



Feed Students and Families Now

Nicholas D. Hartlep, Berea College

At the federal level, policymakers need to focus attention—and resources—on improving student access to food in the home. While H.R. 6201: Families First Coronavirus Response Act was passed, the **Maintaining Essential Access to Lunch for Students (MEALS) Act** has not.

Research by the Southern Education Foundation tells us that low-income students are now a majority of the schoolchildren attending the nation's public schools. Because schools are where many of our nation's students obtain food, low-income students may have difficulty regularly accessing nutritious food during this pandemic. Resources need to be given to school districts to help them be able to feed their students. Developing mechanisms to get food to our nation's hungry families is a problem that policymakers and leaders need to solve. Monetary resources need to be given to the efforts that local schools across the United States are putting into action.

The current pandemic has forced an unprecedented level of school closings across the country. As a result, teachers across the United States are scrambling to create content that can be delivered in their students' homes. While professional organizations like the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education are supporting their members in making the pivot to providing an education for students who find themselves in limbo because of the crisis, policymakers can address the needs of the low-income students that are now unable to access their regular school environments where they previously had access to a variety of important resources.

School districts understand that they will need to procure the food and distribute it directly to their families who are in need. We have seen school districts that have **school bus drivers** to deliver food along bus routes to get much-needed food to students and their families. However, immediate action is needed by our national government.

While local school districts—urban, rural, and suburban—will rely on their local leaders such as superintendents and school boards, it is the federal government that will need to give the greenlight so these local leaders can act right away.