

MSNA Public Policy Update | April 2022

Hello members!

In March, Minnesota had 15 MSNA directors and industry members attend the Legislative Action Conference in Washington DC. While we were at LAC, the buzz was about getting congress to give authorization to the USDA to extend the child nutrition waivers. During that time, MSNA members were asked to reach out to their legislators. Over 133,000 letters were received on the hill, generating quite a bit of attention in Washington. Meetings were held with our two senators and most of our congressional delegation. The meetings all went well and there was much support to extend the child nutrition waivers. The extensions of waivers were not included in the Omnibus bill.



Since then, there has been a new bill that has come forward in the Senate, S.3979 Support Kids Not Red Tape Act. This act would give USDA the ability to extend meals waivers through the summer of 2023. Schools would be expected to resume regular operation of each qualified program for the 2023-2024 school year. This would not be a permanent universal meal program, but does give schools time to recover from supply chain problems. If you have the opportunity, please send a letter of thanks to Senators Smith and Klobuchar, as they are co-sponsors on this bill!



The 2022 Minnesota state legislative session is entering its final phase. What would traditionally be a slower year of activity has turned into quite the active session for school nutrition programs and advocates. The state has an unprecedented budget surplus of \$9.3 billion dollars and there's no shortage of ideas on what to do with it. At the beginning of the session, Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Flanagan proposed a universal school meals program. Coming in at a price tag of \$185 million each year, the proposal would cover the cost of school lunch and breakfast for all of Minnesota's students.

The House of Representatives, led by a DFL majority, spent two committee hearings reviewing HF 1729. Authored by Rep. Sydney Jordan (DFL Minneapolis), HF 1729 was amended in the committee process to incorporate the Walz/Flanagan proposal. The bill had broad support in the House Education Policy committee, passing out on a 16-2 vote. The House Education Finance committee was slated to get a large budget target from leadership, so there was hope that a major school meals expansion would be included in their eventual omnibus education budget bill.

Unfortunately, the House Education Finance committee leadership decided to invest the \$1.155 billion spending target on classroom supports, like special education, student personnel support and English language learner support. When the dust settled, \$18.5 million is slotted into the massive House Education budget bill along with a mandate that schools eligible to participate in the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) can do so.

The Senate GOP majority hasn't entertained a single discussion on school nutrition programs. They have spent two hearings diving into the unfortunate case of summer meals fraud stemming from the "Feeding Our Future" situation. The Senate Education Committee has been singularly focused on improving literacy rates among elementary students. Unlike the House proposal, the Senate's Education bill spends \$30 million on literacy training programs for K-5 teachers.

The legislature faces a state constitutional deadline on all legislative action at midnight on Sunday, May 22. As the legislature and Governor enter the final weeks of this session, it's unclear how they will negotiate the vast difference in approaches to the public-school budget. The nutrition component is just one of many, many ideas on the table. Your MSNA PPL team will be present and working this process until the end, ensuring unfunded mandates are not imposed on school nutrition programs. Ideally, we would be able to secure some funding for school nutrition programs to help deal with increased labor and food costs. It's also possible state lawmakers will ultimately punt on school nutrition, waiting to see if Congress will take further action on school nutrition waivers.

It will be interesting to see how the remainder of the session goes. As always, thank you for all your hard work! You are making a difference in the lives of children, one meal at a time.

Darcy Stueber, SNS

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