

A nonpartisan, nonprofit
organization established by the
Northern and Southern California
Public Health Associations



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Because health doesn't just happen

October 5, 2012

Mr. Kevin Concannon
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Support for Revised National School Lunch Program Meal Patterns

Dear Under Secretary Concannon:

The California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA) writes to support the newly revised United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program meal patterns, the update of which was an important component of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. CCPHA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that raises awareness about critical public health issues and mobilizes communities to promote the establishment of effective state and local health policies. CCPHA has worked for the last decade to reverse the obesity and diabetes epidemics in California. A major component of that work has focused on the school food environment. Each day for up to 13 years, schools have hours of direct contact with more than 95 percent of youth ages 5 to 17. Given schools' influence on young peoples' lives, the food served at school should support good health.

Establishing a healthy school food environment becomes incredibly more important considering the state of the obesity and diabetes epidemics. One in three students in California is overweight or obese. Overweight and obesity are indicators of serious health risks in children and adolescents including high cholesterol and high blood pressure (risk factors for cardiovascular disease), high fasting insulin (an early indicator of diabetes risk), and a variety of musculoskeletal disorders. The increase in Type 2 diabetes in children is closely associated with rising rates of obesity and overweight. If the trends continue, it is estimated that close to half of African American and Latino children born in 2000 will develop diabetes sometime in their lives.

The caloric maximums established in the new school meal patterns will help students keep their caloric intake within recommended ranges. California's experience in regulating the nutritional content of competitive foods offers some perspective in the potential these changes represent. A recent report noted that California students consumed on average nearly 160 calories fewer per day than students in other states. The researchers noted, however, that there is still room for improving the nutritional value of foods eaten at schools. The new school meal pattern helps do that with the stronger fruit, vegetable, and whole grain requirements and the required sodium reductions.

Californians want schools to be a part of the obesity and diabetes epidemics solution. A poll done earlier this year found that 91 percent of California voters believe that local schools should play a role in obesity prevention. Ninety-six percent of respondents felt that schools should make healthy food and drinks available. Implementing the school meal patterns will help schools meet Californians' expectations of them.

Sincerely,

S. Alecia Sanchez
Policy Director