



## **CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES 2015**

### *Nourishing Children Beyond the School Day*

#### **PREVALANCE AND IMPACT OF CHILD HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES**

Households with children are far more likely to be food insecure (20 percent) than households without children (12 percent). Nearly 16 million American children are at risk of hunger nationwide. While hunger affects people of all ages, it is particularly harmful for children, for whom the repercussions of poor nutrition and hunger are more severe. The consequences of child hunger are broad and long-lasting. Food insecure children are more likely to experience:

- Learning and academic difficulties, reduced concentration, and lower test scores;
- School absenteeism and tardiness, making them 1.4 times more likely to repeat a grade;
- Poorer general health and one-third greater likelihood of a history of hospitalization.

#### **PROGRAMS TO COMBAT CHILD HUNGER**

Federal nutrition programs target low-income children at different ages and in different settings to reduce hunger and promote nutrition. WIC reaches children from birth to preschool, while school breakfast and lunch programs serve school-aged children. Food banks and other nonprofits operate summer, afterschool, and weekend programs to make sure children have nutritious food when school is out. Together these programs provide the food children need for healthy development and improve their long-term health and educational outcomes.

#### **STRENGTHENING CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS**

Child nutrition programs provide a critical safeguard against hunger, but they are only effective when they reach the children who need help. Many children are left without the nutrition they need when they are away from school. All too often, hungry kids lack access to food simply because a program is not offered in their community or they cannot access a program site, especially over the summer. Of the more than 21 million children who receive lunch assistance at school, about 16 percent receive food assistance on a typical summer day. When Congress writes a new child nutrition bill in 2015 we have an important opportunity to strengthen child nutrition programs, especially during out-of-school times when children are hard to reach.

#### **LEARNING ABOUT PROGRAMS FIRSTHAND**

There is no better way to learn about child hunger and see how child nutrition programs are working than to visit a child feeding program. The food banks in your state partner with schools and nonprofits to feed children after school, on weekends, and during the summer. Contact your food bank to arrange a visit and learn how programs could be strengthened to better meet your constituents' needs: [www.feedingamerica.org/foodbank](http://www.feedingamerica.org/foodbank)

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## CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen States' Ability to Reach Kids During the Summer**

Only 16 percent of low-income children who receive lunch assistance during the school year receive food assistance through a summer feeding site. We need a two-pronged strategy that makes it easier for communities to establish summer feeding sites in underserved areas and also gives states the flexibility to reach kids in alternative ways. Aligning the area eligibility requirement for summer feeding and educational programs would allow more learning programs to offer meals in the summer. Waiving the requirement that kids consume meals on site would enable communities to adopt innovative program models in areas where children lack access to a program site, such as sending meals home with children or giving families a grocery card to supplement their household food budget.

- **Streamline Regulations for Community Based Providers**

Currently, community based organizations like food banks and other nonprofits have to operate the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) after school and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) during the summer, even though they are serving the same kids, often at the same sites. Allowing nonprofits to operate one program year round, eliminating duplicative administrative processes, and aligning inconsistent program requirements would allow nonprofits to focus on hungry kids, not pushing paperwork.

- **Allow Flexibility to Better Reach Kids During Weekends**

Many low-income children struggle with hunger over the weekend but communities have limited ability to support them because of rigid program requirements that require kids to consume meals on-site. Without designated space to house a program or a busing system to transport children, the logistics are often too difficult to operate a weekend feeding site. By waiving the arbitrary on-site requirement, communities could innovate more effective ways to serve kids, such as sending needy children home from school with a backpack of nutritious meals or groceries on Friday afternoons.

- **Leverage Schools Beyond the School Day**

Schools provide children with nutritious breakfasts and lunches each school day, but school facilities can be leveraged to do much more. By opening up kitchens, libraries, or playgrounds to community nonprofits, many schools are important partners in feeding children after school, during the summer, and on weekends. Encouraging schools to make their facilities available to local nonprofits as a shared community resource would allow communities to nourish more children when school is out.

- **Strengthen Access and Quality in School Meal Programs and WIC**

Only half of children receiving lunch assistance also eat school breakfast, and more can be done to improve access to this most important meal of the day. We should continue to support schools as they strive to improve the nutritional quality of meals, providing support, equipment, and training to meet the guidelines set in the last child nutrition bill. Fewer than half of eligible children ages one to four participate in WIC, and we must ensure families' access to the important nutrition and health benefits that WIC provides.