

## What is the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act?

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act authorizes all of the federal school meal and child nutrition programs. The child nutrition programs touch millions of children each day and improve educational achievement, economic security, nutrition, and health.

Although most of the programs are permanently authorized, every five years or so, Congress reviews the laws governing these programs through the reauthorization process. The current law, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-296), expired on September 30, 2015. Congress includes the funding levels to maintain the programs through the annual appropriations process, which allows the child nutrition programs that are not permanently authorized, such as the Summer Food Service Program, to continue operations when a reauthorization is delayed.

Reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen the child nutrition programs so that they better meet the needs of the nation's children in pre-school, school-based, and out-of-school time settings.

The reauthorization amends two existing statutes: the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry S. Truman

in 1946, created the National School Lunch Program “as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children.” Twenty years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 into law, which established and authorized the School Breakfast Program. Not long after, programs — such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and other child nutrition programs — were added to the National School Lunch Act.

## Which Child Nutrition Programs are up for Review?

- The **School Breakfast Program** and **National School Lunch Program** both guarantee that millions of low-income children receive a healthy breakfast and lunch during their school day. All children can participate in the programs, but low-income children are certified to receive free or reduced-price school meals. The School Breakfast Program is underutilized, reaching just over half of the low-income children who participate in school lunch.
- The **Child and Adult Care Food Program** reimburses child care centers, Head Start Programs, family child care homes, homeless shelters, and afterschool programs for snacks and meals served to children. Generally, children under the age of 12, as well as certain adults living with disabilities, can participate, but homeless shelters and afterschool programs can serve children 18 and under.
- The **Summer Food Service Program** helps ensure that children (18 and under) who depend on school lunch and breakfast during the school year still have access to free, nutritious meals and snacks during the summer when school is out. The program provides reimbursements to schools, local government agencies, and private nonprofit organizations that serve free meals and snacks to children at sites located in low-income areas or that serve primarily low-income children.
- The **Afterschool Meal Program** (available through the Child and Adult Care Food Program) bridges the hunger gap for children who participate in afterschool programs. The program provides federal funds to private nonprofit and public organizations (including schools) so they can serve nutritious meals (and snacks) at afterschool programs located in low-income areas.
- The **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to health care to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to age 5. The monthly WIC food package is a combination of foods that improve nutrition for pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and young children.

- The **WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program** issues coupons to WIC recipients that can be used to purchase fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables at participating local farmers' markets.

- The **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** provides fresh fruit and vegetable snacks to children during the school day. Only elementary schools in which at least 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals can apply to participate in the program.

- The **Special Milk Program** supports serving milk to children in schools and child care institutions that do not participate in other nutrition programs.

## Who in Congress is Responsible for Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

In the House of Representatives, the Education and Labor's Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services has jurisdiction over Child Nutrition Reauthorization. In the Senate, the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry's Subcommittee on Nutrition, Agriculture Research, and Specialty Crops has jurisdiction over the reauthorization.

## Who Benefits From Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

Millions of children, especially low-income children, benefit from the healthy food provided by the child nutrition programs. Schools, afterschool and summer programs, and child care providers also benefit from the valuable funding that helps cover the costs of providing nutritious food to hungry children.

- Food insecurity and the need for the child nutrition programs have only grown during the pandemic. According to Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, in January 2021, an estimated 27.8 percent of adults living with children experienced food insecurity.

- In 2019, 10.5 million children, or 14.4 percent of all children under age 18, lived in poverty.

- On an average day during the 2019–2020 school year (from September through February), 12.6 million low-income children received a free or reduced-price school breakfast and 21.6 million low-income children received a free or reduced-price school lunch.

- In July 2019, 2.8 million low-income children received a summer meal.

- In fiscal year (FY) 2020, 6.3 million women, infants, and children participated in WIC.

- In FY 2019, 1.6 million WIC participants received benefits from the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

- In FY 2020, 4 million children were served 1.5 billion healthy meals and snacks through the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

## What Happened in the Last Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 was signed into law on December 2, 2010. The legislation expanded the availability of nutritious meals to more children in school, in out-of-school time programs, and in child care. It also contained a number of provisions to improve the nutritional quality of meals served in schools and preschool settings, it simplified the application process for children and their parents, and it also made "competitive foods" offered or sold in schools more nutritious.

Visit FRAC's [Child Nutrition Reauthorization](#) page for the latest on the current Child Nutrition Reauthorization.