



clean environment, healthy children, better education

October 5, 2012

Alan Shannon
77 W. Jackson Blvd
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Alan:

On behalf of Healthy Schools Campaign, I am writing to express my support for the USDA's recent improvements to the national nutrition standards for school meals. These improvements represent an important step for children's health and learning.

These new standards reflect a movement to transform our nation's school lunch program from one that supplies calories to a generation of under-nourished children to one that focuses on providing nutrient-rich meals for a generation of children facing high rates of obesity and related illnesses. When the national school lunch program was created in 1945, it was seen in part as a measure of national security. Military leaders, concerned about the number of young men who were too malnourished for military service, called upon the nation to make sure that students received proper nutrition. This drive shaped many of the program's details, such as the fact that school lunches were required to provide a minimum number of calories but had no upper limit on calories.

Today, we are facing a different set of challenges. Sixty-plus years after the school lunch program began, military leaders have again urged schools to make changes to their food program out of concern for the number of young men and women who are facing serious health problems, this time as a result of overweight and obesity. These military leaders have joined parents, educators, medical experts and others in calling for school meals to focus not only on providing children with an adequate number of calories but on providing the healthy, nutrient-dense food that is lacking in many kids' diets, foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

For the past decade, we've seen a shift in the way our country thinks about school food. With these new standards, the USDA is taking an important step to re-engineer the program from one that focuses on delivering calories to one that focuses on the type of nutrition that today's generation of children needs.

This effort has been surrounded by activity from across sectors -- we've seen the growth of the farm to school movement, a requirement for schools to develop wellness policies, even money for school kitchen facilities in the federal stimulus funding. On a school level, we've seen school nutrition leaders across the country making changes to transform their programs and focus on healthier school meals. The new USDA nutrition standards are based in current nutrition science and in an understanding of the health needs of today's generation of children. The standards are an important part of our nation's journey to re-envision school food that began more than a decade ago and will surely continue for years to come.

Healthy Schools Campaign, an independent not-for-profit organization, is a leading authority on healthy school environments and a voice for people who care about our environment, our children, and education. Our mission is to advocate for policies and practices that allow all students, teachers and staff to learn and work in a healthy school environment. We thank the USDA for taking this important step for children's health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Bishop".

Mark Bishop
Vice President of Policy and Communication