
Sample: Universal Meals (parent perspective)

Title: *Congress should authorize free school meals for all students*

Back to school season is usually an exciting time. My kids love to choose new school supplies and a “first day of school” outfit. Nervous anticipation is quickly replaced by the excitement of being reunited with classmates and after-school activities. But this year is different. Some students will attend school entirely from their computers at home, while others will spend half of the week at school and half with distance learning. Because of the pandemic, many students will not have enough money to buy a school meal, or won’t have sufficient access to a healthy meal from home. In these unprecedented times, we need free school meals for all students.

The importance of school meals has never been more evident. Even before the pandemic, 30 million school children relied on school meals. For many students, school meals may be the only nutritious meals they receive that day. In May, [more than twenty percent of parents](#) living with children under 19 reported that their households experienced food insecurity during the prior 30 days. This crisis is even more pressing for Black and Hispanic families with children, who reported food insecurity rates [approximately twice that of white families with children](#).

From the beginning of the pandemic, school nutrition staff set up meal distribution sites in parking lots and delivered individually wrapped meals to homes and bus stops. Staff served impossibly long lines of families waiting to pick up meals for their children. Now these programs are [facing high debt](#). Free meals for all students would help programs recover financially, and ease administrative burden (by eliminating the need to process free/reduced-price meal applications) so they can focus on what’s most important: feeding children.

The [Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act](#), introduced in July by Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA), who is Chairman of the committee that has jurisdiction over child nutrition would ensure a nutritious breakfast and lunch this coming school year for all children. While Congress fails to agree on a coronavirus relief package, kids are going hungry, and programs that stepped up when families needed them most are drowning financially.

School meals also provide good nutrition for children. [A recent study](#) found the school meal nutrition standards decreased the risk of childhood obesity among children in poverty by about half over five years. Schools must continue to provide healthier meals that set children up

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for good eating habits and help reduce their risk of preventable diseases like diabetes and hypertension.

As a parent, taking care of my children is the most important thing to me. It's heartbreaking that unanticipated, unavoidable job loss is making it so hard for so many families to provide for their children, and that children are suffering because of the embarrassment associated with "lunch shaming" and not having enough money to pay for meals. For the well-being of all of our children, Congress must pass the Pandemic Child Hunger Prevention Act as part of the next COVID relief package.



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