

Congress Must Protect and Strengthen the Federal Child Nutrition Programs

The National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Summer Food Service Program, Summer EBT, Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) ensure that children have reliable access to nutritious meals throughout the year, helping them grow, succeed in school, and reach their full potential. For many families, these programs are a critical lifeline that reduces hunger and eases financial strain. Strengthening these programs is not only an investment in children's futures but also in the nation's long-term health, educational success, and economic stability.

» Urge the Trump Administration and Congress to Fully Fund WIC

WIC is the nation's premier preventive public health nutrition program, supporting nearly 7 million low-income mothers and young children who have or are at risk for developing nutrition-related diseases and disorders. The White House must provide an additional \$300 million in emergency funding to WIC to continue operating in early November and avoid major disruptions in benefits for women, infants, and young children.

Congress must fully fund WIC for fiscal year 2026 at the Senate's \$8.2 billion funding level. This funding is expected to ensure that all those who apply can participate, and also preserves the WIC Cash Value Benefit (CVB) that provides fruits and vegetables for WIC participants.

» Protect the Community Eligibility Provision

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools to offer school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge. It is critical to ensuring that every student is hunger-free and ready to get the most out of their school day. When students have access to free meals at school, families have lower grocery bills and more money in their household budgets to help make ends meet. It also reduces the administrative burden on schools, allowing them to focus on serving nutritious and appealing meals instead of processing paperwork.

Losing any of these current policies would hurt school meal operations. Members of Congress must weigh in with their leadership to codify these no-cost items in any end-of-year spending bill, so CEP continues to best serve school districts and families.

There are **FOUR** components that are key to CEP and supporting school meal operations and access including:

- ▶ **A MULTIPLIER OF AT LEAST 1.6.** This number is multiplied by the percentage of students that are directly certified for free school meals to determine the financial reimbursement schools receive for the meals they serve. Lowering it would make it harder for schools to run a financially viable meal program.
- ▶ **A SCHOOL ELIGIBILITY THRESHOLD OF 25 PERCENT IDENTIFIED STUDENT PERCENTAGE (ISP).** This allows high-poverty schools, where at least one in four students can be directly certified for free school meals, to participate in CEP. The ISP is a subset of total poverty within a school. This ISP also allows local communities to make the decision to invest in their school nutrition programs and support the health and well-being of all their students.
- ▶ **SCHOOL GROUPING.** School districts know best how to group schools together to run the most efficient school meal operations. Losing this flexibility would increase administrative burdens and operational complexities.
- ▶ **DIRECTLY CERTIFYING STUDENTS FOR FREE MEALS WITH MEDICAID AND INCOME DATA.** Medicaid direct certification is critical to supporting program integrity and ensuring that eligible students are certified for free and reduced-price school meals. Forty-four states use this data to certify their students for subsidized school meals, most through a demonstration project. Losing this option would increase paperwork for schools and harm program integrity.