

December 22, 2020

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Vice President-Elect Kamala D. Harris
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris,

We, the 64 undersigned national organizations and associations, write urging you to work with Congress and take every administrative step possible to establish Universal School Meals. This would ensure that every child in the U.S. has access to the nutritious breakfast and lunch at school that can help support their academic success. School meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance, and behavior.

Universal School Meals would allow school breakfast and lunch to be offered at no charge to all children. Currently, only students from homes with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line are eligible for free school meals. Many struggling families do not qualify for free school meals, and school meals fees create a barrier to participation. Offering free meals to all students eliminates the cost barrier for children whose families' income is near the cutoff line to receive free school meals. And by having every student participate in school meals, the stigma some children fear of being labeled "poor" by their classmates is eliminated.

Offering meals at no charge also would be a tremendous support to schools across the country. Schools would no longer have the cost of collecting and processing school meals applications and completing other paperwork. Schools would no longer struggle with collecting unpaid school meal fees from families or foot the bill for meals served when children do not have money to pay. Removing this dynamic between families and schools allows school nutrition staff to focus on preparing and serving healthy meals to children, and it eliminates a significant financial burden for school districts and families.

Recent studies reaffirm that access to nutritious meals in school increases the health and educational outcomes for our nation's children. Investing in these programs to ensure all children — regardless of income — can access healthy meals year-round would help ensure that every child is ready to learn and thrive.

The current pandemic has highlighted the critical role that school meals play for children, particularly those from low-income households and will be an important educational and health support as the nation recovers from the pandemic. Thank you for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to ensure that every child in this country receives the healthy food they need to learn and grow.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Commodity Distribution Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
American School Health Association
American Society for Nutrition
Bread for the World
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Chef Ann Foundation
Children's Defense Fund
Children's HealthWatch
Coalition on Human Needs
Congressional Hunger Center
E-RoadMap Corporation
Environmental Working Group
First Focus on Children
Food Research & Action Center
FoodCorps
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Girls Inc.
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities
Hispanic Federation
Hunger Free America
Intertribal Agriculture Council
Islamic Relief USA
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
Life Time Foundation
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
MomsRising
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Community Action Partnership
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Education Association
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National Farm to School Network
National Immigration Law Center

National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Partnership for America's Children
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
RESULTS
School Nutrition Association
SchoolHouse Connection
SERCAP
Student Voice
The Forum for Youth Investment
UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity
UnidosUS
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Fresh Produce Association
Urban School Food Alliance
US Conference of Mayors
ZERO TO THREE