

# School Food Modernization Act of 2021

## (H.R. 4379/ S.876)

### About Us

The **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**, the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, represents more than 100,000 credentialed practitioners - registered dietitian nutritionists, nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered and advanced-degree nutritionists - many of whom are providers working in and with school nutrition programs.

The Academy is committed to ensuring proper kitchen equipment and training is available to provide meals to millions of children each day. **The Academy supports modernizing school nutrition programs to improve schools' ability to serve nutritious and delicious meals to children.** The health of adults in the future depends on the health of children today.

### Overview

The National School Lunch Program turned 73 years old in 2019, and many of the 95,000+ school kitchens that participate in the program are nearly as old. Old kitchen equipment hinders schools' ability to adapt to the preferences and dietary needs of today's students.<sup>1</sup> The NSLP feeds nearly 30 million children each school day, serving more than 4.8 billion lunches nationwide in FY 2018, and in order for schools to have the ability to feed these children, they require optimally functioning kitchen equipment.<sup>2</sup>

Since 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture has provided more than \$160 million in kitchen equipment funding to states and schools who abide by the NSLP guidelines promoting nutritious meals with whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean protein and low-fat dairy.<sup>3</sup> Grants are provided by the USDA and appropriated annually through Congress. The School Food Modernization Act legislation will expand schools' access to modern infrastructure and equipment as well as strengthen workforce training. The bill establishes a USDA loan assistance program to help schools update infrastructure, it provides targeted grant assistance to give school administrators and food service directors the money for equipment and provides training and technical assistance to school food service personnel.

### School Kitchen Grants Improve Diets and So Much More

Researchers conducted site visits and interviewed food service directors, school administrators and students from 19 schools in seven states during 2015. Prior to receiving equipment grants, outdated kitchens hindered the efforts of school staff to prepare and efficiently serve healthy meals. The research found that equipment purchased with USDA grant funds helped schools overcome these challenges.

New equipment allows for from-scratch cooking instead of pre-processed heat-and-service items. Grants used to purchase energy-efficient walk-in refrigerators, freezers and blast chillers accommodate more fruits and vegetables. Students in participating schools are more exposed to fresh produce by displaying fruits and vegetables with new layouts, shorter service lines, and mobile carts.

Additionally, the benefits of kitchen equipment upgrades typically extend beyond school breakfasts and lunches, to snacks, after school meals and dinners.<sup>4</sup>

In April 2019, the USDA released its "School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study" and found that the greatest challenge school food service administrators encounter to implementing the new nutrition challenges is the cost of foods. Staff training, equipment and kitchen remodels were also listed as challenges.<sup>5</sup>

## Fast Facts

- The Kids' Safe and Healthful Food Project, a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, assessed school kitchen equipment and infrastructure challenges in every state and the District of Columbia; they found many schools rely on workarounds that are expensive, inefficient, and unsustainable.<sup>6</sup>
- 95% of U.S. schools serve healthy lunches, but most could be more efficient and spend less money if they had updated equipment and infrastructure.<sup>7</sup>
- 88% of school districts need at least one new piece of kitchen equipment.
- 55% of schools need kitchen infrastructure changes, such as electrical upgrades.<sup>6</sup>

## Key Take-Away

Congress' prior appropriations for USDA-administered school equipment grants have helped thousands of schools upgrade kitchens, providing a greater variety of healthy, fresh dishes, boosting student participation in meal programs and reducing operating costs.<sup>8</sup> More schools could serve healthy, appealing meals if investments were made in new kitchen equipment, infrastructure and technical assistance.<sup>9</sup> Congress' next reauthorization should continue aiding school districts' outdated kitchens so staff can focus more time and resources on the meal options all students deserve.<sup>10</sup>

## Co-sponsor the School Food Modernization Act

The School Food Modernization Act provides loan guarantees and grants to finance certain improvements to school nutrition facilities, including improving equipment and infrastructure. The federal share of costs for assistance funded through this act do not exceed 80% of the total cost of durable equipment or infrastructure. Infrastructure includes kitchens, cafeterias, dining rooms and facilities for food storage, service and preparation.

This bill also provides training and technical assistance for school food service personnel. Grants will be awarded on a competitive basis to eligible third-party training institutions to develop and administer training and technical assistance for school food service personnel. This training allows school food service personnel to meet and exceed nutritional standards set forth by the Child Nutrition Act and National School Lunch Program, as well as improve the effectiveness of their school nutrition programs.

The School Food Modernization Act of 2021 was introduced in the Senate (S. 876) by Sens. Susan Collins (Maine) and Tina Smith (Minn.) and in the House by Reps. Mark DeSaulnier (Calif.) and Glenn 'GT' Thompson (Penn).

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<sup>1</sup>Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. (2016). USDA's school kitchen grants benefit meal programs and students. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/06/usdas-school-kitchen-grants-benefit-meal-programs-and-students>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>2</sup>National School Lunch Program Participation. USDA. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/slsumar.pdf>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>3</sup>USDA FNS. (2017). USDA awards grants for new school food service equipment to help schools dish up healthy meals. USDA Food and Nutrition Services. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2014/006514>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>4</sup>Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. (2016). USDA's school kitchen grants benefit meal programs and students. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/06/usdas-school-kitchen-grants-benefit-meal-programs-and-students>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>5</sup>USDA. School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study. "https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS\_Summary-Findings.pdf" [https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS\\_Summary-Findings.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNMCS_Summary-Findings.pdf). Accessed on June 8, 2019.

<sup>6</sup>Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. (2014). States need updated school kitchen equipment. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2014/03/26/states-need-updated-school-kitchen-equipment-b>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>7</sup>Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. (2016). Five facts about school meal programs. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/analysis/2016/07/19/five-facts-about-school-meal-programs>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. (2016). USDA's school kitchen grants benefit meal programs and students. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/06/usdas-school-kitchen-grants-benefit-meal-programs-and-students>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>9</sup>Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. (2013). Serving healthy school meals: kitchen equipment. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/collections/2013/12/18/serving-healthy-school-meals-kitchen-equipment-collection>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.

<sup>10</sup>Scarmo, S. (2017). More federal investment in school kitchens would benefit student health. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/analysis/2017/01/26/more-federal-investment-in-school-kitchens-would-benefit-student-health>. Accessed on July 8, 2019.