

### **School Nutrition Issues in Play in St Paul**

The 2024 legislative session is deep into the second half, when it all comes down to the wire at the state Capitol. Lawmakers can vote on bills until Sunday, May 19. There are always rumors about getting done early, but the amount of policy and supplemental budget items in play likely mean they'll be in St. Paul as long as they can. It's a "bonding bill" session and some would like to pass that bill and then go home. Despite it not being a budget session, there's surplus money, at least for the time being, and the various Finance committees have been given supplemental budget targets for additional spending. Education has been given \$43 million and most of that will likely go toward teacher stipends for their additional time going through literacy training as part of the massive "Read Act" that is being implemented.



Nutrition issues have been in the mix since the first week of session. One of the first bills up in the House Education Policy committee (HF 3556) would have created a requirement for 15 minutes of actual time for students to consume their lunch. Principals balked at the mandate as being unmanageable and the bill wasn't heard in the Senate. The legislation won't advance any further at this point of session.

Late in the process a new bill popped up (SF 5256) that would allow school districts to use surplus funds in the nutrition account on cafeteria furniture. School administrator groups expressed an interest in going further, and allowing cafeteria remodeling to be coded against the nutrition account. The latter request isn't likely to advance and it may be prohibited by USDA rules. Still, the impact of MN Free Meals is sinking in and cafeteria pressures around time, and administrators seeing growing nutrition reserves are issues school nutrition professionals need to grapple with.



### **Bills and Budget to Watch in Washington**

SNA has signed on as a supporter of the Scratch Cooked Meals for Students Act, introduced by Representative Jahana Hayes (D-Connecticut). The Act will establish a USDA grant program to expand the practice of scratch cooking in schools. H.R.7748 was referred to the House committee on Education and the Workforce.

U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) has introduced H.R.7639 the National Advisory Council on Unpaid School Meal Debt Act, which would establish a commission to address unpaid school meal debt in child nutrition programs. If this passes it would develop a National Advisory Council that would play a pivotal role in formulating policy recommendations to address school meal debt and design policy to help ensure the sustainability of these our vital nutrition programs.

The White House shared its annual budget, including funding to support anticipated increases in child nutrition program participation. Among other allocations, it includes \$15 billion over 10 years to expand the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and provide healthy school meals at no cost to an additional nine million children. We will be watching as the budget moves through committee.

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