

Block Grant Talking Points

Calling your Congressman to express opposition to block grants?

Here's a sample script:

Hi – I'm a constituent and a school nutrition professional. I am calling to urge Senator/Representative xxx to oppose any effort to block grant school meal programs. Block grants strip school meal programs of critical funding and threaten student access to healthy meals. Block grants void all federal nutrition standards and eligibility mandates for free and reduced price meals. I hope Senator/Representative xxx will stand up for students! Congress must pass a bipartisan child nutrition reauthorization bill that protects school meal programs.

Below are more detailed talking points:

- I oppose any effort to block grant school meal programs.
- Block grants threaten student access to healthy meals by cutting funding and eliminating federal nutrition standards for school meals.
- Block grant funding cuts will compromise the quality of meals for all students.
 - o Schools will be forced to raise meal prices on families or cut into education funds to cover food service losses.
- By capping funding annually, block grants prevent schools from serving more students when local economic downturns or rising enrollment increase demand for school meals. Children in need could lose access to free and reduced price school meals.
- For 70 years, the federal government has guaranteed that America's students have consistent access to the nutritious meals they need to succeed at school. Block grants will break that promise.
- Congress must come together to pass a bipartisan Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill that protects school meal programs for the students they serve.



Block Grant FAQs

What is a block grant and how does it differ from current school meal funding?

Block grants provide states a fixed amount of federal funding, based on a formula, to implement a designated program. Block grants offer states broad latitude over how to manage the program with limited federal oversight and requirements. Currently, the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs are entitlements, which means meal programs that comply with regulations are “entitled” to federal reimbursements for meals served. Funding is open-ended and fluctuates annually with the number of meals served. When student meal participation increases, federal funding rises to help meal programs cover the cost. Fixed-sum block grants do not permit an increase in funding to meet demand.

Why are we talking about block grants?

Congress will be debating Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation.

Why is the block grant pilot bad for school meal programs and students?

Participating states could abandon federal nutrition standards and other requirements that ensure uniformity and consistency in school meal programs nationwide. States could set their own rules on student eligibility for free and reduced price meals, limiting access for poor children. States would be required to only serve one “affordable” meal a day to students, threatening recent progress in expanding student access to healthy school breakfasts.

School meal programs in participating states would lose critical funds under the block grant. States would lose the additional six cents per lunch reimbursement they earned under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act and the approximately 29 cent reimbursement for meals served to full price students.

In a September 2015 report, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) warned that “block grants that are smaller than the funding that current legislation would provide would probably eliminate access to nutrition programs for some children and reduce it for others. Such grants would also leave the programs unable to respond automatically to economic downturns.”

Funding provided under the block grant would remain static for the entirety of the grant cycle. No additional funding is available if the number of students in need of free or reduced price meals rises due to unexpected increases in enrollment or local lay-offs. Additionally, block grants would not be adjusted for inflation, so funding would not keep pace with rising food and labor costs.

What lessons have we learned from existing block grants?

A Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) analysis of 13 major housing, health, and social services block-grant programs reveals that combined funding for the programs declined by 26 percent - or \$13 billion in 2016 dollars - from 2000 to 2016. Notably, when adjusted for inflation, funding under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant has plummeted by 32 percent, despite population growth. In summary, the CBPP report states, “History shows that when social programs are merged into (or created as) broad block grants, funding typically contracts - often sharply - in subsequent years and decades, with the reductions growing over time.”

What can I do to help protect school meal programs and the students they serve?

Contact your Members of Congress to let them know you oppose any school meal block grant proposal. Here are two ways to take action:

1. Pick up the phone and call your Senators and Representatives to ensure your voice is heard on this important issue.
2. Urge your colleagues and school district officials to take action too. SNA’s Action Alert system is not just for SNA members – anyone passionate about protecting school meals can participate.