

## SCHOOL LUNCH REAUTHORIZATION

The National School Lunch Program, which is up for reauthorization by Congress this year, is a major source of nutrition for millions of American children:

- ▶ During the 2008 fiscal year, more than 5 billion lunches were served through the program. Half of them were free to the students and another 10 percent were at a reduced price.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Nearly 2 billion breakfasts were served during the same time frame through the program. A total of 71 percent of them were free and another 10 percent provided at a reduced price.
- ▶ Sixty percent of the students receiving free lunches live in households with incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. The meals they receive at school account for a significant portion of all calories they will eat in a day.<sup>2</sup>



Although the Department of Agriculture sets guidelines on what kinds of food may be served through the program, they do little to limit high-fat, high-sugar foods and many schools are not meeting the requirements:

- ▶ Foods of minimal nutritional value cannot be sold in the food service area during meal times. What qualifies as minimal nutritional value is limited and includes items such as hard candies and chewing gum. However, those types of items can be sold during lunch time in vending machines located outside the cafeteria doors.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ À la carte items that are sold in cafeterias apart from the reimbursable school lunch often are a source of empty calories. In one study published in *Pediatrics*, nearly 80 percent of middle and high schools had low-nutrient, energy-dense foods available for students through à la carte items.
- ▶ A survey conducted by the Agriculture Department found less than one-third of public schools offered and served lunches that met the requirements for fat (no more than 30 percent of calories) and saturated fat (less than 10 percent of calories).
- ▶ Almost no schools met the benchmarks for sodium.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Usually there is no one person who makes all of the decisions about what type of food can be bought at school. School food service directors decide on à la carte sales and items served on the lunch line, while principals make decisions about competitive foods sold in vending machines. Parents and teachers decide what kind of food is sold for fundraisers, which often includes candy.<sup>6</sup>

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack proposed a variety of new measures for the reauthorization of the National School Lunch Program that will improve the quality of school food and impact states:

- ▶ Establish standards for competitive foods in schools.<sup>7</sup> Groups such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recommend applying the food standards to all food served on school campuses throughout the day, not just at lunch times.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ Provide federal financial assistance so schools can buy better equipment to prepare healthful meals.
- ▶ Train people who prepare school meals. Right now, there are no federal regulations requiring training or certification for school food service workers.

- ▶ Increase the federal reimbursement rate for school meals to enhance the quality of food and promote the consumption of whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- ▶ Increase access to meal programs with tools like direct certification, which automatically enroll children into the free lunch program when families apply for food assistance.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture. "The Food Assistant Landscape: FY 2008 Annual Report." <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib6-6/>

<sup>2</sup> USDA. "The National School Lunch Program: Background, Trends, and Issues." <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err61/err61.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> USDA. "Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value." <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/menu/fmnv.htm>

<sup>4</sup> "School Food Environments and Policies in U.S. Public Schools." Daniel M. Finkelstein, et al. *Pediatrics* 2008; 122; e251–e259.

<sup>5</sup> USDA. "School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study—III." <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/published/CNP/FILES/SNDAll-SummaryofFindings.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Government Accountability Office. "School Meal Programs: Competitive Foods Are Widely Available and Generate Substantial Revenue for Schools." <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05563.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> USDA. "Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Presents Obama Administration's Priorities to Improve National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs." [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/ut/pl\\_s7\\_0\\_A7\\_0\\_10B?contentidonly=true&contentid=2010/02/0079.xml](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/ut/pl_s7_0_A7_0_10B?contentidonly=true&contentid=2010/02/0079.xml)

<sup>8</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "Improving Child Nutrition Policy: Insights from National USDA Study of School Food Environments." <http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=38168>



## State Nutrition Policies and School Meals Served, 2009

STATE	Nutritional Standards for School Meals	Nutritional Standards for Competitive Foods	Limited Access to Competitive Foods	Average Number of Breakfasts Served Daily	Average Number of Lunches Served Daily
Alabama	X	X	X	212,324	579,890
Alaska				16,898	53,554
Arizona	X	X	X	231,667	655,529
Arkansas	X	X	X	155,041	353,214
California	X	X	X	1,172,578	3,175,197
Colorado	X	X	X	106,049	382,913
Connecticut	X	X	X	68,907	302,994
Delaware				33,202	90,073
District of Columbia				20,431	44,579
Florida			X	610,874	1,560,326
Georgia			X	564,600	1,290,939
Guam	N/A	N/A	N/A	7,849	18,449
Hawaii		X	X	35,946	103,807
Idaho				70,851	170,005
Illinois		X	X	293,385	1,148,899
Indiana		X	X	209,931	783,684
Iowa				84,552	394,411
Kansas				96,288	356,432
Kentucky	X	X	X	238,789	570,761
Louisiana		X	X	243,399	586,243
Maine		X	X	37,130	107,748
Maryland		X	X	154,363	432,584
Massachusetts	X			134,878	547,388
Michigan				282,196	911,337
Minnesota				140,076	626,280
Mississippi	X	X	X	199,880	405,716
Missouri				235,682	645,275
Montana				25,594	86,652
Nebraska			X	58,000	243,466
Nevada	X	X	X	55,882	183,981
New Hampshire				22,025	110,787
New Jersey	X	X	X	172,368	704,632
New Mexico		X	X	129,159	221,647
New York			X	573,474	1,811,215
North Carolina	X	X	X	367,242	961,655
North Dakota				20,235	80,910
Ohio				360,224	1,119,418
Oklahoma	X	X	X	208,240	437,581
Oregon		X	X	138,804	310,770
Pennsylvania		X	X	290,156	1,149,169
Puerto Rico	N/A	N/A	N/A	141,250	373,353
Rhode Island	X	X		23,418	79,017
South Carolina	X	X	X	249,443	500,742
South Dakota	X			25,474	106,232
Tennessee	X	X		250,436	614,311
Texas	X	X	X	1,530,524	3,257,146
Utah				66,482	337,720
Vermont	X	X	X	21,397	54,837
Virginia				234,396	752,699
Virgin Islands	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,483	13,948
Washington				168,090	532,520
West Virginia		X	X	93,121	207,758
Wisconsin				135,345	592,963
Wyoming				14,207	56,351