

Oklahoma's ESSA Draft: Addressing Hunger as an Academic Intervention

Oklahoma's most recent draft of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan takes a proactive approach towards increasing participation in the federal school, summer, and afterschool nutrition programs. Hunger Free Oklahoma actively engaged and provided feedback to the Oklahoma State Department of Education and are credited for advocating for language that includes best practices for increasing access to the child nutrition programs.

Oklahoma's plan includes "Initiatives," which are action steps to address students' individual needs. The first is increasing participation in the federal nutrition programs and another is to leverage out-of-school time to address food insecurity among students (p. 15). Oklahoma's plan repeatedly acknowledges its high rates of food insecurity and the importance of nutrition in order for students to succeed. By highlighting key strategies and setting goals to expand access to the child nutrition programs, Oklahoma's plan serves as a model for other states that want to prioritize increasing participation in the various child nutrition programs as a broader strategy to improve student outcomes.

- The **Community Eligibility Provision** allows high-needs schools to offer school meals at no cost to all students and dramatically increases student participation in school breakfast and lunch. Oklahoma has set a goal that 100 Local Education Agencies (LEA) will operate community eligibility by 2025 (p. 20).
- **Direct certification** allows states to qualify students for free school meals through data matching instead of collecting school meal applications if they live in a household that participates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or if they are homeless, migrant, in foster care, or in head start. Oklahoma's plan focuses on improving direct certification for SNAP and FDPIR. This will improve student participation in school meals and increase the number of LEAs and schools that are eligible for, and participating in, community eligibility (p. 20).
- The **School Breakfast Program** provides the nutrition students need to start the day ready to learn. Models, such as breakfast in the classroom, increase school breakfast participation. Oklahoma has set a goal to increase participation by 25 percent by 2025 (p. 21).
- The **Summer Food Service Program** provides funding to serve free meals at sites in low-income communities across the state. Oklahoma's plan prioritizes increasing access in rural areas and sets a goal of increasing participation by 10 percent by 2025 (p. 21).
- **Afterschool Meals** ensure student access to nutritious meals during out-of-school educational and enrichment programming. Oklahoma's long-term goal is to increase participation by raising awareness of this program through professional development (p. 21).

Underperforming schools that do not meet state standards within three years are required to implement evidence-based interventions to support academic achievement. These schools will be required to implement child nutrition programs that increase participation in school meals. These schools will also be required to operate five-day school weeks. Many schools in Oklahoma operate four-day school weeks, meaning longer weekends, which limits access to school breakfast and lunch and often afterschool meals (p. 49).

Oklahoma's ESSA plan is currently going through a public comment period. The state anticipates that the governor will review the plan in August 2017 in order to submit it by September 2017. For more information on the status, visit [Oklahoma's ESSA website](#).