

## POSITION STATEMENT:

# Retain School Meal Standards and Healthy School Lunches

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The Society of Behavioral Medicine continues to support the retention of U.S. school meal standard changes to promote healthy eating among school-aged children.

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) released a health policy brief in March 2015 supporting retention of the revised nutrition standards in the U.S. National School Lunch Program set by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) to promote healthy eating and improve the overall health of children.<sup>1</sup> After initial implementation, opponents to the policy—such as food service personnel, parents, and members of Congress—reported that the changes resulted in lower consumption of school meals and increased plate waste. Initial evidence did not support these claims. In fact, several studies showed intake of healthy food options actually increased and there were no significant changes in plate waste.<sup>2,3</sup> In November 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a proposal to roll back some of the nutritional standards implemented by the HHFKA. Specifically, they are proposing to allow schools to offer 1% flavored milk; serve grains that are not whole; and delay the next level of sodium reductions.<sup>4</sup> SBM opposes this proposal given that, since initial implementation of the HHFKA, there have been several new studies that provide further evidence in support of the school lunch changes. We briefly review these studies below.

## NEW STUDIES

- Schwartz, Henderson, Read, Danna, and Ickovics<sup>3</sup> collected data before and after the implementation of the HHFKA at 12 kindergarten through eighth-grade schools in an urban school district in Connecticut. Results indicated the implementation of the HHFKA led to:
  - Healthier meals and less plate waste;
  - Increased fruit selection and consumption, with no increase in fruit waste;
  - More students selecting the revised entrées and less wasting of foods; and
  - Decreased vegetable plate waste. (Fewer students selected vegetables, but students who did select vegetables were eating more of the portion and wasting less.)
- The USDA<sup>5</sup> conducted semi-structured telephone interviews of nine school food service directors. Questions focused specifically on challenges faced during the initial implementation of HHFKA, strategies developed to cope with these challenges, and plate waste perceptions.
 

Directors reported that plate waste initially increased following implementation of the HHFKA. However, they were able to reduce fruit and milk waste to pre-HHFKA levels during the 2013-14 school year. Strategies for reducing plate waste included:

  - Involving students in meal planning and taste tests;
  - Offering healthful foods versus just serving them;
  - Providing more menu choices;
  - Serving familiar flavors;
  - Serving ready-to-eat fresh fruit;
  - Scheduling recess before lunch;
  - Inviting staff and teachers to sit with students at meals;
  - Encouraging students to save food for snacks; and
  - Allowing school cafeterias to donate intact, unserved foods to local food banks.
- Bergman, Englund, Taylor, Watkins, Schepman, and Rushing<sup>6</sup> compared student food consumption before versus after HHFKA implementation among a sample of more than 1,000 second- to fifth-graders. Results showed significant reductions in sodium and calories from saturated fats, and an increase in fiber. However, the amount of calcium-containing items selected and



consumed decreased. Authors noted the decrease in calcium might be due to reducing saturated fat, which may have led to reductions in consumption of foods high in fat and calcium (like cheese).

- There is also emerging evidence that school lunch plate waste can be reduced by:
  - Slicing fresh fruit rather than leaving it whole;<sup>7</sup>
  - Holding recess before lunch;<sup>8</sup> and
  - Scheduling lunch for at least 25-minute periods.<sup>9</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

New evidence continues to confirm that changes implemented as a result of the HHFKA have improved the dietary quality of school meals without increasing plate waste.

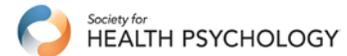
### SBM urges policymakers to:

1. Continue to support the retention of school meal standards and healthful lunches through reauthorization of the HHFKA.
2. Oppose the USDA's proposal to roll back school meal nutrition standards.
3. Continue to support other federal funding initiatives in support of healthful school lunches.

### SBM urges schools and stakeholders to:

1. Continue to support traditional and innovative nutrition education formats (e.g., farm tours, urban farming, demonstration kitchens) among children of all ages, encourage consumption of healthful foods, and make small environmental changes in lunchrooms/cafeterias to promote accessibility and attractiveness of healthful foods to help make these foods more normative as recommended in our 2015 statement.<sup>1</sup>
2. Use the following strategies to reduce plate waste:
  - Involve students in meal planning and taste tests;
  - Offer healthful foods versus just serving them;
  - Provide more menu choices;
  - Serve familiar flavors;
  - Serve ready-to-eat (sliced) fresh fruit;
  - Invite staff and teachers to sit with students at meals;
  - Schedule recess prior to lunch;
  - Allow 25 minutes or more for lunch sessions; and
  - Encourage students to save food for snacks.
- See additional suggestions from the USDA in Figure 1.

## ENDORSEMENTS



The Society for Health Psychology does not speak for the American Psychological Association (APA) or other divisions within the APA.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Buscemi, J., Odoms-Young, A., Yaroch, A. L., Hayman, L. L., Robertson, T. P., & Fitzgibbon, M. L. (2015). Society of behavioral medicine position statement: Retain healthy school lunch policies. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, 5(3), 357-359.
- 2 Cohen, J. F., Richardson, S., Parker, E., Catalano, P. J., & Rimm, E. B. (2014). Impact of the new US Department of Agriculture school meal standards on food selection, consumption, and waste. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 46(4), 388-394.
- 3 Schwartz, M. B., Henderson, K. E., Read, M., Danna, N., & Ickovics, J. R. (2015). New school lunch regulations increase fruit consumption and do not increase total plate waste. *Childhood Obesity*, 11(3), 242-47.
- 4 Department of Agriculture. (2017). Interim Rule: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/11/30/2017-25799/child-nutrition-programs-flexibilities-for-milk-whole-grains-and-sodium-requirements>.
- 5 USDA. (2016). HHFKA Implementation Research Brief: Plate waste. *USDA Food and Nutrition Service*, 1-7. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/HHFKA-PlateWaste.pdf>
- 6 Bergman, E. A., Englund, T., Taylor, K. W., Watkins, T., Schepman, S., & Rushing, K. (2014). School lunch before and after implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. *Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*, 38(2), 1-12.
- 7 Handforth, K. M., Gilboy, M. B., Harris, J. H., & Melia, N. (2016). Fruit and vegetable plate waste among students in a suburban school district participating in the National School Lunch Program. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*, 40(1), 1-12.
- 8 Price, J., & Just, D. R., (2014). Lunch, recess and nutrition: Responding to time incentives in the cafeteria. *Preventative Medicine*, 71, 27-30.
- 9 Cohen, J. F., Jahn, J. L., Richardson, S., Cluggish, S. A., Parker, E., & Rimm, E. B. (2016). Amount of time to eat lunch is associated with children's selection and consumption of school meal entrée, fruits, vegetables, and milk. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 116(1), 123-128.



# REDUCING FOOD WASTE

## WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO TODAY



USDA's Economic Research Service estimates

# 31%

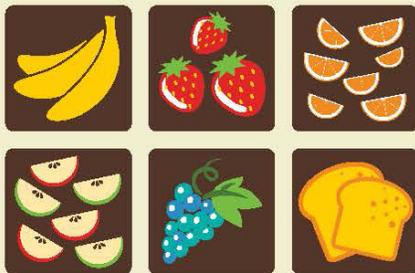
of the overall food supply at the retail and consumer level **went uneaten** in the U.S. in 2010



Scheduling recess before lunch can **reduce plate waste by AS MUCH AS 30%**

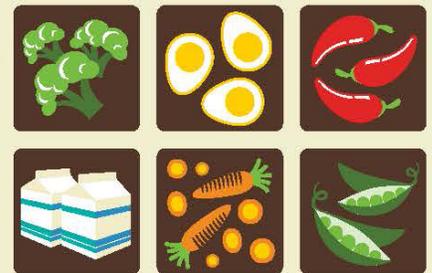


Extending lunch periods from **20 TO 30** minutes reduced plate waste by nearly one-third



### SMARTER LUNCHROOM STRATEGIES,

such as how foods are named and where they are placed in the cafeteria, can facilitate healthy choices and increase fruit and vegetable consumption by **UP TO 70%**



### SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE WITH INNOVATIVE NEW STRATEGIES, SUCH AS:

- Allowing students to keep a lunch or breakfast food item for consumption later in the school day
- Using techniques listed on the **Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Score Card** to help reduce food waste
- Setting up a table for kids to place items they are not going to consume (packaged or pre-portioned items)
- Letting kids self-serve
- Composting food waste for school gardens
- Collaborating with local farmers on composting or food-scrap projects
- Collecting excess wholesome food after mealtimes to donate to charitable organizations
- Sign up for the **U.S. Food Waste Challenge** to share your story on how you are reducing, recovering, or recycling food waste