



April 18, 2016

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman
House Education and The Workforce
Committee
2439 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chairman
House Education and The Workforce
Committee
1201 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kline and Scott:

RE: California's Education Priorities –School Nutrition Programs

We are writing on behalf of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and California School Boards Association (CSBA) to share our joint priorities and recommendations for reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 and the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act. Our members – over 17,000 school leader members and 5,000 locally-elected school board members -- share your desire to make sure that these important federal laws are updated and fine-tuned to better meet the needs of the more than 6.2 million students served by public schools throughout our state.

Every school day, in every community of our state, school staff carry out the important duty of providing students with nutritious meals and snacks, opportunities for physical activity, and safe and supportive learning environments. The National School Lunch and National School Breakfast Programs have long played an important role in these efforts. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 put in place a number of program improvements. Among them, we commend and urge Congress to maintain, through reauthorization, the following:

- **Expanded access.** The simplification of the direct certification process, the automatic certification of foster children, and the establishment of community eligibility have enabled us to serve more students with nutrition needs and, at the same time, have lessened the application and enrollment burdens put on school staff and parents.
- **Equity in school lunch pricing.** The Act is helping schools and districts strengthen program transparency and efficiency, 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.
- **Promoting strong school policies.** The Act allows for local flexibility and community-level decision-making by requiring that sound nutrition policies be developed and implemented at the local level.

With the Senate Agriculture Committee's approval in January of the "Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016," and the recent release of a discussion draft by your committee, we are writing to underscore the need for a strong bipartisan agreement that helps state and local leaders ensure children are able to be productive students, with a strong focus on their best interests. This reauthorization has presented

an important opportunity to build on the positive changes that have occurred and to ensure that federal law appropriately addresses shortcomings in current law and policy.

Many of the most significant challenges our members have faced in implementing the Act stem from the establishment of national nutrition standards. There is inherent tension in the desire to have a national baseline when the needs and contexts of communities are so different - that is why flexibility for each state is vital, along with federal regulations that serve the needs of every student. Above all, we ask you to ensure through reauthorization that the school meal programs remain valuable tools for addressing child nutrition while attending to the unintended consequences of federal overreach.

Specifically, we recommend the following:

- 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.
- Require targets for sodium level reductions and whole grain offerings that reflect best practice as well as the lessons learned about regional food preferences, reasonable transition timelines, and other challenges.
- Encourage the use of health experts and scientists in making healthy food decisions, in addition to other stakeholders (including school leaders, school boards, LEA administrators and school food nutrition directors), while allowing local boards and district leaders some flexibility in how they ensure sound decision making and regular reviews of policies.
- Maintain the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), serving all students free meals in high poverty schools or districts, at the 40% threshold, instead of raising the threshold to 60%. The complexity of current regulations and program requirements often hinder local efforts to serve our most needy students. Further, an increase in the threshold would result in more administrative burden and hours spent to ensure the program continues.
- Expand efforts to ensure the financial sustainability of school meal programs, including through further increases in the per meal reimbursement rate. We join the School Nutrition Association in calling for at least a minimum of a 35 cent increase in the reimbursement rate. We also support the proposed 2-cent increase in reimbursement rate for breakfast for the school year 2017-2018 which will help this program continue and will reflect rising food costs.
- Focus fraud and waste reduction efforts on strengthening existing direct certification requirements. Reject any proposals that would increase the number or percentage of school meal applications required to be verified by school administrators. Any increase in the verification requirement would significantly increase the program administrative burden and divert program resources from where they are most needed – providing nutritious meals to eligible students, while doing little to improve the accuracy of certification efforts.
- Help schools and districts 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, limiting the ability of schools to make these and other healthy food options available to students throughout the school day.

Because child nutrition outside of the school day is also of critical importance, we support efforts to strengthen the Child and Adult Food Care Program and the Summer Food Service Program for Children. Specifically, we support proposals to expand the programs to cover three meals per day and reducing the eligibility test to 40 percent of residents living below the poverty line for the Child and Adult Food Care Program.

Thank you for carefully considering our recommendations. We would be pleased to respond to any questions you or your staff may have about these ideas.

Sincerely,



Erika K. Hoffman
Legislative Advocate
California School Boards Association



Laura Preston
Legislative Advocate
Association of California School Administrators