

# FACTS

## Child Nutrition Reauthorization

### A Healthy Recipe for School Nutrition

#### OVERVIEW

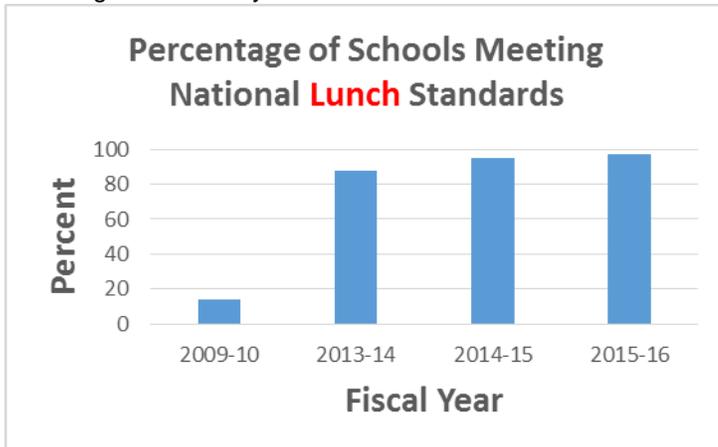


The U.S. is in the midst of a childhood obesity epidemic. Currently, nearly one third of children are overweight or obese.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The health consequences of obesity in children are staggering. Research shows that an obese child's arteries can resemble those of a middle-aged adult and obese adolescents have a greater risk of becoming obese adults.<sup>4,5</sup> Childhood obesity can also increase left ventricular mass, which can increase the likelihood of adverse

outcomes in adulthood.<sup>6</sup> Children participating in school meals consume 35%- 50% of their daily caloric intake and nearly a third of their daily solid fat and added sugar intake at school.<sup>7,8</sup> Schools can encourage a healthy environment by promoting and providing nutritious meals.

#### HEALTHY, HUNGER-FREE KIDS ACT: AFFECT ON KIDS' HEALTH

In 2010, President Obama signed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) moved forward in updating the national nutrition standards for school meals and establishing nutrition standards for other foods sold in schools throughout the school day.<sup>9</sup> As of 2015, 97% of schools in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) offered lunches that met these nutritional standards according to data collected by the USDA.<sup>10</sup> This is up from 15% in 2009-2010.<sup>11</sup> That means an overwhelming majority of children are receiving heart-healthy lunches while at school.



The law has had several other positive effects on school nutrition and health. For example:

- As of 2015, the overwhelming majority of schools are serving healthier meals, and are receiving the \$.06 performance-based increase in the federal reimbursement rate for school lunches for meeting the updated nutrition standards for lunch.<sup>10</sup> School meals have substantially lower sodium and overall caloric content, and are generally healthier than before the new rules were implemented.<sup>12,13</sup>
- Local school wellness policies have been strengthened by creating more accountability and better implementation.<sup>14,15</sup>
- The Smart Snacks in School standards, which went into effect during the 2014-2015 school year, updated nutrition standards for all foods sold on the school campus outside of the meal program throughout the school day, including vending machines, a la carte, and school stores.<sup>16</sup>
- 70% of elementary school administrators and food service staff report that their students seem to like the lunches under the new meal standards.<sup>17</sup>
- 12% more students are choosing fruit with their meals after the new rules were implemented.<sup>18</sup>
- A Government Accounting Office (GAO) report concluded that while there have been some challenges in implementing the school lunch standards, school meals are now healthier than ever and challenges are expected to resolve over time as school food service and students adjust to the changes.<sup>19</sup>

#### MAKING CHILDREN HEALTHY, LEARNERS

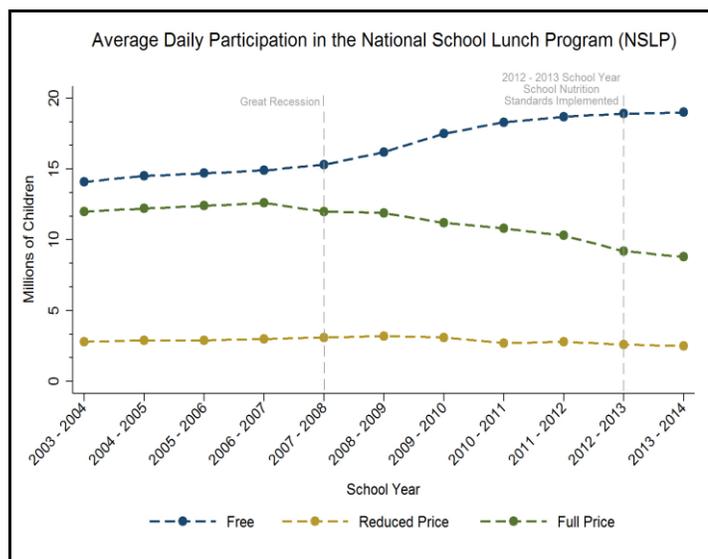
A healthy school environment helps improve children's physical well-being, enhances learning, and increases attendance.<sup>20,21</sup>

- Comprehensive nutrition education and promotion in schools is successful in increasing children's nutrition knowledge and fruit and vegetable consumption, especially in low-income students.<sup>22</sup>
- Children who participate in the NSLP select more fruits and vegetables and have an overall better quality diet.<sup>23</sup>

USDA. School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Survey IV. 2010. [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SNDSIV\\_Final\\_0414.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SNDSIV_Final_0414.pdf) (Pg. 3).  
USDA. HHRKA Section 201 Administrative Funds Spending Progress and School Meals Compliance Rates. 2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2014-08-11-2014-2015-Administrative-Funds-Spending-Progress-and-School-Meals-Compliance-Rates.pdf>  
USDA. Percent of School Food Authorities (SFA) certified for the performance based reimbursement as of December 2014. 2015. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2015-01-20-2014-2015-Percent-of-School-Food-Authorities-Certified-for-the-Performance-Based-Reimbursement-as-of-December-2014.pdf>  
USDA. Percent of School Food Authorities (SFA) certified for the performance based reimbursement as of June 2015. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2015-06-23-2015-Percent-of-School-Food-Authorities-Certified-for-the-Performance-Based-Reimbursement-as-of-June-2015.pdf>

## DON'T GIVE UP ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH

While there have been challenges, that's not unexpected. Kids are adjusting to the new meals and appropriate portion sizes. And while there has been some criticism about participation declining, this downward trend is only among paid participants and started in 2007, well before the school meal standards went into effect in 2012.<sup>19,24</sup> In fact, the GAO report also noted that participation will likely improve over time as students and school food service fully adapt to the new standards for healthier meals.<sup>19,24</sup>



Food Research and Action Center  
Data Source: USDA

However, Congress recently passed a provision to funding legislation that not only would stop the USDA from implementing the next sodium standard levels until more science supports the benefits of sodium reduction in children, but also would allow states to grant exemptions for whole grain standards in school meals.<sup>25</sup> This is particularly troubling in light of recent research that shows sodium consumption among school-aged children is still well-above healthy levels, and that whole grain consumption lowers mortality risk.<sup>26,27</sup>

Schools that struggle with the new standards need assistance, not a pass or waiver. It is critical that schools are not forced to stop mid-implementation or get mixed messages of what is required of them. Let's help the schools who are not meeting the new standards move forward, and reward those who are making remarkable progress. Most importantly, let's not turn back the clock on our children's health.

The evidence is overwhelming that the new school meal standards are working. Going into child nutrition reauthorization for 2015, the American Heart Association advocates for:

- Continued strong implementation of school meal and Smart Snacks standards. These standards include reducing sodium; eliminating *trans* fat; decreasing saturated fat; minimizing fried foods; offering healthy beverages; and increasing the offering of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, seafood, and low-fat dairy.
- Investments in kitchen equipment and infrastructure that can help schools serve healthier meals.<sup>28</sup>

- Continued robust technical assistance by the USDA to support schools in implementing nutrition standards, effective nutrition education, and nutrition promotion and model local wellness policies with effective implementation and evaluation.
- Continued support to schools for effective implementation of the federal nutrition standards for school meals.
- Extra reimbursement for breakfast and lunch, based on the latest evidence, to help schools ease the burden of increased costs.

<sup>1</sup> Mozaffarian, D., et al. Heart disease and stroke statistics-2015 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2015. 131(4): e29-e322.

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey, 2013. Public-use data file and documentation. [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/quest\\_data\\_related\\_1997\\_forward.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/quest_data_related_1997_forward.htm). NCHS tabulations. Accessed February 5, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ogden, CL., et al. (2014). Prevalence of childhood and adult obesity in the United States, 2011-2012. *JAMA* 311(8): 806-814.

<sup>4</sup> Cote, AT, et al. Obesity and Arterial Stiffness in Children Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology*. 2015: ATVBAHA-114.

<sup>5</sup> Le, J., et al. "Vascular age" is advanced in children with atherosclerosis-promoting risk factors. *Circ Cardiovasc Imaging*. 2010. 3(1): 8-14.

<sup>6</sup> Kharod, AM, et al. Childhood obesity increases left-ventricular mass irrespective of blood pressure status. *Pediatric cardiology*. 2014. 35(2): 353-360.

<sup>7</sup> Story, M. The third School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study: findings and policy implications for improving the health of US children. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 2009. 109: S7-S13.

<sup>8</sup> Potti, JM, et al. Solid fat and added sugar intake among US children: The role of stores, schools and fast food, 1994-2010. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015: 45:5 551-559.

<sup>9</sup> Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-296, 124 Stat. 3183, §§ 101-105, 201-210.

<sup>10</sup> US Department of Agriculture. Percent of School Food Authorities (SFA) certified for the performance based reimbursement as of December 2014. 2015. Available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meal-certification-data>. Accessed on May 7, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Agriculture. School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study IV. 2012. Available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-dietary-assessment-study-iv>. Accessed on February 15, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Cummings, PL, et al. Nutrient content of school meals before and after implementation of nutrition recommendations in five school districts across two US counties. *Preventive medicine*. 2014: 67: S21-S27.

<sup>13</sup> Cummings, P L., et al. Evaluating changes to sodium content in school meals at a large, urban school district in Los Angeles County, California. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*. 2014: 20: S43-S49.

<sup>14</sup> Longley, CH, et al. Effects of federal legislation on wellness policy formation in school districts in the United States. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. 2009. 109: 1: 95-101.

<sup>15</sup> Hood, NE, et al. School wellness policies and foods and beverages available in schools. *American journal of preventive medicine*. 2013. 45: 2: 143-149.

<sup>16</sup> Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-296, 208 Stat. 3183

<sup>17</sup> Turner, L, et al. Perceived Reactions of Elementary School Students to Changes in School Lunches after Implementation of the United States Department of Agriculture's New Meals Standards: Minimal Backlash, but Rural and Socioeconomic Disparities Exist. *Childhood Obesity*. 2014: 10: 4: 349-356.

<sup>18</sup> Schwartz, MB., et al. New School Meal Regulations Increase Fruit Consumption and Do Not Increase Total Plate Waste. *Childhood Obesity* 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Government Accountability Office. School Lunch: Implementing Nutrition Changes Was Challenging and Clarification of Oversight Requirements Is Needed. 2014. Available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/660427.pdf>. Accessed February 1, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Edwards JU, et al. Relationship of nutrition and physical activity behaviors and fitness measures to academic performance for sixth graders in a midwest city school district. *Journal of School Health*: 2011; 81: 2: 65-73.

<sup>21</sup> Anzman-Frasca, S, et al. Estimating Impacts of a Breakfast in the Classroom Program on School Outcomes. *JAMA pediatrics*. 2015: 169: 1: 71-77.

<sup>22</sup> Moss, A., et al. Farm to School and Nutrition Education: Positively Affecting Elementary School-Aged Children's Nutrition Knowledge and Consumption Behavior. *Childhood Obesity*: 2013; 9(1): 51-56.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, JF, et al. Impact of the new U.S. Department of Agriculture school meal standards on food selection, consumption, and waste. *Am J Prev Med* 2014; 46(4): 388-394.

<sup>24</sup> Food Research and Action Center. National School Lunch Program: Trends and Factors Affecting Student Participation. 2015. Available at: [http://frac.org/pdf/national\\_school\\_lunch\\_report\\_2015.pdf](http://frac.org/pdf/national_school_lunch_report_2015.pdf). Access on February 10, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-235

<sup>26</sup> Wu, H., et al. Association Between Dietary Whole Grain Intake and Risk of Mortality: Two Large Prospective Studies in US Men and Women. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Cogswell, ME, et al. Vital Signs: Sodium Intake Among US School-Aged Children—2009-2010. *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*. 2014: 63: 36: 789-797.

<sup>28</sup> The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts. Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project. Serving Health School Meals: Schools need updated kitchen equipment. [http://www.healthyschoolfoodnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/KITS\\_Equipment\\_Report.pdf](http://www.healthyschoolfoodnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/KITS_Equipment_Report.pdf) 2013. Accessed February 5, 2015.