



Nutrition Programs and Preschool Initiatives

Why Federal Nutrition Programs are Critical to Preschool Expansion Efforts



The child nutrition programs, federally funded entitlements, are an often overlooked asset for supporting quality early care and education. The federal child nutrition programs are administered

by each State to early care and education efforts in schools, child care centers and family child care homes.

There are a variety of options available to serve preschool children including the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the school meal programs: School Breakfast and Lunch, Summer, and After school programs. In these difficult times, the child nutrition programs can support quality early care and education by providing:

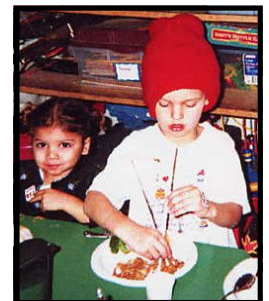
- **Reliable Funding**
- **Nutrition Standards and Support**
- **Meal time experiences that allow children to learn and grow, and build a foundation of good habits and health.**

The federal nutrition funds are both significant in amount and reliable, providing an important source of income to preschool initiatives.

- A year-round program serving two meals and a snack each day will get as much as **\$1,100 per child** per year in federal funds. This **adds 10-20 percent** to the typical public funding for preschool. If a pre-school program with a wrap-around child care component serves three meals and a snack, it will get up to \$1,500/year per child.
- The funds come from federal entitlement streams. They therefore can grow and provide support to federal discretionary and State funding.

The nutrition helps make preschool work. Young children only feel safe and secure, pay attention, behave and stay healthy if they are well-nourished. Study after study has shown the importance of good nutrition, and good nutrition programs, to children's development and achievement. Two of special note show:

- children receiving breakfast in preschool do better than those eating breakfast at home; and



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- children receiving federally-funded nutrition benefits in a child care center had much better nutrition, including higher intakes of many key nutrients (e.g., protein, minerals, vitamins.) and fewer servings of fat and sweets. These children also had fewer days of illness.

The food sets a foundation for a lifetime of better nutrition and health. Families, and especially low-income families, are struggling to feed their children enough food and the right food, and to lay the foundation for appropriate lifelong patterns that will assure good health and prevent obesity. Basic nutritional requirements in the federal food programs ensure that healthy and nutritious meals are served to children and a solid foundation is laid.

Especially for young children, the eating experience is an integral part of the educational experience. Teachers use the meal to engage young children in discussion of and learning about colors, shapes, quantities, etc. Mealtime is a learning laboratory, aiding in the conceptual, sensory and language development of children.

The social aspects of the eating experience are critical to early childhood development. With appropriate child-sized tables and utensils, age-appropriate portions, an adult presence, enough time to eat and talk, family-style meals to nurture sharing skills, and a role for the preschoolers (e.g. setting the table), the experience becomes one that develops positive social skills for life.



For program fact sheets, State contacts and additional information on the child nutrition programs please see the FRAC website www.frac.org.



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