



# Elevating the Role of Food in Schools

## FOODCORPS' POLICY VISION AND PRIORITIES

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*In the wake of COVID-19, as FoodCorps adapts our work to meet school communities' evolving needs and priorities, our purpose remains: to dismantle the systemic inequities in our food and education systems so that every child—regardless of race, place, or class—gets the nourishment to thrive.*

### THE POWERFUL ROLE OF FOOD IN SCHOOL

Structural racism and classism impede access to healthy food for underserved communities and communities of color, making it harder for kids to build healthy relationships with food. But an equitable and resilient school food system can help dismantle the institutional racism and classism that creates these inequalities. School food can instill in children a love for healthy food; nurture lifelong healthy habits and reductions in chronic health issues; use food as an educational tool to teach kids about science, math, and history; and connect kids to the cultures of their community.

We envision a school food environment that furthers equity and sustainability and is fully woven into our broader education system as a strategic priority. In such an environment, all students—regardless of race, place, or class—would learn about food, its origin, and its cultural roots, and enjoy healthy, delicious meals and snacks featuring food that supports and advances equity, livelihoods, and sustainability all along the supply chain.

To achieve this vision, FoodCorps will advocate for legislation toward achieving five outcomes. Only by working together with school food communities, local and national organizations, and individual advocates around the country, will we be able to advance policies that result in real change in how food shows up in schools, and how schools can show up for kids in powerful ways.



## THE OUTCOMES WE SEEK

### >> AN EQUITABLE, HEALTHY, AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL MEAL SUPPLY CHAIN

Our nation spends over \$18 billion on school meals; by intentionally directing those dollars to manufacturers, producers, and firms that uphold equity and sustainability, we can begin to transform our food system. We advocate for policies that enable schools to source and serve food that supports local economies, protects lands and waters, treats animals humanely, treats workers with dignity through fair wages, benefits, and safe working conditions, and prioritizes producers and farmers of color.



#### Policy change we are advocating for:

- ✓ Increase meal reimbursements
- ✓ Expand farm-to-school initiatives
- ✓ Enact incentives for “good food” purchasing policies to include equity, sustainability, fair labor and more
- ✓ Ensure dedicated support for producers of color to enter/compete in the school food market

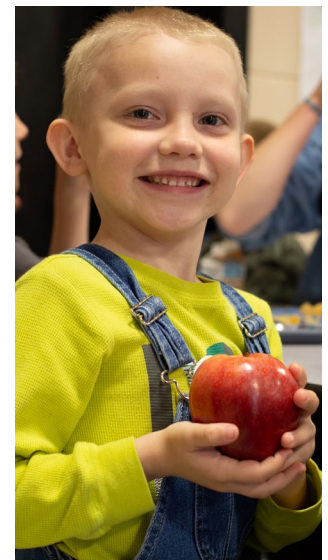
### >> SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

Just as we don't charge for textbooks and school bus rides, we should not charge students for something as vital as food. The Community Eligibility Provision has demonstrated the effectiveness and simplicity of making school meals free to all students. This universal access at the community level is shown to reduce student stigma and relieve schools of administrative burdens. We must build on that progress and make school meals truly universal. We advocate for universal school meals, where students have enough time to eat and enjoy their meals. Universal meals can serve to destigmatize school meals, remove unnecessary barriers to access, support the financial security of school meal programs, and allow child nutrition professionals to focus on sourcing and serving healthy meals and snacks.



#### Policy change we are advocating for:

- ✓ Enact universal school meals
- ✓ Provide adequate time to eat





## »» FOOD EDUCATION AS AN ACADEMIC PRIORITY

A typical U.S. student receives fewer than 8 hours of nutrition education in school per year, and too rarely is that education integrated or hands-on in the ways we know nurture healthy eating habits. When schools prioritize food education, whether through support from national service programs like FoodCorps, state farm to school initiatives, or staff positions focused on garden education or health and wellness, it can drive changes in the school food environment and student behavior change. Through 10 years of experience at FoodCorps, we've seen that dedicated staff positions ensure that food education is integrated into the fabric of the school community. Over 70% of FoodCorps schools had measurably healthier school food environments by the end of the school year, and in schools with more of FoodCorps' hands-on learning activities, children are eating up to three times as many fruits and vegetables. We advocate for legislation that strengthens food and nutrition education and integrates that education into curricula and standards. We also advocate for policies that create more dedicated staff positions at schools to deliver high quality food education.



### Policy change we are advocating for:

- ✓ Integrate food/nutrition education into state education plans and curricula
- ✓ Create and fund dedicated staff positions related to food/nutrition education



In early 2020, Senators Booker (D-NJ) and Cornyn (R-TX) introduced the Food and Nutrition Education in Schools Act. This bipartisan bill, developed in partnership with FoodCorps, would support food and nutrition educator positions in schools.



## >> A WELL-SUPPORTED SCHOOL NUTRITION WORKFORCE

School nutrition professionals perform the essential task of feeding our nation's kids every day. Yet a 2010 study found that school cafeteria workers earned a median wage of \$9,300 per year, compared with \$30,000 for workers across sectors, which are also underpaid. We advocate for legislation that recognizes the critical work of school nutrition leaders and staff, through ensuring livable wages, health and safety protections, and resourcing for recruitment, training, and professional development.



### Policy change we are advocating for:

- ✓ Establish fair wages for school nutrition professionals and increase funding for school nutrition departments commensurately
- ✓ Strengthen professional development for school nutrition staff

## >> MODERNIZED SCHOOL KITCHEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Almost 30 million kids eat a school meal every day. Yet too many schools and districts have decades-old equipment or lack the basic kitchen infrastructure needed to efficiently process and prepare those meals. A Pew survey found that many schools are relying on workarounds — such as more frequent deliveries of perishable items due to lack of cold storage — that are expensive, inefficient, and unsustainable. Investing in modernizing school kitchens offers a triple win: (1) kids get healthier meals, (2) local economies get investment and jobs from equipment purchasing and installation, and (3) schools are able to more efficiently process and prepare meals, including more locally sourced ingredients, which often require additional processing. We advocate for policies that increase funding for schools to upgrade and modernize their kitchen and cafeteria facilities to prepare healthy, appetizing meals.



### Policy change we are advocating for:

- ✓ Increase funding and support for school kitchen infrastructure

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