



School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin

State Government Affairs Report (fall 2015)

Heading into the 2015-16 legislative session, SNA-WI had the following two legislative priorities:

1. Securing an additional \$1.6 million in state funding to increase the state School Breakfast reimbursement rate from 8-cents per meal to 10-cents for each breakfast served in public and private schools; and
2. Passage of the *School Food Safety Bill*, which aimed to equip school nutrition professionals with the necessary education to enhance food safety and reduce the risk of food borne illness in Wisconsin schools.

While state lawmakers have begun to understand that Wisconsin school breakfast programs are woefully underfunded – due to rising food costs, increased program participation and new regulations under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act – the Legislature chose to spend the state's limited resources on other priorities in the two-year state budget bill passed in July.

The news was certainly more positive on the *School Food Safety Bill*. Thanks to a strong advocacy effort by SNA-WI members and an effective lobbying strategy, the bill was signed into law by Gov. Scott Walker in July.

The newly signed law directs Wisconsin school nutrition programs that participate in the National School Lunch Program to have at least one employee on staff that holds a valid food safety certificate issued by the state (e.g., ServSafe; etc.). While food borne illness outbreaks in Wisconsin schools are rare, the risk of an outbreak is very real and can put children at risk for serious illness, lead to lost classroom and learning time, and create potential liability and litigation costs for schools. The *School Food Safety Bill* will not only help prevent these outbreaks in Wisconsin, but it will also increase professional standards for school nutrition professionals.

In addition to being smart policy, passage of the bill was a significant legislative victory for SNA-WI. The bill had wide bipartisan support and was approved unanimously by both the Assembly and Senate.

To build on the success of the School Food Safety Bill, SNA-WI will continue to push an aggressive legislative agenda in the New Year and into the 2017-18 legislative session.

The Association will certainly continue to educate legislators on the importance and benefits of the School Breakfast Program in an effort to increase state funding for the program. We need legislators to recognize that investing in school breakfast programs is a wise choice, one that will help improve student health, behavior and academic performance.

In addition to the breakfast funding issue, SNA-WI's Legislative Committee has identified nutrition education as the Association's next legislative priority. Under the new initiative, SNA-WI is seeking to modify current state law to require K-12 schools to provide science-based nutrition education. Current law requires instruction on "the comparative vitamin content of food and food and health values of dairy products and their importance for the human diet," which should be updated to better reflect the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The proposal would also require nutrition education to be provided as part of health class in grades 7-12. Students are required by law to have at least 0.5 credits in health education to graduate from high school.

SNA-WI members will also have a prime opportunity to talk to their legislators about these issues at the Association's upcoming 2016 Legislative Advocacy Day, which will be held on March 16 in Madison. For the past few years, SNA-WI has partnered with the Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (WAND) for a joint Legislative Advocacy Day, which has proved to be a tremendous success. In an effort to build off that success, SNA-WI is once again teaming-up with WAND for the 2016 Legislative Advocacy Day.

SNA-WI members who attend the event will have an opportunity to meet with their state legislators to discuss the school nutrition profession, promote the benefits of school nutrition programs, and discuss the organization's legislative and state funding priorities. Prior to the afternoon meetings with lawmakers, participating members will hear from high-level speakers and will take part in issue briefings and legislative advocacy training.

Even if you are new to legislative advocacy, you are highly encouraged to attend – as SNA-WI needs your help to deliver our message to the State Legislature. Please remember that SNA-WI staff will take care of all the preparations, including scheduling of the legislative meetings and providing in-depth issue briefs. Legislative Advocacy Day is meant to be a fun learning experience.

If your schedule doesn't permit you to attend Legislative Advocacy Day, don't worry.... There are plenty of other opportunities for you to engage in the political process and have an impact on school nutrition policy. In fact, SNA-WI is rebooting its successful *Take Your Legislator to Work Campaign*.

The program is designed to help Association members build relationships with their state lawmakers and to educate them about the role school nutrition plays in developing the full potential of all Wisconsin children. The goal of the campaign is to increase SNA-WI influence in the political and policymaking process. By inviting your legislators to your worksite, you can personally show them the value of school nutrition and help SNA-WI make a difference in the legislative arena.

The program has been well received and many members have already taken advantage of the opportunity to invite their local legislators to their worksites. SNA-WI wants you to be the next member to *Take Your Legislator to Work*, and over the next few months, the Association will be actively recruiting members to participate in this popular program.

If you have any questions on any of the above-mentioned legislative or advocacy issues, please do not hesitate to contact SNA-WI's Government Affairs consultant, Michael Welsh, at mike@hovenconsulting.com.