



ACTION NEEDED:

Authorizing the USDA to Grant Nationwide Child Nutrition Waivers



The past two years of the COVID pandemic have given us one certainty: new challenges can, and will, arise at any time. Yet, even during these chaotic times, schools and local organizations have continued to make sure kids get the healthy food and nutrition they need.

It hasn't been easy. But early in the pandemic, Congress gave the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the authority to issue national child nutrition waivers that made it possible for schools and local organizations to adapt their nutrition programs so they could still reach kids with the food they need. As a result, schools and other organizations were able to keep serving meals to kids. But this authority expires on June 30.

Right now, schools and community organizations are working to establish sites to serve summer meals, create budgets, place food orders, coordinate and train their staff, and alert families in need about how and where to find meal programs. At the same time, challenges like new COVID variants, ongoing economic aftershocks, and global supply chain issues have forced schools and local organizations to have to adapt their programs at a moment's notice.

Allowing the USDA's waiver authority to expire along with the current waivers on June 30 will make it much harder for schools respond to new challenges in real time. The USDA must continue to have the ability to grant waivers to help schools budget and plan more effectively as they transition back to more normal operations.

Acting now ensures that school districts and local organizations have the tools and time they need to adapt, plan and budget. For kids to continue to get the healthy food they need, Congress must authorize USDA to grant nationwide child nutrition waivers through the 2022-2023 school year.



How Nationwide Nutrition Waivers Help Feed Kids

The nationwide child nutrition waivers allow schools and community organizations to adapt the way they serve meals to children, allowing them to be flexible and responsive in the aftermath of the pandemic.

For example:

- The child nutrition waivers give schools more flexibility on when they can serve meals, which is important to ensure less frequent contact and exposure for kids and families during times of social distancing;
- They help schools cut through red tape and streamline the serving process, alleviating administrative burdens at a time when many school programs are understaffed;
- When needed, waivers allow for families and children to pick up meals to take home through a grab-and-go model or allow for meals to be dropped off at a child's home;
- And they allow schools more flexibility over challenges caused by supply chain issues.

Authorizing the USDA to grant waivers through the 2022-2023 school year allows school districts and local organizations to continue safely and effectively feeding kids while managing through current challenges and preparing to transition to normal operations.

Notes From The Frontlines

“Now is the time to extend USDA waivers. Budget planning for the 2022-2023 school year is in progress in the Sioux Falls School District and in schools across the nation. Extending the waivers now will help school districts efficiently budget for staffing and ongoing supply chain concerns in order to meet guidelines and properly procure food and supplies.”

Gay Anderson
Child Nutrition Coordinator
Sioux Falls School District, South Dakota

“We're still in a pandemic and school changes day to day or sometimes twice in a day. When we're pivoting to keep schools safe, the waivers allow us to adapt to almost any scenario. We need the reassurance and confidence to make quick decisions and work alongside school administrators to develop a plan. Without knowing about the waivers for next year, we cannot work together right now.”

Frances Montoya-Gatewood
Director of Food Services
Vaughn Next Century Learning Center,
California

To hear more from school nutrition professionals about the importance of school nutrition waivers, visit <https://nokidhungry.org/waiverquotes>

About No Kid Hungry

No child should go hungry in America. But in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, 1 in 6 kids could face hunger this year. No Kid Hungry is working to end childhood hunger by helping launch and improve programs that give all kids the healthy food they need to thrive. This is a problem we know how to solve. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization committed to ending hunger and poverty. Learn more at NoKidHungry.org.