

December 22, 2020

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
Vice President-Elect Kamala D. Harris  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris,

**We, the 64 undersigned national organizations and associations, write urging you to work with Congress and take every administrative step possible to establish Universal School Meals.** This would ensure that every child in the U.S. has access to the nutritious breakfast and lunch at school that can help support their academic success. School meals reduce childhood hunger, decrease childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and wellness, enhance child development and school readiness, and support learning, attendance, and behavior.

Universal School Meals would allow school breakfast and lunch to be offered at no charge to all children. Currently, only students from homes with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line are eligible for free school meals. Many struggling families do not qualify for free school meals, and school meals fees create a barrier to participation. Offering free meals to all students eliminates the cost barrier for children whose families' income is near the cutoff line to receive free school meals. And by having every student participate in school meals, the stigma some children fear of being labeled "poor" by their classmates is eliminated.

Offering meals at no charge also would be a tremendous support to schools across the country. Schools would no longer have the cost of collecting and processing school meals applications and completing other paperwork. Schools would no longer struggle with collecting unpaid school meal fees from families or foot the bill for meals served when children do not have money to pay. Removing this dynamic between families and schools allows school nutrition staff to focus on preparing and serving healthy meals to children, and it eliminates a significant financial burden for school districts and families.

Recent studies reaffirm that access to nutritious meals in school increases the health and educational outcomes for our nation's children. Investing in these programs to ensure all children — regardless of income — can access healthy meals year-round would help ensure that every child is ready to learn and thrive.

The current pandemic has highlighted the critical role that school meals play for children, particularly those from low-income households and will be an important educational and health support as the nation recovers from the pandemic. Thank you for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to ensure that every child in this country receives the healthy food they need to learn and grow.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Commodity Distribution Association  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Heart Association  
American Public Health Association  
American School Health Association  
American Society for Nutrition  
Bread for the World  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Center for Disability Rights  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Chef Ann Foundation  
Children's Defense Fund  
Children's HealthWatch  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Congressional Hunger Center  
E-RoadMap Corporation  
Environmental Working Group  
First Focus on Children  
Food Research & Action Center  
FoodCorps  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Girls Inc.  
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities  
Hispanic Federation  
Hunger Free America  
Intertribal Agriculture Council  
Islamic Relief USA  
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future  
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy  
Life Time Foundation  
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
MomsRising  
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Community Action Partnership  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National Education Association  
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)  
National Farm to School Network  
National Immigration Law Center

National Urban League  
National Women's Law Center  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Partnership for America's Children  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
RESULTS  
School Nutrition Association  
SchoolHouse Connection  
SERCAP  
Student Voice  
The Forum for Youth Investment  
UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity  
UnidosUS  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
United Fresh Produce Association  
Urban School Food Alliance  
US Conference of Mayors  
ZERO TO THREE