

# School Nutrition: A Link to Classroom Success

Providing nourishing food at school has been a priority for educators since the 1800's. Even then, those involved in educating children connected food and success in the classroom. A variety of programs popped up throughout the United States in both urban and rural schools as more and more families sent children to be educated. These initiatives have been recognized throughout the decades and in 1939 Gordon Gunderson, a Wisconsin native, was elected to support USDA distribution of commodities and implement school meals during World War II.

It was the vast number of malnourished young men that could not meet the requirements of the draft during World War II that pushed Congress to establish the National School Lunch Act. The preamble includes, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security to safe guard the health and well-being of the Nation's children ... to establish a national school lunch program".

In 1969, President Nixon hosted a White House Conference on Nutrition and spoke passionately about the hunger issues throughout America and the role of school meals in erasing hunger. "All of us poor and non-poor alike, must be reminded that a proper diet is a basic determinant of good health".

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, 2010 was the first major change in school meals in over 30 years, improving both access to meals as well as the nutritional quality of meals required. As the new Congress and Administration begins working in our nation's capital it is critical to remember to keep school meals intact.

1. School meals must stay as a per meal reimbursement so schools can respond to the needs of children in their individual community. Block grants would restrict that ability to respond.
2. A national program should be kept intact to ensure that ALL children throughout the United States have the opportunity to access healthy, tasty food. The quality of a school meal should not depend on where you live in the country.
3. Better understanding Community Eligibility Provision will show that this is a partnership between a local school district and the federal government. It does not give all children free meals. Federal reimbursement is only for those qualified for free or reduced meals. The other funding comes from the local district. This provision takes all stigma away from school meals and saves district money by drastically reducing paperwork.
4. As history has shown, school meals have always been and should continue to be considered as an essential tool for classroom success. Income does not decide whether a child receives a bus ride or a text book, neither should it decide whether a child deserves to eat or not.

For the wealthiest country in the world, actually presenting children with healthy food in their schools should not become a political battlefield. We must do what is right for our nation's children and prepare them to be successful in the classroom.

