



March 9, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger, Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Martin Heinrich, Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration,  
and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Andy Harris, Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration,  
and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins, Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven, Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration,  
and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sanford Bishop Jr, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration,  
and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Murray, Heinrich, Granger, and Harris, and Ranking Members Collins, Hoeven, DeLauro, and Bishop:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who teach, support, and provide healthy meals to students in public schools across our nation, we urge you to oppose any policy riders blocking implementation of stronger nutrition standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs as you craft the fiscal year (FY) 2024 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies spending bill.

The school meals programs make it possible for schools to serve nearly 30 million students, and the guidelines for healthy school meals have led to marked improvement in the quality of the meals students receive. A study by Tufts University linked improvements in school meals from 2003 to 2018 directly to

the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids (HHFK) Act. Furthermore, the researchers found that school meals are actually the *healthiest source of nutrition for children*.

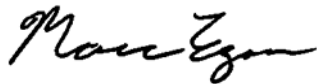
“Whether eating out or buying food from the grocery store, Americans of all ages are, for the most part, eating poorly everywhere—except at school,” concluded [a summary of the study’s findings](#).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s own research noted that HHFK Act guidelines have increased children’s access to healthy foods, helped address nutrition shortfalls, and cultivated healthy eating habits in children. USDA found that by the 2014-15 school year, the nutritional quality of school meals had increased by more than 40 percent in just a few years of implementation. In addition, USDA found that over 90 percent of schools were meeting the updated nutrition standards for reducing sugar, sodium, and fat, and increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables. We cannot take this progress for granted. Instead, we must take steps to build on it.

This is why we strongly support USDA’s proposed rule to strengthen nutrition standards consistent with the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (“Child Nutrition Programs: Revisions to Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans”). Despite the overwhelming success of the nutrition standards, improvements are still needed to align school meals with the Dietary Guidelines, which the current proposed rule aims to do. USDA’s approach is gradual and incremental, and will move school meals closer to the full promise of the HHFK Act for our students.

NEA educators know that students who are hungry or lack the nutritious foods that provide the energy they need cannot focus on learning. We ask that you oppose any riders that block or weaken nutrition standards for healthy school meals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association