

# Nutrition Environment and Services

Schools should prioritize their **Nutrition Environment and Services (NS)**, given the links between healthy eating and good overall child health. This analysis explores several emerging areas in Nutrition Environment and Services, including marketing of healthy foods, standards for foods outside traditional school meals, and provisions for unpaid school meal debts. The U.S. Department of Agriculture heavily regulates nutrition issues, with requirements on food served and sold in schools,<sup>1</sup> marketing,<sup>2</sup> food service training,<sup>3</sup> and more.

## How are nutrition environment and services addressed in state law?

- Laws in 18 states require that schools meet at least the federal *Smart Snacks* standards at all three grade levels. *Smart Snacks* standards limit the fat, sugar, sodium, and calorie content of competitive foods sold in schools. Thirteen states require nutrition standards that did not rise to the level of *Smart Snacks*, and four other states recommend but do not require nutrition standards in their laws.
- Of the 19 states that address strategies to increase breakfast in schools, 12 have laws that encourage such practices, or provided strategies for some but not all schools. Seven states' laws require strategies to promote breakfast for all students in all schools.
- Eleven states' laws include an unpaid meal charge policy that supports student access to healthy meals, even if the account has a negative balance. Laws in three states (HI, LA, NJ) either restrict access to meals for unpaid meal charges or allow stigmatizing practices (e.g., alternative meals or public lists) to recoup unpaid meal charges.
- Two states' laws encourage (AR, CO) and two states' laws require (MA, WV) that free water be available to students throughout the school day, beyond the federal requirement for meals. Many students lack adequate hydration in schools, which can impair cognitive functioning.<sup>4</sup>
- Laws in six states address restricting marketing of unhealthy food and beverages. Four of these states (CA, DC, VA, WV) require that marketing be consistent with the *Smart Snacks* standards.
- Twenty-two states address providing technical assistance to school districts to assist in the implementation of nutrition standards. Such technical assistance ensures schools are equipped with strategies to meet nutrition requirements within allocated budgets and with available resources.

Figure 1. Only 14 states cover key nutrition-related topics in state education policies.

Comprehensiveness of policies promoting nutrition in schools, by state

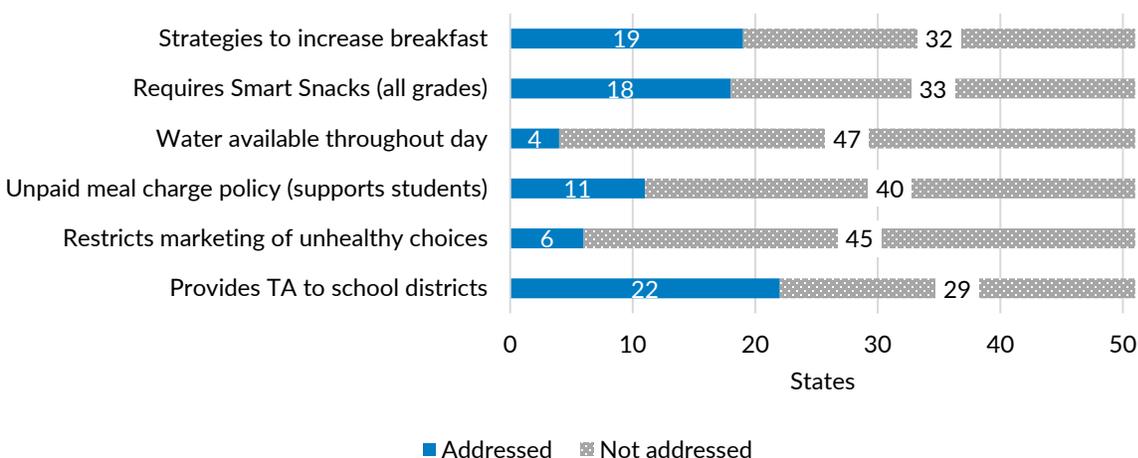


This map shows states that have [◇] **comprehensive** (1), [△] **moderate** (13), [□] **low** (33), [○] and **no** (4) coverage of nutrition environment and services topics in statutes and regulations governing education.

## How comprehensively do states cover nutrition environment and services?

- **Fewer than half of states address key aspects of the nutrition environment.** Like prior studies, this report found that states have made progress in promoting stronger nutrition standards,<sup>5</sup> but opportunities exist to address class parties, provide free water, promote healthy food marketing, and improve training for food service workers to assist in implementing nutrition standards.
- **West Virginia is the most comprehensive state in the NS domain (addressing 86 percent of topics).** Opportunity exists to revisit state laws on nutrition environment and services in the four states with no formal state law coverage (AK, ID, NE, SD) and the 33 states with low coverage.

Figure 2. Number of States Covering Select Nutrition Environment and Services Topics



Child Trends, in partnership with The Institute of Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago and EMT Associates, Inc., examined the extent to which 11 healthy schools domains are addressed in state policy. These domains include the 10 components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model: Health Education; Physical Education and Physical Activity; Nutrition Environment and Services; Health Services; Counseling, Psychological, and Social Services; Social and Emotional Climate; Physical Environment; Employee Wellness; Family Engagement; and Community Involvement. An additional domain, the WSCC References domain, addresses the extent to which state laws include explicit references to the WSCC model or similar language, such as the Center for Disease Control and Preventions' Coordinated School Health model.

This sub-brief provides an overview of how state policies cover the Nutrition Environment and Services domain. Sub-briefs covering the other domains as well as the compiled report can be found on the [Child Trends website](#). Definitions of each of the 14 topics are provided in the Appendix of the compiled report. Data from all topics are available through the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) [State Policy Database on School Health](#).

<sup>1</sup> Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. PL 111-296; 124 Stat 3183. 2010(111th Congress). <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ296/pdf/PLAW-111publ296.pdf>;

<sup>2</sup> Local School Wellness Policy Implementation Under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Final Rule, (2016). 81 Federal Register 50151. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-07-29/pdf/2016-17230.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Final Rule, (2015). 80 Federal Register 11077. Retrieved <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2015-03-02/pdf/2015-04234.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Increasing Access to Drinking Water in Schools. Atlanta GA: US Dept. of Health and Human Services; 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Piekarz-Porter E, Chriqui JF, Schermbeck RM, Leider J, Lin W. The Active Role States Have Played in Helping to Transform the School Wellness Environment through Policy, School Years 2006-07 through 2014-15. Chicago, IL: Bridging the Gap Program and the National Wellness Policy Study, Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2017, [www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts](http://www.go.uic.edu/NWPSproducts).