

Fact Sheet: Schools Serving, Kids Eating Healthier School Meals Thanks to Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

For the past three years, kids have eaten healthier breakfasts, lunches and snacks at school thanks to the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which made the first meaningful improvements to the nutrition of foods and beverages served in cafeterias and sold in vending machines in 30 years. Thanks to the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act and other strategies, the national obesity trend is slowly reversing, and our children have more energy to learn and grow, greater opportunity to thrive, and better overall health.

As Congress turns its attention to reauthorizing the Act this year, it is important to remember that our children are battling a national obesity epidemic that costs \$190.2 billion per year to treat and, according to retired U.S. generals, threatens our national security by making almost one in three young adults unfit to serve in our nation's military. If we don't continue to invest in our children's health, this generation will be the first to live shorter lives than their parents.

The Act has undoubtedly improved the quality of school meals as well as the health and wellbeing of our children and for those reasons is supported by parents, teachers, doctors and kids themselves. USDA continues to work with schools, listen carefully, and provide time, flexibility, guidance, and resources to help them serve the healthier meals. Now is not the time to backpedal on a healthier future for our kids—that is why Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack is encouraging Congress to act quickly to reauthorize a strong Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act and support the ongoing success of the healthier meals.

- Kids are eating more healthy food and throwing less food away. Plate waste is not increasing. A study released in March 2015 by the University of Connecticut's Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity shows that students are eating more nutritious foods and discarding less of their lunches under the healthier standards. Kids ate 13 percent more of their entrees and nearly 20 percent more of their vegetables in 2014 than in 2012, which means that less food is ending up in the trash today than before the national standards were updated.
- Americans agree that healthier meals are the right thing for our kids. A poll released in mid-August by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation shows that 9 out of 10 Americans support national nutrition standards for school meals. Nearly 70% believe school meals are excellent or good, compared to just 26% in 2010, before the healthier school meals were implemented in schools.
- Students like the taste of the healthier school meals. A 2015 study from the University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health found that nearly 90 percent of surveyed students liked at least some school meal options. And according to an August 2014 survey by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 70 percent of elementary school leaders nationwide reported that students liked the new lunches.
- Kids are eating more fruits and vegetables as a result of updated standards. A May 2014 Harvard School of Public Health study shows that, under the updated standards, kids are now eating 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit at lunch.
- Parents support the healthier school meals. A September 2014 poll released by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association shows that 72 percent of parents favor strong nutrition standards for school meals and 91 percent support serving fruits or vegetables with every meal.

- Support for healthier school meals is bipartisan. A September 2014 poll released by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association found that 87 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of independents and more than half of registered voters with kids in public schools surveyed were supportive of the new meals.
- Over 95 percent of schools report that they are successfully meeting the updated nutrition standards. Students across the country are experiencing a healthier school environment with more nutritious options. The new meals are providing children more whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean protein and low-fat dairy, as well as less sugar, fat, and sodium.
- USDA continues to work with schools as they implement the new standards. USDA recently launched an initiative called Team Up for School Nutrition Success that allows the schools who still face challenges to pair up and learn best practices from schools that are already successfully serving healthier meals. The program has provided training for more than 3,500 individuals and has been enthusiastically received by schools and school officials.
- School lunch revenue is up. Despite concerns raised about the impact of new standards on participation and costs, a USDA analysis suggests that last year, schools saw a net nationwide increase in revenue from school lunches of approximately \$450 million. This includes the annual reimbursement rate adjustments, as well as increased revenue from paid meals and the additional 6 cents per meal for schools meeting the new meal standards.
- Participation is increasing substantially in many areas of the country. Total breakfast participation increased by 380,000 students from FY2013 to FY2014 and has increased by more than 3 million students since 2008. USDA has also received reports from many schools indicating a positive response to healthier offerings and increased participation.

The Community Eligibility Provision under the HHFKA has been successfully implemented in over 14,000 schools. As a result, schools in low-income areas are now able to offer free, nutritious school meals to more than 6.8 million kids. Schools participating in CEP report increased revenue, decreased administrative costs, reduced program errors, and substantially higher program participation – on average, a 9 percent increase in school breakfast participation and 5 percent increase in school lunch.

As more kids and schools continue to successfully make the transition to the new standards, USDA expects participation to keep growing.

- Virtually all schools continue to participate. Data from states indicated very few schools (only 0.51 percent of schools nationwide) reported dropping out of the programs due to struggles over providing kids healthy food. State agencies reported that the schools no longer participating in the NSLP were mainly residential child care institutions and smaller schools with very low percentages of children eligible for free and reduced price meals.
- USDA has and will continue to listen to stakeholders and provide guidance and flexibilities, as appropriate, to help schools and students adapt to the updated requirements. Early in the implementation process for school meals, when schools asked for flexibility to serve larger servings of grains and proteins within the overall calorie caps, USDA responded. In January of 2014, that flexibility was made permanent. USDA is also phasing other requirements in over the next several years. And hearing schools concerns on the lack of availability of whole grain products, USDA is allowing schools that have demonstrated difficulty in obtaining adequate whole grain items to submit a request to the States to use some traditional products for an additional two years while industry works to create better whole grain products.