



What is a Block Grant and Why is it Bad for Child Nutrition?

The National School Lunch Act has been structured as an entitlement program since it was enacted in 1946. That means for each meal served consistent with the statute and regulations, the school is “entitled” to a federal reimbursement, depending upon the income of the student. It also means that as a federal program, the nutrition regulations and other standards are consistent from state to state.

The [Fiscal Year 2013 House Budget Proposal](#) includes language that would convert the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) into a state block grant program. This proposal, if enacted, would drastically change the SNAP program. If applied to child nutrition programs in the future, block grants would have severely detrimental effects.

Potential Impacts of a Child Nutrition Block Grant

- Currently, child nutrition programs are entitlement programs, meaning that the federal funding for the program is guaranteed. If another student comes to your school and signs up for free or reduced price lunch, SFA’s should be reimbursed for the lunches served.
- Block grants would eliminate that guarantee. Block grants provide a finite amount of funding each year, with the amount going to each state determined by a formula. If circumstances changed during that year, states would be unable to meet an increased enrollment or other fluctuations. Increased funding would likely not be available to address a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina or a national or local economic downturn, such as the current recession or layoffs at a local plant.
- Block grants could well mean the end of defined and standardized school breakfast, school lunch, snack, and after school care programs. Each state would have its own pool of money and would decide how to allocate it across these multiple needs.
- Block grants often allow complete state and local discretion. This would eliminate the guarantee of uniform national standards. Each jurisdiction could develop unique requirements for funding eligibility, severely compromising the ability of schools to procure necessary items for meals.
- There is no evidence that “local control” is a more effective means to manage government programs.