



Healthy School Meals: What's At Stake?

Students are in danger of losing the only reliable meal they get each day.

Healthy school meals fuel learning, reduce stress on working families, and help ensure that all students across race, place, background, and ability can succeed. Critical programs—like the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), enabling schools and districts to serve free school meals to all students—are now at risk of being undermined or eliminated, putting student well-being and family stability at risk. **Some of these programs have already been eliminated.**

What We've Already Lost

In March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [canceled](#) the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program, the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program, and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program. This thoughtless decision halted more than \$1 billion in federal spending intended to help schools purchase foods from local farmers and ranchers, fund nutrition education, and include garden activities in their meal programs. **This is not just a policy shift; it's a rollback of fundamental support for our children.**

Now, some in Congress want to pull the rug out from under families. Children enrolled in SNAP or (in some cases) Medicaid are automatically eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Slashing these programs means more vulnerable families will go without critical health and nutrition support, and more children will go without school breakfast and lunch. Schools participating in the CEP could lose the ability to serve meals to all students at no cost, since eligibility is tied to the number of students enrolled in programs like SNAP and Medicaid. That means students who narrowly miss income thresholds, but currently benefit from CEP, may now be forced to pay—or worse, go hungry during the school day.

How Our Students and Educators Are Impacted

1. **Hungry students can't focus.** Educators report better attention, behavior, and learning when students are fed.
2. **Families already stretched thin suffer more.** Free meals reduce household food costs by up to 19 percent, yet many families just over the income eligibility threshold are left out.
3. **Students with disabilities are hit harder.** Cuts to nutrition support compound the loss of other specialized programs.
4. **Cafeteria workers, often women, lose hours and wages** when cooking and full staffing are replaced by prepackaged, underfunded models.

We Must Act Now

Fight back against the gutting of school nutrition programs.

- **Grow Participation in CEP:** Help your school [qualify for and enroll in CEP](#), which already benefits 40 percent of students nationwide. Every new school that joins the program strengthens the case for expanding access nationwide and makes it harder to dismantle.
- **Speak Out and Share Your Story:** School board meetings, public hearings, and community forums are all places where your voice can tip the balance. Your experience, or that of a student you know, is more powerful than any statistic.
- **Stay Up-to-Date on What's Happening and Act:** Visit the NEA [Action Center](#) and our friends, [National Farm to School Network](#) and [Food Research and Action Center](#) (FRAC).
- **Tell us how you acted** by emailing FutureofSchools@nea.org.

No student should be expected to succeed on an empty stomach. **Together, we can build a future where every child is fed, focused, and free to learn.**