



A Voices for America's Children Issue Brief

Feed Today, Lead Tomorrow: End Child Hunger Now!

Child Nutrition Reauthorization

This year, Congress will reauthorize federal school meal and child nutrition programs. The reauthorization includes several child and adult feeding programs that touch infants, toddlers, school-aged children and older youth. Referred to collectively as Child Nutrition Reauthorization, the effort will include all federal school meal and child nutrition programs.

Seventeen million children, one in four, don't know where their next meal is coming from. The programs included in the child nutrition reauthorization ensure nourishing meals for needy children, which is fundamental to fostering healthy, strong and smart children. Polling data indicate that the public supports this aim with 83 percent of adults surveyed support expanding the Child Nutrition Act to more children and providing healthier food.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 10 million children participate in the school breakfast program and 30 million children receive lunch through the school lunch program; oftentimes the only nutritious foods the poorest children can count on are these subsidized school meals. These programs, along with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Programs for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program and

What federal programs are included in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act authorizes all federal school meal and nutrition programs.

A reauthorization of the child nutrition programs can reduce hunger and food insecurity in America while reducing childhood overweight and obesity and improving child health.

The programs in the reauthorization include the following:

- National School Lunch Program
- School Breakfast Program
- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Summer Food Service Program
- Afterschool Snack and Meal Program
- Supplemental Nutrition Programs for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Special Milk Program

These programs touch millions of children each day and provide access to healthy meals, increased in food security and better preparation for learning and activity.

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Importance of Federal Nutrition Programs as a Food Delivery System

A robust reauthorization of federal nutrition programs would strengthen the existing food delivery system by reaching millions of children across age and setting. In the richest country on the planet, children should not be unsure of their next meal; yet more than 500,000 children sometimes face outright hunger. Child nutrition programs are facing a two-part challenge: rising rates of child hunger and obesity. Child nutrition reauthorization is critical to solving them both.

Meal programs like the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, and the Afterschool School Snack and Meal Program and others are the strongest part of the our nation's safety net and are vital resources in the fight to end child hunger.

The need for food assistance is growing as more families turn to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) as a way of keeping food on the table in the wake of a job loss or a cut in pay. From August 2008 to August 2009, SNAP participation grew by seven million people, with children making up half of the increase in participants, due largely to the impact of the recession. Although more children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals by being eligible for SNAP or meeting the income criteria, schools meals don't show the same sharp upward climb because they typically exchange data with their local SNAP office only once or twice a year. As a result, states are only slowly beginning to see upticks in the demand for school meals, and more children are likely to be eligible for school meals but are not being enrolled.

Principles to Guide the Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Voices for America's Children (Voices) supports the principles for the reauthorization of child nutrition programs adopted by the Child Nutrition Forum, a consortium of national organizations against hunger. In short, Voices believes:

- Good nutrition is critical for children's development and contributes to their ability to learn in school.
- Child nutrition programs play a critical role in helping children – especially those in low-income families – achieve access to quality nutrition, child care, educational opportunity and enrichment activities while improving their overall health, development and school achievement. Federal support for these programs has not always kept pace with children's need for these programs.

- A well-conceived, appropriately funded reauthorization bill can reduce hunger and food insecurity in America, help reduce the number of children who are overweight or obese, improve child nutrition and health, and enhance child development and school readiness.

Voices' Goals for Child Nutrition Reauthorization

President Obama included \$1 billion a year for the child nutrition reauthorization in his budget proposal for fiscal years 2010 and 2011; however, securing the funding is likely be an uphill battle in Congress given the current budget climate. But federally funded meal programs are a lifeline for children and families. Food programs are the remaining family support for thousands of households that lack a regular source of income, face exhausted unemployment compensation in some states, and live without adequate health care. These programs are the critical link.

In partnership with the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Voices' primary advocacy goals include a reauthorization that:

- Provides an at least \$1 billion for the child nutrition reauthorization above current spending levels;
- Increases access and participation in places where children gather, like school, child care centers and after-school locations;
- Removes administrative and other barriers to participation for children, parents and at food locations;
- Enhances nutrition quality by placing greater emphasis on healthy meals, which can be more expensive to provide, particularly in neighborhoods with limited or no access to sources of healthy food.