

FROM THE EDITOR

Feeding the Hungry



Hungry students focus on their stomachs more than on what the teacher is saying. And today, there are more hungry children than at any time in the past two decades.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate has risen to 15.1 percent, its highest level since 1993. Meanwhile, food prices—along with the cost of fuel—continue to increase.

That puts yet another squeeze on school districts, which are seeing a jump in free and reduced-price lunch participation. And, as Senior Editor Naomi Dillon notes in her cover story, “Feeding the Hungry,” that’s not necessarily a bad thing.

The bright side, if there is one, to the increased federal regulations from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act is that states must register 95 percent of free-meal-eligible children by 2013. And in March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture started a pilot program—the Community Eligible Option—that offers free breakfast and lunch to every student in high-poverty schools in several high-need states (Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, and Tennessee). If successful, the option will be rolled out beyond those states in the near future.

One positive about this option, according to Naomi’s story, is that it eliminates the meal application process, instead relying on Census data and a formula to arrive at the reimbursement rates. From an economic

standpoint, a higher rate of high-needs students actually could benefit school nutrition programs.

Meanwhile, another food-related topic—dealing with students’ food allergies—is featured in this month’s School Law column and in the bonus content available to our National Affiliate readers.

Emily J. Leader, deputy chief counsel of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, starts the Law column with a personal story—her daughter’s allergic reaction to escargot. She then goes on to reference the legal cases that have entangled school districts that were not properly prepared to prevent tragedy. The good news, as Leader notes, is that districts and boards can avoid expensive, time-consuming legal action.

The first steps in doing that are outlined in this month’s National Affiliate bonus content. In “Safe at School and Ready to Learn,” we provide you with information from NSBA’s new food allergy publication that will help you in shaping policies to protect your students.

All of these stories, plus Lawrence Hardy’s story on Long Beach Unified School District and Kathleen Vail’s look at the notable education books of 2011, should make this month’s issue essential reading.

Until next month ...

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief