

Child Nutrition Forum/National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA) Joint Sign-On Statement for COVID-19 Recovery Priorities

The upcoming stimulus/recovery legislative vehicles provide an important opportunity to meet children's nutritional needs so that no child is hungry and all children have the nutrition they need to grow up healthy. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for and importance of strong nutrition policies that improve children's access to healthy meals to address health disparities exacerbated by this crisis. The Biden-Harris plan includes several provisions that will be critical to combating food and nutrition insecurity in the United States. The upcoming stimulus/recovery package is an opportunity to build on this work by including a strong Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program for children, as well as an extension of the child nutrition waivers and policies that have ensured broad access to nutritious meals.

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)

The P-EBT program has provided families with resources to purchase food to replace meals that they would have received through the child nutrition programs during normal times. The program is set to expire on September 30, 2021, and benefits cannot be provided during summer break, on weekends, or for school holidays. The upcoming stimulus/recovery packages offer the opportunity to extend and strengthen an EBT program for children that helps to ensure they have the nutrition they need when schools are closed. While the executive order for guidance to increase P-EBT benefits to include an additional snack is a critical need, there is much more that needs to be done to ensure access to good nutrition during the pandemic and beyond.

Child Nutrition Waivers

The nationwide child nutrition program waivers issued in 2020 have allowed the school meal programs to respond to the pandemic. Congress granted the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) this waiver authority through fiscal year 2021, but Congress should extend that waiver authority to allow the child nutrition programs to better meet the needs of struggling families through the next school year and beyond.

In addition, the waivers that allow schools and communities to offer meals at no charge through the Summer Nutrition Programs through June 30, 2021 highlight the importance and value of nutritious school meals for all. USDA should encourage schools to use the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program nutrition standards regardless of the program they operate. Schools should continue to document if they struggle to meet the standards due to COVID-19, and USDA must provide robust technical assistance to help schools address these challenges. By offering school meals at no charge and ensuring they remain nutritious, all children will be able to experience the health and academic benefits linked to participation in school meals. These waivers also ensure that schools have less administrative work and costs, and do not have to struggle with unpaid school meal fees. This approach should be extended to the next school year and beyond.

The health of students and their academic achievement are inextricably linked. College and career readiness and post-secondary academic success are associated with improved health and well-being as well as reduced risk for premature death, particularly among communities of color. Similarly, healthy students miss fewer days of school and are more able to learn, creating a feedback loop that can either position students to succeed or hold back their potential. We call upon the administration and Congress to include these provisions in the upcoming stimulus/recovery legislative vehicles to ensure that every child in this country receives the healthy food they need to learn and grow.

The joint statement was developed by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), and the American Heart Association. FRAC facilitates the Child Nutrition Forum, a diverse group of national organizations that urges Congress to make critical investments and improvements in Child Nutrition programs through the reauthorization process. CSPI leads the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, the largest nutrition coalition.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK)
Advocates for Better Children's Diets
African American Health Alliance
Alliance for a Healthier Generation
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Commodity Distribution Association
American Diabetes Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
Association of SNAP Nutrition Education Administrators
Bread for the World
Center for Ecoliteracy
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Science in the Public Interest
ChangeLab Solutions
Chef Ann Foundation
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition for Healthy School Food
Common Threads
Congressional Hunger Center
Consumer Federation of America
Environmental Working Group
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Family Centered Treatment Foundation
Feeding America
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
FoodCorps
FoodPlay Productions
Healthy Food America
Healthy Schools Campaign
Intertribal Agriculture Council
Islamic Relief USA
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Jump in for Healthy Kids
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy
LunchAssist
Migrant Legal Action Program
MomsRising
NAACP
National Action Against Obesity
National Action Network
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education (NASDME)
National Athletic Trainers' Association
National Council of Jewish Women
National Diaper Bank Network
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Education Association
National Farm to School Network
National PTA
National Recreation and Park Association
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
PFLAG National
Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
Pinnacle Prevention
Public Health Institute
RESULTS
Save the Children
Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)
School Nutrition Association
Slow Food USA
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Society of State Leaders of Health and Physical Education
The Forum for Youth Investment
The Jewish Federations of North America
UnidosUS
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Concerned Scientists
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Fresh Produce Association
Urban School Food Alliance
We All Rise
ZERO TO THREE