

# Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior, and School Nutrition Association: Comprehensive Nutrition Programs and Services in Schools

Dayle Hayes, MS, RD<sup>1</sup>; Isobel R. Contento, PhD<sup>2</sup>; Carol Weekly, RDN, SNS<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

It is the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, School Nutrition Association, and Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior that comprehensive, integrated nutrition programs in preschool through high school are essential to improve the health, nutritional status, and academic performance of our nation's children. Through the continued use of multidisciplinary teams, local school needs will be better identified and addressed within updated wellness policies. Updated nutrition standards are providing students with a wider variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while limiting sodium, calories, and saturated fat. Millions of students enjoy school meals every day in the US, with the majority of these served to children who are eligible for free and reduced-priced meals. To maximize impact, the Academy, School Nutrition Association, and Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior recommend specific strategies in the following key areas: food and nutrition services available throughout the school campus, nutrition initiatives such as farm to school and school gardens, wellness policies, nutrition education and promotion, food and beverage marketing at school, and consideration of roles and responsibilities. (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2018;50:433–439.)

**Position Statement:** It is the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, School Nutrition Association, and Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior that comprehensive, integrated nutrition programs in preschool through high school are essential to improve the health, nutritional status, and academic performance of our nation's children. To maximize impact, the Academy, School Nutrition Association, and Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior recommend specific strategies in the following key areas: food and nutrition services available throughout the school campus; nutrition initiatives such as farm to school and school gardens; wellness policies; nutrition education and promotion; food and beverage marketing at school; and consideration of roles and responsibilities.

Millions of students enjoy school meals every day in the United States, with the majority of these served to children from low-income families who are eligible for free and reduced-priced meals. The previous joint paper of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, School Nutrition Association (SNA), and Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB)<sup>1</sup> was published before the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA). The implementation of HHFKA between 2012 and 2016 has resulted in significant changes in nearly every aspect of school nutrition programs, which are explored in this current joint position paper and in greater detail in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics practice paper on comprehensive nutrition programs and services in schools.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nutrition for the Future, Inc, Billings, MT

<sup>2</sup>Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY

<sup>3</sup>Queen Creek Unified School District, Queen Creek, AZ

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<b>National School Lunch Program</b>	
Children participating daily	30,390,000
Total lunches served annually	5,052,000,000
Percent free	66.6%
Percent reduced-price	6.7%
Total after-school snacks served annually	211,000,000
<b>School Breakfast Program</b>	
Children participating daily	14,569,000
Total breakfasts served annually	2,448,000,000
Percent free or reduced-price	85.2%
<b>Summer Food Service Program</b>	
Total meals served annually	153,000,000

**Figure.** Annual summary of school food and nutrition service programs in the US. Adapted from reference 5 (data as of May 5, 2017 [FY 2016]; data are preliminary and subject to revision).

## MEAL PROGRAMS AVAILABLE PRESCHOOL THROUGH GRADE 12

The *National School Lunch Program* (NSLP), the *School Breakfast Program* (SBP), the *Child and Adult Care Food Program*, the *Summer Food Service Program*, the *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program*, and *After School Snack Program* are US Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs that are available in public, charter, and nonprofit private preschool through grade 12 schools.<sup>3</sup> These nutrition programs, administered by state education or agriculture agencies, are designed to provide nourishing meals and snacks to fuel students' minds and feed their bodies. Not all programs are available in all districts, and state budgets vary in their investments in nutrition programs.<sup>4</sup>

In 2016 an average of 30.4 million children per day participated in school lunch, and 14.6 million children participated in school breakfast.<sup>5</sup> The [Figure](#) shows annual summary data of school food and nutrition service programs in the US. The SBP has shown a steady increase in participation, but the gap between lunch and breakfast participation is still wide. Strategies that increase SBP participation include breakfast in the classroom, breakfast after the bell, and universal free breakfast programs. To participate in the *After School Snack Program*, sites must operate the NSLP and

sponsor or operate an after-school care program. Those snacks can be offered under either the NSLP or the *Child and Adult Care Food Program*. Operators are required to follow several different sets of regulations and guidance for the different USDA child nutrition programs.

Schools are responsible for providing high-quality meals that are appealing to students while meeting all federal regulations and nutrition standards. Although updated nutrition standards improved the nutrition quality of school meals, they also created some financial and acceptance challenges for some school districts and school food authorities.<sup>6</sup> According to the USDA's cost estimates of the regulations for food and labor in 2012, the updated regulations added an estimated 10 cents to the cost of preparing every school lunch and 27 cents for every breakfast.<sup>7</sup> The 2010 HHFKA provided only an additional reimbursement of 6 cents per lunch to school districts that were certified to be in compliance with the 2012 meal patterns. Nearly 8 in 10 school district directors have reported the need to reduce staffing, defer or cancel equipment investments, and reduce reserve funds to offset financial losses since the 2012 standards were implemented.<sup>8</sup>

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools with an Identified Student Percentage over 40% to serve free breakfast and lunch to

all students. Identified students are those that are qualified to receive a meal at no cost through Direct Certification, including students certified as homeless, runaway, migrant, foster, children enrolled in a federally funded *Head Start* program, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*, or *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*, and nonapplicant students approved by the local education agency (LEA). An evaluation of participating LEAs found that they were satisfied and likely to continue using the CEP; the CEP appeared to increase NSLP and SBP participation.<sup>9</sup> As of September, 2014, enrollment at CEP schools was 6,408,507.<sup>10</sup>

## STANDARDS AND MEAL PATTERNS FOR REIMBURSABLE MEALS

The 2010 HHFKA required the USDA to update nutrition standards for the first time in 15 years. The updated regulations, based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and issued by the USDA in 2012 after an extensive comment process, included meal patterns with a wider variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains while limiting sodium, calories, and saturated fat. The nutrition standards included phases for implementation of new breakfast requirements, sodium targets, and inclusion of whole grain-rich menu items.<sup>7</sup> The HHFKA required food-based menu planning and 5 vegetable subgroups that include dark green, red/orange, starchy, legumes, and other vegetables each week.

Since implementation of the USDA's 2012 Nutrition Standards for School Meals, districts have made significant progress in offering whole grains,  $\geq 2$  vegetables, and fresh fruit each day, using low-sodium canned vegetables, and reducing overall sodium content of meals.<sup>11</sup> Studies have shown some positive effects in students' nutrient intake after implementation of the 2012 nutrition standards.<sup>12,13</sup> Concerns have remained about the acceptability of some whole-grain products, the planned further reductions in sodium levels, and the availability of 1% flavored milk. On November 29, 2017, the Secretary of the USDA issued an interim final rule,

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