



## **Strengthening the Child and Adult Care Food Program: Streamlining and Simplifying CACFP Program Administration**

### **CACFP makes a difference to children, parents, *and* providers:**

- CACFP helps children by ensuring they receive healthy meals, which leads to healthy development. Mealtime is learning time and healthy choices last a lifetime.
- CACFP helps parents by providing healthy meals for their children, informing them about good nutrition practice, and keeping their child care costs down.
- CACFP helps providers with the high cost of food, and offers helpful training and resources on child nutrition, as well as monitoring and support.

The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) has worked for several years to strengthen CACFP as part of the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization. Now with the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, we will be working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture as it begins the process of writing new regulations to go with the new provisions in the law.

### **Program Access and Efficiency**

CACFP administration and paperwork issues are also an access issue: right now the many layers and often duplicative paperwork is a tremendous burden on child care providers, and often is a barrier to participation, especially under the current law's low reimbursement rates.

Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have expressed commitment to streamline and simplify the programs within the Child Nutrition Act, including CACFP. Such reforms will make CACFP more efficient, will save dollars that could go toward increasing access to nutritious meals, and save program providers valuable time and resources making the participation in CACFP more worthwhile.

### **Positive Changes in the Law for CACFP Administration**

- The law reinstates the Paperwork Reduction Task Force to review and recommend improvements in CACFP. *ECEC recommends including CACFP child care providers in the process of reviewing the details and making recommendations.*
- The law establishes permanent operating agreements for eligible child care programs with an annual update only if an update is needed to reflect program changes and to ensure continued compliance. *ECEC recommends that if there have been no changes, there should be no update required. This would alleviate one of the many layers of paperwork involved in program participation.*
- On parent information forms, collect only the last four digits of the Social Security number to prevent identify theft and ensure parent participation in the eligibility process.

### **To Further Strengthen CACFP, the following issues should be addressed:**

- Children who are hungry need to be fed and the tax status of the child care center should not be a barrier to providing nutritious meals. Streamline and reduce the frequency and quantity of paperwork involved in verifying that "for-profit" child care centers are maintaining the proper threshold of eligibility; especially those centers that serve 50% or more low-income families.

- Eliminate production paperwork. This is a state option, and nearly half the states have already figured out that this is not a meaningful demonstration of accountability, nor a good use of resources. Child care providers document food purchases, and they document meal service. They need not also document the details of meal preparation.
  - Proper meal preparation is currently addressed through CACFP’s monitoring and technical assistance guidance for providers.
  
- Allow the use of existing attendance records instead of re-counting heads at meal time and snack time. Detailed attendance records are kept every day at child care programs. These records are sufficient, when coupled with food purchase and meal service counts, to determine consumption of meals and snacks each day.
  - Allow *total counts* of meals and snacks served; stop requiring a name list and check-marks to indicate each individual child ate which meal and snack. Total numbers are sufficient for ensuring accountability of public funds to serve nutritious meals and snacks.
  - States should also accept electronic print-outs of daily attendance records. Currently, not all states allow this, and instead require providers to manually prepare an additional list to document attendance for CACFP records separate from the attendance records they keep for the child care center as a whole.
  
- Encourage more uniformity across the states, including requirements to use the same type of meal documentation and reimbursement claim forms. Currently, each state interprets and enforces the federal regulations in their own way. Uniformity across state lines would streamline the accountability efforts of USDA and make a meaningful difference to multi-site child care programs that operate across multiple states, like many ECEC members do.
  
- Require states that require both income eligibility *and* enrollment forms to combine the forms into one. Parents should not have to complete two nearly duplicative forms.
  
- Allow states to collect scanned documentation in place of duplicate paper copies. This would cut down on the need to make multiple copies of documentation, and to maintain those copies at the child center (and, for multi-site operators, reduce the duplicate paperwork also kept in the headquarters office). This would also reduce the quantity of paper and help CACFP to “go green.”
  
- Allow two-year contracts with food vendors where possible. Allowing the opportunity to lock in a good rate for a two-year contract would be better than annual reapplications, and would save providers and state and federal agencies valuable time and money.