

FRAC 101: Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act

What is the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act?

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act authorizes all of the federal school meal and child nutrition programs, which provide funding to ensure that low-income children have access to healthy and nutritious foods. The child nutrition programs touch millions of children each day, and improve educational achievement, economic security, nutrition and health.

Although the programs are permanently authorized, every five years Congress reviews these programs through the reauthorization process; the current law is set to expire at the end of September 2009. This reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen these programs so they better meet the needs of our nation's children.

The reauthorization amends two existing statutes: the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry S. Truman in 1946, created the National School Lunch Program "as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children." Twenty years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 into law, which established the School Breakfast Program. Not long after, programs such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and other child nutrition programs were added to the National School Lunch Act.

What child nutrition programs are up for review?

- The **National School Lunch Program** guarantees that millions of low-income children receive a healthy lunch during their school day. All children can participate in the program, but low-income children qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Children who qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch also qualify for the School Breakfast Program.
- The **School Breakfast Program** ensures that children across the country can get a healthy breakfast at school. As with the case of school lunches, children are eligible for free, reduced-price or paid breakfasts based on their families' incomes.
- The **Child and Adult Care Food Program** reimburses child care centers, Head Start Programs, family child care homes, homeless shelters and afterschool programs for snacks and meals served to children. Generally, children under the age of 12, as well as certain disabled adults can participate, but homeless shelters and afterschool programs can serve children 18 and under.
- The **Summer Food Service Program** ensures that children (18 and under) who depend on school lunch and breakfast during the school year still have access to free, nutritious meals and snacks during the summer when school is out. It provides reimbursements to schools, local government agencies and private nonprofit organizations that serve free meals and snacks to children at sites located in low-income areas or that serve primarily low-income children.
- The **Afterschool Snack and Meal Program** bridges the hunger gap between lunch and dinner for children who participate in afterschool programs. It provides federal funds to private nonprofit and public organizations (including schools) so they can serve nutritious snacks and, in eight states, meals as part of afterschool programs.
- The **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to health care to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children up to age 5. The monthly WIC food package is a combination of foods that improve nutrition for pregnant women, new mothers, and children.

- The **WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program** issues coupons to WIC recipients that can be used to purchase fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables at participating local farmers' markets.
- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** provides fresh fruit and vegetable snacks to children during the school day. Only elementary schools in which at least 50 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals can apply to participate in the program.
- The **Special Milk Program** supports serving milk to children in schools and child care institutions that do not participate in other nutrition programs.

In Congress, who has responsibility for Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

In the House, the House Education and Labor Committee's Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee has jurisdiction over the child nutrition programs. In the Senate, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee has jurisdiction over the programs. Visit FRAC's Legislative Action Center for a current listing of committee members and staff contacts.

Who benefits from Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

Millions of low-income children benefit from the healthy food provided by the child nutrition programs. Schools, afterschool and summer programs, and child care providers also benefit from the valuable funding that helps cover the costs of providing nutritious food to hungry children.

- According to the latest USDA data, 12.6 million (17.2 percent) children lived in households facing a constant struggle against hunger.
- In 2007, 13.3 million children, or 18 percent of all children under age 18, lived in poverty.
- During the 2006-2007 school year, 8.1 million low-income children received free or reduced-price breakfast and 17.9 million low-income children received free or reduced-price lunches.
- In July 2007, 2.8 million low-income children received summer meals.
- 8.3 million women, infants and children participated in the WIC program in 2007 – of that, 2 million were women, 2.1 million were infants, and 4 million were children under five.

What happened in the last Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 was signed into law on June 30, 2004. The legislation expanded the availability of nutritious meals and snacks to more children in school, in outside school hours programs, and in child care. It also contained a number of provisions to improve the nutritional quality of meals served in schools and to simplify the application process for children and their parents. It required that all school districts participating in the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast Programs establish a local wellness policy by the start of the 2006-2007 school year.

What is the timeline for Child Nutrition Reauthorization?

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-265) is set to expire on September 30, 2009. The School Breakfast, National School Lunch, and Special Milk Programs are authorized permanently and will continue without any Congressional action. All of the other child nutrition programs could expire on September 30, 2009 without congressional action.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization groundwork has begun with a series of USDA "listening sessions" in each of the nine USDA regions. Congress will begin its process with the start of the 111th Congress in early 2009. Visit FRAC's Legislative Action Center (www.frac.org/Legislative/action_center) to see the latest progress in Child Nutrition Reauthorization.