



Florida School Nutrition Association 2023 Position Paper

As of March 24, 2023

FSNA Mission

To advance child nutrition programs that promote wellness and academic success, while promoting leadership development opportunities to members.

About the School Nutrition Program

The school nutrition program in Florida is federally and state funded and consists of the breakfast, lunch, and snack/supper programs. Public, charter and non-profit private schools can participate to provide great tasting, nutritious, low cost or free meals to children on school days. Florida is third in the nation in school meal participation and meals served. The nutrition programs endured a changing landscape for procurement & distribution of food to schools, staffing issues, and child participation, during the pandemic. There are significant on-going challenges:

- Decreased participation as a result of the discontinuation of serving meals at no charge. This has resulted in children not able to afford the meals and leaving school hungry and/or accruing meal debt.
- Insufficient USDA reimbursement for increased costs due to labor and supply chain shortages. A recent USDA study showed that the full cost of producing school meals exceeds reimbursement by an average of 19 percent.ⁱ

Current FSNA Initiatives

1. Implement a *Buy Florida Produce* purchasing incentive plan for school nutrition programs.

Funding is needed to allow school districts to purchase fresh produce grown in Florida. FSNA is developing a pilot develop a recurring fund stream for school districts and to broaden the supply chain and build a network of Florida farmers to supply local produce to schools.

2. Transfer the After School Meals (ASM) Program oversight, for school districts, from the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) to the Florida Department of Agriculture - Food, Nutrition and Wellness division (FDACS- FNW).

- The National School Lunch and Breakfast programs are implemented and overseen by the FDACS-FNW. Duplication of all documentation is required for the ASM program, under FDOH, resulting in significant additional paperwork, staff time, and administrative costs to school child nutrition programs.
- Compliance reviews by the local health department were developed for childcare programs. They are a poor fit for school-based programs requiring separate, redundant and labor-intensive processes to complete. This increases labor cost, but, does not improve nutrition, safety, or efficiency.
- FDACS-FNW currently provides best-practice levels of training, technical assistance and marketing to the School Nutrition programs relevant to K-12 staff & students.

FSNA Position on Current Bills

FSNA Opposes: HB 243 Rep. Cambell/SB 1376 Sen. Rodriguez – *A bill requiring schools in Florida to provide religious specialty meals and plant based meals to students who request them in advance.*

Schools in Florida do not have certified facilities to prepare Halal, Kosher or other religion specific meals. In addition, schools do not collect documentation on religious affiliation from students.

This bill sets a precedent for providing religious specialty meals for all religions and other preference based meal requests from students and parents.

Outcomes:

- Higher food and labor costs leaving less money per child for their meals, and increased regulation on an already highly regulated program. The senate staff analysis sites:
 - **Kosher Meals**
 - SY 22/23 Rates
 - Average cost per meal of Kosher lunch = \$6.23
 - NSLP Lunch Free Category Reimbursement Rate = \$3.95*

* The \$3.95 must cover all costs, labor & infrastructure, the cost of the food/raw materials is between \$1.50 to \$1.75. This is a 300% + increase in cost.
- Less time for kids to eat. The special meals will confuse children and increase the time it takes for kids to get through the line.
- Waste. If the child does not like the specialty meal that is prepared on any given, it will be wasted.

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ⁱ U.S. House of Representatives, Hearing before the Committee on Education and Labor, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-110hrg43312/pdf/CHRG-110hrg43312.pdf> (last visited March 17, 2023).