

Families shouldn't choose between **food** and their child's **public education**

Since 1946, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) has been a godsend for millions of food insecure families. Unfortunately, thanks to the policy's antiquated definition of "school", **approximately 347,000* virtual public school students are not receiving free lunch benefits, even if they would have qualified based on their family's income.**

Food insecure families are being penalized because they chose an innovative educational option for their child, as the 1946 law requires meals to be served only at physical school buildings. As a result, full-time virtual students are not receiving the same nutrition benefits as their brick and mortar peers.

The provision was changed during the pandemic through waivers for brick and mortar students learning online, and we believe it should be changed permanently to extend the benefit to full-time virtual public school students.

Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture must act to ensure no child that qualifies for NSLP goes without a proper lunch.

Policy should include innovative education models

During the pandemic it was demonstrated, through creativity and flexibility, that it is possible to provide critical food support to families who participate in public educational environments outside of a physical school building environment.

One such program operated by the Ohio Department of Education allowed students and families to access food via the use of EBT cards (much like welfare programs nationwide).

*There were 656,000 full-time k-12 virtual school students in 2020-21 school year (Digital Learning Collaborative). 57% of virtual school families qualify for free or reduced lunch. This number may be larger as many families do not submit documentation due to the lack of lunch benefit.

How current policy hurts virtual school students:

57%

of full-time virtual students are eligible for free lunch. That is approximately 347,000 students.



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www.publicschooloptions.org



kristen@publicschooloptions.org



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