School Nutrition Association of Virginia

2027 State Legislative Position Paper

Feeding Virginia's Students. Strengthening Communities.

Our Position

Virginia's public K–12 schools serve approximately 1.2 million students. Every school day, school nutrition professionals provide nutritious, appealing meals that support students' health, well-being, and readiness to learn.

For school year 2026–27, the base federal reimbursement is **$4.76 for each free lunch and $2.54 for each free breakfast served.** These reimbursements must support the full cost of producing and serving meals—not just food—including labor and benefits, equipment, maintenance, training, supplies, and other operating expenses. As costs rise, school nutrition programs must stretch limited per-meal revenue while maintaining meal quality and reliable service.

The School Nutrition Association of Virginia (SNA-VA) urges the Governor and General Assembly to advance three priorities:

1. Make School Breakfast Free for Every Student

Legislative request: Enact and fully fund Breakfast for All legislation so every Virginia public school student can receive breakfast at no cost, regardless of household income. Maximize available federal reimbursement and provide sustained state funding to cover the remaining cost of providing breakfast at no charge to students.

Why it matters: In school year 2023–24, Virginia served 65.2 free- or reduced-price breakfasts for every 100 free- or reduced-price lunches. FRAC estimates that increasing participation to 70 breakfasts per 100 lunches could serve approximately 24,600 additional children and generate $7.2 million in additional federal reimbursement. Universal access removes the price barrier, reduces stigma, and helps more students begin the day nourished and ready to learn. [4]

2. Expand Buy Local and Farm to School Funding

Legislative request: Increase recurring state funding for Virginia-grown and Virginia-raised foods served in school meals. Pair purchasing incentives with support for equipment, storage, staff training, and distribution partnerships so schools can use local foods successfully.

Why it matters: Virginia schools purchased $20.89 million in local foods during school year 2023–24. Expanded investment can increase students' access to fresh, nutritious foods, strengthen markets for Virginia farmers and producers, and keep more school food dollars in Virginia communities. [1, 3]

3. Strengthen Virginia's School Nutrition Lunch Funding Structure

Legislative request: Preserve existing state investments in school nutrition and direct the Virginia Department of Education, in consultation with school divisions and school nutrition professionals, to evaluate Virginia's current school meal funding structure and recommend options for a predictable, sustainable state contribution to school meal operations.

Why it matters: For FY2026, Virginia's State Lunch Match provided $5.8 million statewide—approximately five cents per reimbursable lunch. Because the match is a fixed allocation based on prior-year meal participation, the per-meal amount is not tied to changes in food, labor, equipment, or other operating costs. A Virginia-specific review would help policymakers assess the adequacy of state support and identify a more predictable, sustainable approach. [7]

A Practical Investment in Virginia's Children and Communities

Together, these priorities support a strong and dependable school meal system—one that provides nutritious meals, supports a skilled workforce, makes effective use of federal dollars, and strengthens markets for Virginia agriculture. SNA-VA calls on state leaders to partner with school divisions and school nutrition professionals to advance these priorities and ensure Virginia's school nutrition programs have the resources and support needed to serve students successfully.

Sources

1. School Nutrition Association (SNA). 2026 Position Paper: Increase Funds; School Year 2025–26 School Nutrition Trends Report (January 2026). National findings include 70% reporting insufficient federal reimbursement for lunch and 69% identifying higher costs as a barrier to local foods. These are national survey results, not Virginia-specific estimates.

2. Food Insight Group and Chef Ann Foundation. 2026 Virginia School Food Service Vacancy & Turnover Study. March 2026 survey of 68 school food authorities concerning school year 2024–25; reported a 10.6% vacancy rate among respondents.

3. Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). “Virginia Celebrates Farm to School Week October 6–10” (2025). Reports $20.89 million in local food purchases during school year 2023–24.

4. Food Research & Action Center (FRAC). The Reach of School Breakfast and Lunch in Virginia During the 2023–2024 School Year (October 2025). Reports 65.2 free/reduced-price breakfast participants per 100 free/reduced-price lunch participants; the 70-to-100 scenario estimates 24,627 additional children and $7,223,743 in additional federal reimbursement. This scenario does not estimate the cost of universal breakfast.

5. University of Virginia, Weldon Cooper Center. Virginia School Enrollment Projections: 2026–2030 (March 18, 2026). Reports actual fall 2025 public K–12 enrollment of 1.209 million.

6. School Nutrition Association (SNA). School Meal Statistics. School year 2026–27 base federal reimbursement rates: $4.76 for a free lunch and $2.54 for a free breakfast. These are base federal cash rates, not total program revenue or food-only budgets.

7. Virginia Department of Education. SCNP Director’s Memo #2025-2026-25, Attachment A: State Lunch Match Payments for Fiscal Year 2026. FY2026 State Lunch Match of $5,801,932 distributed based on 115,956,732 lunches claimed during school year 2024–25, producing an effective state reimbursement of approximately $0.05 per lunch.

Data note: Statistics reflect the school years and populations identified in the cited sources. National survey findings should not be interpreted as Virginia-specific estimates.