), based on the number of lunches served the prior year. Currently, the USDA allocates \$0.2475 for every lunch served during the previous school year. The Alliance

requests the commodity allocation formula be increased by \$0.50 cents to a total of \$0.75 per lunch served in the previous year. This increase will align the food costs of the program with many private schools who invest more in their food programs. Private schools in our districts, which are not part of the USDA meals program, spend an average of \$3.72 for food at lunch, as opposed to our average of \$1.20.

This increased allocation of USDA Foods can be spent on ALL types of meals offered by a SFA and will continue to stimulate American businesses by allowing school districts to purchase additional and improved varieties of foods for our children. For example, the additional funding would allow the SFAs to purchase more whole muscle meat products and less chopped and formed products. Other opportunities include moving from “difficult to eat” whole fruits, such as oranges to “easy to eat” precut oranges and clementines, both student favorites that are cost prohibitive to offer regularly. Increased funding for USDA foods would allow SFA’s to expand and stimulate our local and national economy thorough the purchase of more local and regional foods.

In conjunction with this increase, the Alliance supports greater flexibility in how commodity dollars are spent by SFAs. School Food Authorities should be able to purchase USDA foods, use raw commodities in processed items and allow for other appropriate ways to purchase USDA foods (similar to the fresh fruit and vegetable local procurement pilot being conducted today). The processing and tracking of commodity products is a drain on limited school district resources. Streamlining the process for allocation would allow for increased flexibility in spending so districts can determine the most efficient manner for procuring USDA foods.

## 2) Expand Non-Congregate Feeding Opportunities

Under current regulations, children must eat their meals on the premises of the sites where they are served in a supervised setting. This is commonly known as the "congregate feeding requirement". We are champions of both food safety and congregate meals but we believe that the congregate feeding requirement reduces access in some cases and nor is not the only way to serve meals safely, nor is it the only way children consume meals. Updating the congregate feeding requirement would allow more children to access wholesome, nutritious and safe meals easily.

The Alliance proposes legislative changes to give SFAs the ability to pilot non-congregate feeding programs during this reauthorization providing children with the ability to receive a meal regardless of where it would be consumed. During the pilot, non-congregate meals would be offered during all types of meal programs (breakfast, lunch, afterschool and summer meals).

It is our stance that this will demonstrate that by expanding non congregate feeding opportunities more meals can reach children who have limited access to nutritious meals at home. Studies have shown that children living in low-income households eat healthier meals provided by school than from outside of school. Therefore, making the meals easy to access, for all children will result in more nutritious food consumption. In regards to promoting and ensuring food safety, School Food Authorities will be responsible for noting the time of service of the meal and providing information to children as to when the meal should be consumed. We suggest engaging a third party evaluator to determine if the meals are being received by high need children.

### 3) “Free” Meals for All

As the Urban School Food Alliance, we aim to change the image of school meals. In addition to serving healthy and delicious food, we believe that school food authorities could play a pivotal role in improving the food culture and the food system in our country. While in school, children are constantly learning and we believe that we can offer them important lessons through the food they eat.

To do so, the Urban School Food Alliance believes that all American school children should be able to receive free meals while in school. In our public schools, we do not give free textbooks to children below the poverty line while requiring their wealthier classmates to purchase the books. We do not require wealthier children to pay an extra allotment for their teacher’s salary while giving a free teacher to the lower income children. Similarly, if you are one of our children, you should be able to receive free meals so that the experience with food becomes the lesson and the menu becomes the curriculum. This would include all meals served to school children during breakfast, lunch, snack and supper.

The USDA should provide free meals to all children in all schools and reimburse all meals served at the free eligibility rate. Currently, children from families with annual incomes at or below 130 percent (e.g. a family of 4 with an annual income <\$22,850) are eligible for free meals. Those with annual incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level (e.g. a family of 4 with an annual income between \$22,850 and \$44,123) are eligible for reduced-price meals. Children from families with annual incomes over 185 percent of poverty (e.g. a family of 4 with an annual income of > \$44,123) pay full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent. Local school food authorities set their own prices for full-price (paid) meals, and continue to operate their meal services as non-profit programs. Since all meals offered in school support the academic success of our children, we propose the USDA should waive the collection of funds from the children who pay for meals and allow them to receive the meal as part of their school day. All meals would be reimbursed at the “free” meal rate.

## Conclusion:

The Alliance proposes that Congress consider these three important improvements to the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act in order to elevate the meal experience for our nation's children each day that they attend school. Making these changes will lead to better participation in the meal programs and sets the stage for our meal programs to become a model for the world to point to.

As stated we propose that Congress:

- 1) Significantly **invest** in farm economies and children by **increasing the USDA food dollars spent** by school districts.
- 2) **Expand non-congregate feeding opportunities** to increase access to food.
- 3) Provide meals to children as part of their instructional day by implementing ***"Free" Meals for All service.***

After the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP"), The National School Meals Program is the next largest food assistance program in the United States. Both programs need to be strengthened so that food insecurity, in the largest economy in the world, is eliminated. Strengthening the School Meals Program and SNAP directly supports the American economy and will lead to a healthy population.