Negative Brief: School Lunch Reform

By Katherine Baker

Negative Brief: School Lunch Reform 3

NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY / OPENING QUOTES 3

MINOR REPAIR 3

M.R. Advocacy: There are better ways to solve for waste than rolling back all we have gained 3

Mandate longer school lunch periods 3

More eating time reduces lunch waste 3

Recess before lunch 3

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE 4

1. “Food waste” responses 4

Status Quo has better food, less waste 4

“Increased food waste” studies flawed: Didn’t take into account income differences 4

Worth the waste, considering the health benefits of reduced chronic disease 4

2. “Kids going hungry” responses 4

Wait, I thought they were throwing food away? If they get hungry enough, they’ll eat what they’re given 4

3. “Schools hate HHFKA, dropping out of school lunch program” responses 5

False information being spread about schools rejecting HHFKA. Example: CBS report on Laguna Beach, California. 5

Exaggerated/mistaken statistics about schools rejecting HHFKA. Example: Associated Press report. 5

4. “Student lunch participation declining” responses 6

Nothing new about student school lunch participation decline – it was declining before HHFKA was enacted 6

Other factors led to declining participation. GAO study did not recommend changing HHFKA standards 6

5. “Students hate the food” responses 6

Students enjoying food 6

Students like and eat the HHFKA food 6

Exposure leads to acceptance 7

Implementation challenge expected; not a problem and well worth the effort 7

6. Reverse advocacy: the GAO study and hundreds of experts 7

Even with flaws, GAO study would keep HHFKA 7

Hundreds of experts and organizations support Status Quo school nutrition standards 7

7. More time needed 8

Takes time. Increasing acceptance of healthier food will take a while. 8

Student acceptance is improving. Negative trend will reverse itself over time 8

Changing times, changing minds. After initial complaints, children grew to like new meals. 8

Exposure equals acceptance 8

DISADVANTAGES 9

1. Poorer child health 9

Link: Central Washington Univ. study - Food quality improved with HHFKA 9

Link: Central Washington University study - HHFKA had a positive effect on nutritional quality 9

Link: CWU Study – HHFKA has significant positive effect on nutrition 9

Link: Renton, Washington study - 29% improvement in nutritional quality under HHFKA 10

Brink: Lunches before HHFKA were unhealthy 10

Brink: Rules help low-income students eat more nutritious food, and they are consuming more of it with the new rules 10

Impact: Rolling back nutrition standards leads to childhood obesity, hurts children’s health 10

Impact: Heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and shorter lifespans 11

Impact: Child obesity rise. Due to recent efforts, obesity trends have plateaued. 11

2. Increased school administrative costs from abolishing CEP 11

CEP reduces administrative burdens 11

CEP reduces administrative burden 11

Works Cited: School Lunch Reform (Negative) 12

Negative Brief: School Lunch Reform

NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY / OPENING QUOTES

MINOR REPAIR

M.R. Advocacy: There are better ways to solve for waste than rolling back all we have gained

Teresa Watanabe, 2014 (journalist) LOS ANGELES TIMES “Solutions sought to reduce food waste at schools” April 1, 2014 <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-lausd-waste-20140402-story.html> (brackets added)

The solution to waste, [Harvard public health professor Juliana] Cohen and others say, isn't to roll back the rules but to find other ways to prod children to eat their vegetables. Working with professional chefs to make meals tastier, planting school gardens and scheduling recess before lunch are all proven ways to do so, Cohen and McCarthy say. The Utah study found that rewards such as raffle tickets and small amounts of money got students to eat more produce with far less waste than mandatory servings. Joseph Price, a Brigham Young assistant economics professor and study co-writer, said smoothies and redesigned cafeterias have also been effective.

Mandate longer school lunch periods

Christopher Wanjek 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column, Bad Medicine, appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” October 7, 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html> (brackets added)

But there are no national standards for the length of the school lunch period, [Harvard public health professor Juliana] Cohen said. Thus, the new findings provide evidence that offering kids enough time to sit down and eat may ensure that they will eat healthier foods.

More eating time reduces lunch waste

Christopher Wanjek 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column, Bad Medicine, appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” 7 Oct 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html>

Yet recent studies have shown that claims of food waste may be inflated. And now, researchers at Harvard University have found that schoolkids will consume more fruits and vegetables if they are given at least 25 minutes to eat. The researchers followed more than 1,000 elementary school kids from low-income families who were eligible for these free school-based meals. They found that children with less than 20 minutes of seated lunch time consumed 13 percent less of their entrees, 10 percent less of their milk and 12 percent less of their whole grains and vegetables when compared with students who had at least 25 minutes to sit and eat their lunch. Kids who were given less time for lunch also were less likely to choose healthier options.

Recess before lunch

Christopher Wanjek 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column, appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets, such as Yahoo!, MSNBC, AOL, and Fox News.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” October 7, 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html> [Brackets in original]

Just and his colleague Joseph Price, an associate professor at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, found that scheduling recess before the seated lunchtime, instead of after, similarly increased the students' consumption of fruits and vegetables. When recess playtime comes after eating, "[the children] have an incentive to rush through lunch," Just said. The researchers on the Harvard-led study, which includes members of the Boston-based anti-hunger nonprofit Project Bread, wrote that the new lunch nutrition guidelines are surely bringing healthier foods to schoolkids. More research is needed, however, to maximize the efficiency of the program.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

1. “Food waste” responses

Status Quo has better food, less waste

Christopher Wanjek, 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets, such as Yahoo!, MSNBC, AOL, and Fox News.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” October 7, 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html> (brackets added)

As for food waste, [Harvard public health professor Juliana] Cohen said that two major studies in large, low-income school districts have found similar results: The new standards have led to improvements in diets and decreases in waste.

“Increased food waste” studies flawed: Didn’t take into account income differences

Christopher Wanjek, 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets, such as Yahoo!, MSNBC, AOL, and Fox News.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” October 7, 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html> (brackets added)

One large study did find increases in waste, [Harvard public health professor Juliana] Cohen said, but the children studied were from a higher income bracket and perhaps not representative of the majority of kids getting free lunches. Smaller studies have found more waste in wealthier, suburban schools compared to poor, urban schools.

Worth the waste, considering the health benefits of reduced chronic disease

Teresa Watanabe, 2014 (journalist) LOS ANGELEST TIMES “Solutions sought to reduce food waste at schools” April 1, 2014 <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-lausd-waste-20140402-story.html>

Many nutrition and health experts disagree, citing studies that show repeated exposure to fruits and vegetables eventually leads children to eat more of them. That, in turn, will help prevent obesity and related maladies, says William J. McCarthy, a UCLA professor of health policy and management. The cost of wasted food "is a small investment for permanently enlarging our children's receptivity to the foods most likely to prolong their lives and minimize their risk of the major chronic diseases that kill Americans," McCarthy said in an email.

2. “Kids going hungry” responses

Wait, I thought they were throwing food away? If they get hungry enough, they’ll eat what they’re given

Madeline Holler 2013 (mom, journalist) 16 Oct 2013 “The School Lunch Myth” <http://mom.me/kids/tween/9245-school-lunch-myth/>

Still, people complain that kids won't eat the un-breaded foods, and they might have a point. But everyone knows that if kids are hungry enough, they'll eat what they're given. Kid's palates also might need to adjust to the difference, but that's no reason to just go back to deep-fried burritos and tater tots.

3. “Schools hate HHFKA, dropping out of school lunch program” responses

False information being spread about schools rejecting HHFKA. Example: CBS report on Laguna Beach, California.

Dana Woldow 2013. (founder of Parents Educators & Advocates Connection for Healthy School Food; formed a committee that wrote the nutrition plan for San Francisco schools in 2003; former co-chair of the Student Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee for S.F. school district) “[ATTACKS ON SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM GOT IT WRONG](http://www.beyondchron.org/attacks-on-school-lunch-program-got-it-wrong/)” 5 Sept 2013 <http://www.beyondchron.org/attacks-on-school-lunch-program-got-it-wrong/>

The CBS report also singled out the Laguna Beach school district in Southern California for special mention. “The Laguna Beach Unified School District, in Southern California, is the latest district to rebel against the federal healthy lunch program — a cornerstone of first lady Michelle Obama’s campaign against childhood obesity. The school district announced Tuesday night that it will revise its lunch menus,” claimed CBS. Later in the report, the Laguna Beach student nutrition director, Debra Appel, is quoted as saying “It’s not the chicken nuggets, it’s not the popcorn chicken. It’s not the corn dogs and stuff that the kids really liked”, as if she were objecting to the changes that have brought healthier offerings to her cafeterias. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. After seeing the CBS news report, I contacted Debra Appel. She told me that her school district has no intention of dropping any schools from the federal meal program, and that contrary to what the CBS report trumpeted in its opening, Laguna Beach is not “rebelling” against school meal regulations, nor does it object to or intend to back away from the new healthier meal regulations. Appel said her district is “working with student committees on new kitchen cooked recipes to enhance our menus; we have hired two Registered Dietitians to work on recipes and menu production just to comply with the new regs. We got our “Menu Certification” in May and are very proud of our program and all the efforts we have put into being in compliance with the new regulations” which, she said, “are for the benefit of our students, and give them the tools to live healthy and learn.” Like the children’s game commonly called [Telephone](http://www.parentsconnect.com/parenting-your-kids/activities/games/telephone-game.html), or Whispering Down the Lane, the more these inaccurate news articles get repeated, the more the mistakes are compounded.

Exaggerated/mistaken statistics about schools rejecting HHFKA. Example: Associated Press report.

Dana Woldow 2013. (founder of Parents Educators & Advocates Connection for Healthy School Food; formed a committee that wrote the nutrition plan for San Francisco schools in 2003; formerly served as co-chair of the Student Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee for S.F. school district) “[ATTACKS ON SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM GOT IT WRONG](http://www.beyondchron.org/attacks-on-school-lunch-program-got-it-wrong/)” 5 Sept 2013 <http://www.beyondchron.org/attacks-on-school-lunch-program-got-it-wrong/>

As many school districts are comprised of dozens, even hundreds, of individual schools, confounding a single school with an entire district is kind of a big mistake for AP to make in reporting this story. But then, five nutrition directors saying they would drop one school from the program wouldn’t really be a story at all, would it? The article cited three districts that planned to drop the federal meal program, but without mentioning that all of them are very small. For example, [Voorheesville School District](http://vcsd.neric.org/HS/HS_about.htm) in NY was mentioned, but not the fact that the district has just 3 schools serving a total of about 1300 students. The [Catlin Community School District](http://catlin.il.schoolwebpages.com/education/school/school.php?sectionid=8475), in Illinois, also mentioned in the article, has just two schools, serving about 500 students total. The only other school district mentioned, [Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake](http://bhbl.org/index.cfm) in upstate NY, has a total of 5 schools and a student population of about 3200. With over 100,000 schools and more than 31 million students [participating](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program.aspx) in the National School Lunch Program in 2012-13, how does the loss of these 10 schools and their 5,000 total students merit even a paragraph in a small town weekly, let alone an AP story?

4. “Student lunch participation declining” responses

Nothing new about student school lunch participation decline – it was declining before HHFKA was enacted

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Massachusetts General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 13, 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

Proponents of the waivers also argue that many children dropped out of the school-lunch program as a result of 2012 changes to school meals. In fact, the number of students paying full price for school lunch has been decreasing by an average of nearly 5% annually since the 2007–2008 school year, while the number of students qualifying for free meals has been increasing.

Other factors led to declining participation. GAO study did not recommend changing HHFKA standards

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Massachusetts General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 13, 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

Several factors may have led to an overall 3.7% decrease in student participation from the 2010–2011 school year through the 2012–2013 school year, including the recession, price increases for full-price participants, students' wariness of new foods, and negative media coverage of school-lunch content. In a January 2014 report, the Government Accountability Office noted that it was unclear how much each of these factors contributed to changes in program participation and did not recommend changes to the new nutrition standards.

5. “Students hate the food” responses

Students enjoying food

Monica Hobbs Vinluan 2016 (Monica Hobbs Vinluan, JD, is a senior program officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation working to ensure that all children in the United States have a healthy start.) “Healthier Cafeterias Thanks to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act” Jan 4, 2016 <http://www.rwjf.org/en/culture-of-health/2015/12/healthier_cafeterias.html>

Putting healthier options on kids’ trays is an essential step, but the big challenge is making sure kids are eating and enjoying the meals. The good news is research shows that more students are taking fruit with their lunch, they’re eating more of their vegetables and entrees, and they generally like the new meals.

Students like and eat the HHFKA food

Monica Hobbs Vinluan 2016 (Monica Hobbs Vinluan, JD, senior program officer at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ) “Healthier Cafeterias Thanks to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act” Jan 4, 2016 <http://www.rwjf.org/en/culture-of-health/2015/12/healthier_cafeterias.html>

After five years, a lot truly has been accomplished. Ninety-seven percent of schools nationwide are meeting healthier standards for school meals. Significantly more schools are now offering lunches with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Putting healthier options on kids’ trays is an essential step, but the big challenge is making sure kids are eating and enjoying the meals. The good news is research shows that more students are taking fruit with their lunch, they’re eating more of their vegetables and entrees, and they generally like the new meals.

Exposure leads to acceptance

Teresa Watanabe 2014 (journalist.) LOS ANGELES TIMES “Solutions sought to reduce food waste at schools” April 1, 2014 <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-lausd-waste-20140402-story.html>

Many nutrition and health experts disagree, citing studies that show repeated exposure to fruits and vegetables eventually leads children to eat more of them. That, in turn, will help prevent obesity and related maladies, says William J. McCarthy, a UCLA professor of health policy and management. The cost of wasted food "is a small investment for permanently enlarging our children's receptivity to the foods most likely to prolong their lives and minimize their risk of the major chronic diseases that kill Americans," McCarthy said in an email.

Implementation challenge expected; not a problem and well worth the effort

Tim Carman 2014 (journalist) WASHINGTON POST “Two new studies underscore hopes, frustrations of revamped school lunches” March 4, 2014 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/food/wp/2014/03/04/two-new-studies-underscore-hopes-frustrations-of-revamped-school-lunches/> (brackets added)

But more important, [director of nutrition policy for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Margo] Wootan said, change is never easy. Challenges adopting the new standards were expected. “Teaching science also is challenging, but that doesn’t mean schools should drop it from the curriculum,” Wootan noted in an e-mail. “And even if schools do a great job teaching science, not all students get passing marks. Schools keep working to help as many students as possible do well and pass.” “Ultimately when you consider the long-term public health benefits, these initial bumps don’t compare to your savings and impact of improving school nutrition for 31 million kids/day,” Wootan wrote.

6. Reverse advocacy: the GAO study and hundreds of experts

Even with flaws, GAO study would keep HHFKA

Tim Carman 2014 (journalist) WASHINGTON POST “Two new studies underscore hopes, frustrations of revamped school lunches” March 4, 2014 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/food/wp/2014/03/04/two-new-studies-underscore-hopes-frustrations-of-revamped-school-lunches/>

Despite the apparent gloom and doom of the GAO report, its authors do not recommend scaling back the USDA nutritional requirements for the lunch program, unlike other groups. Food service directors and other members of the School Nutrition Association are lobbying Congress to drop a number of requirements, including the one forcing students to select a half cup of fruit or vegetables.

Hundreds of experts and organizations support Status Quo school nutrition standards

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Massachusetts General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 13, 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

This past spring, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Heart Association, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and more than 200 other organizations joined First Lady Michelle Obama and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in opposing the challenges to the new school-nutrition standards. Although current leaders of the SNA are vocal advocates for rollbacks and waivers, a group of 19 past SNA presidents opposes the waivers.

7. More time needed

Takes time. Increasing acceptance of healthier food will take a while.

Tim Carman 2014 (journalist) WASHINGTON POST “Two new studies underscore hopes, frustrations of revamped school lunches” March 4, 2014 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/food/wp/2014/03/04/two-new-studies-underscore-hopes-frustrations-of-revamped-school-lunches/>

The decline doesn’t surprise Howell Wechsler, chief executive of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and former director of the Division of Adolescent and School Health at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “One of the things is getting students used to” more healthful foods, Wechsler says. “It takes a while to get them used to new food. . .It takes a little bit of trial and error.”

Student acceptance is improving. Negative trend will reverse itself over time

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Massachusetts General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 13, 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

Many school officials expect some of these challenges to diminish over time, as schools and students become accustomed to the new program — and indeed, reports of improved acceptance among students are emerging. In a nationwide survey conducted in the spring of 2013, 70% of school officials said they believed that elementary-school students liked the new meals.

Changing times, changing minds. After initial complaints, children grew to like new meals.

Christopher Wanjek, 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets, such as Yahoo!, MSNBC, AOL, and Fox News.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” October 7, 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html>

But pundits have argued that criticism of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama, may be based more on politics than on science. Bettina Elias Siegel, who created the blog The Lunch Tray, has noted that most studies do not indicate that children hate the food or that food waste is on the rise as a result. In her blog, Siegel highlighted a survey of nearly 600 schools published last year in the journal Childhood Obesity that revealed that although most schools reported that children first complained about the new meals, the kids soon grew to like them.

Exposure equals acceptance

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Massachusetts General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

Finally, students' taste preferences are cited as a barrier to consumption of school meals that adhere to the new guidelines. But research demonstrates that children — even infants as young as 4 months old — who are repeatedly exposed to new foods are more willing to accept them. Thus, repeated opportunities for children to try healthy foods create a pathway for improving nutrition early in life.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Poorer child health

Link: Central Washington Univ. study - Food quality improved with HHFKA

Ethan A. Bergman, Tim Englund, Tracee Watkins, Stephen Schepman, Keith Rushing, 2014 (Bergman, Englund, Watkins, and Schepman are respectively Professor and Associate Dean, College of Education and Professional Studies; Professor and Associate Dean, College of the Sciences; former Asst Prof of Nutrition, Exercise and Health Sciences; and Prof of Interdisciplinary Studies at Central Washington Univ. Watkins is now a graduate student at Kansas State Univ. Taylor was a grad. student at Central Washington Univ at the time of the study. Rushing is a Research Scientist at the National Food Service Management Institute, Hattiesburg, Miss.) “School Lunch Before and After Implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act” Fall 2014 <https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/5_News_and_Publications/4_The_Journal_of_Child_Nutrition_and_Management/Fall_2014/SchoolLunchBeforeandAfterImplementationHealthyHungerFreeKidsAct.pdf>

In summary, the current study indicates that changes in meal pattern requirements mandated by the HHFKA improved the quality of the NSLP meals within the four elementary schools participating in the study. This included a majority of the key nutrients and fiber analyzed. The only notable exception to this was calcium. Calcium selected and consumed dropped when compared to the NSLP meals selected and consumed before the HHFKA was implemented. Although this is based on limited data in four schools, it may be prudent for child nutrition professionals to be cognizant about including calcium rich foods in the NSLP menu development pattern.

Link: Central Washington University study - HHFKA had a positive effect on nutritional quality

Ethan A. Bergman, Tim Englund, Tracee Watkins, Stephen Schepman, Keith Rushing, 2014 (Bergman, Englund, Watkins, and Schepman are respectively Professor and Associate Dean, College of Education and Professional Studies; Professor and Associate Dean, College of the Sciences; former Asst Prof of Nutrition, Exercise and Health Sciences; and Prof of Interdisciplinary Studies at Central Washington Univ. Watkins is now a graduate student at Kansas State Univ. Taylor was a grad. student at Central Washington Univ at the time of the study. Rushing is a Research Scientist at the National Food Service Management Institute, Hattiesburg, Miss.) “School Lunch Before and After Implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act” Fall 2014 <https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/5_News_and_Publications/4_The_Journal_of_Child_Nutrition_and_Management/Fall_2014/SchoolLunchBeforeandAfterImplementationHealthyHungerFreeKidsAct.pdf>

Results of this investigation suggest that implementation of the HHFKA had a positive effect on the nutrient makeup of NSLP meals, both selected and consumed, in four schools in two school districts in the state of Washington. Specifically, the current study indicates that reductions in the percentage of calories from saturated fat, sodium, and increases in fiber have occurred when comparing 2012 meal nutrient means to 2013 meal nutrient means.

Link: CWU Study – HHFKA has significant positive effect on nutrition

Ethan A. Bergman, Tim Englund, Tracee Watkins, Stephen Schepman, Keith Rushing, 2014 (Bergman, Englund, Watkins, and Schepman are respectively Professor and Associate Dean, College of Education and Professional Studies; Professor and Associate Dean, College of the Sciences; former Asst Prof of Nutrition, Exercise and Health Sciences; and Prof of Interdisciplinary Studies at Central Washington Univ. Watkins is now a graduate student at Kansas State Univ. Taylor was a grad. student at Central Washington Univ at the time of the study. Rushing is a Research Scientist at the National Food Service Management Institute, Hattiesburg, Miss.) “School Lunch Before and After Implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act” Fall 2014 <https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/5_News_and_Publications/4_The_Journal_of_Child_Nutrition_and_Management/Fall_2014/SchoolLunchBeforeandAfterImplementationHealthyHungerFreeKidsAct.pdf>

When the NSLP meals from 2012 and 2013 were compared, the results support the hypothesis that the implementation of the HHFKA had a significant positive effect on the mean amount of many of the nutrients selected and consumed in the NSLP lunches. Data analysis, shown in Table 2, revealed significant differences between the 2012 meals and 2013 meals in mean content of selected food energy, percentage of calories from total fat and saturated fat, carbohydrates, protein, calcium, fiber, cholesterol, sodium, and vitamin C.

Link: Renton, Washington study - 29% improvement in nutritional quality under HHFKA

Monica Hobbs Vinluan 2016 (Monica Hobbs Vinluan, JD, senior program officer at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ) “Healthier Cafeterias Thanks to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act” Jan 4, 2016 <http://www.rwjf.org/en/culture-of-health/2015/12/healthier_cafeterias.html>

Renton School District in Washington State is a fantastic example of the progress being made. A study published earlier this week found that, after the new standards rolled out, students there chose healthier foods with fewer calories per gram for lunch. The overall nutritional quality of the foods students chose increased by 29 percent, and participation in the lunch program held steady between 2011 and 2014. The study’s authors attributed the improvements to increases in the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables offered.

Brink: Lunches before HHFKA were unhealthy

Christopher Wanjek, 2015 (author of "Food at Work" and "Bad Medicine." His column appears regularly on Live Science, a science news website. Stories and editorial commentary are typically syndicated to major news outlets, such as Yahoo!, MSNBC, AOL, and Fox News.) “Are Healthy School Lunch Programs a Waste?” October 7, 2015 <http://www.livescience.com/52408-healthy-school-lunch-food-waste.html>

In 2008, a study conducted by the U.S. Institute of Medicine, a nonprofit, non-governmental organization comprising the nation's top physicians (now renamed the National Academy of Medicine), found that many school lunches were unhealthy and did not meet national dietary guidelines. The study inspired the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which set new nutrition standards, even for schools that don't provide free lunches.

Brink: Rules help low-income students eat more nutritious food, and they are consuming more of it with the new rules

Teresa Watanabe 2014 (journalist.) LOS ANGELES TIMES “Solutions sought to reduce food waste at schools” April 1, 2014 <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-lausd-waste-20140402-story.html>

Other nutrition experts are pushing back. Juliana Cohen, a Harvard University nutrition research fellow, said the rules have helped children eat more nutritious food — particularly important, she said, for urban, low-income students who get up to half their daily calories from school meals. She co-wrote a study, published this month, that found that students observed over two days in four Boston schools ate more fruits and vegetables after the new rules took effect — although they still threw away much of them.

Impact: Rolling back nutrition standards leads to childhood obesity, hurts children’s health

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of the Division of General Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Massachusetts General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

Attempts to roll back the modernization and improvement of school-meal standards threaten future progress in reducing obesity and other chronic diseases that originate in early childhood. After 30 years of escalating prevalence of childhood obesity, recent plateaus suggest that progress has been made on many fronts. Federal improvements to school meals represented a key victory — yet now they are under attack. As pediatricians, we worry that this attack undermines schools' ability to foster health-promoting behaviors and represents a disinvestment in children's health.

Impact: Heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and shorter lifespans

Dana Woldow 2013. (founder of Parents Educators & Advocates Connection for Healthy School Food; formed committee that wrote nutrition plan for San Francisco schools in 2003; former co-chair of the Student Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee for S.F. school district) “[ATTACKS ON SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM GOT IT WRONG](http://www.beyondchron.org/attacks-on-school-lunch-program-got-it-wrong/)” 5 Sept 2013 <http://www.beyondchron.org/attacks-on-school-lunch-program-got-it-wrong/>

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 established the new regulations requiring more fruit, vegetables and whole grains in school meals, and less sodium and empty calories. This was an important step in addressing childhood obesity that puts kids at [risk](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm) for developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some types of cancer, and other problems that mean the current generation of children face the [possibility](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/Overweight-in-Children_UCM_304054_Article.jsp) of a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Impact: Child obesity rise. Due to recent efforts, obesity trends have plateaued.

Prof. Jennifer A. Woo Baidal and Dr. Elsie M. Taveras 2014 (Baidal - Asst Prof of Pediatrics at CUMC; director of Pediatric Weight Management at Division of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology & Nutrition. Taveras - MD, MPH, Chief of General Pediatrics, Director of Pediatric Population Health Management at Mass. General Hospital and Assoc. Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School) “Protecting Progress against Childhood Obesity — The National School Lunch Program” 13 Nov 2014 <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1409353#t=article>

We can help ensure that U.S. children have access to healthy foods and reduce their risk of obesity. Waivers of new school-lunch standards would represent a large step backward. Instead, we believe that the scientific integrity of school-meal standards should be maintained and that the U.S. Department of Agriculture should work with stakeholders to evaluate progress in implementing the new regulations. The Robert Wood Johnson Commission to Build a Healthier America recommends that we create a “culture of health” for U.S. children. Doing so requires investing in physical and mental wellness beginning in early childhood and creating communities that foster health-promoting behaviors. Pediatricians can talk with children and their families about the importance of eating whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Parents can tell school officials and lawmakers that they want healthy school meals. Schools can work with local chefs, dietitians, parents, and students to make school meals more appealing and to incorporate culturally appropriate foods. The prevalence of childhood obesity has increased sharply over the past 30 years. It will take time to reverse this trend, but recent plateaus in obesity rates suggest that multipronged initiatives spanning health care, public health, and education settings are well worth the effort. School nutrition is a matter of children's health; it should not be driven by politics.

2. Increased school administrative costs from abolishing CEP

CEP reduces administrative burdens

Abt Associates under contract with US Dept of Agriculture 2014. “Community Eligibility Provision Evaluation” Feb 2014 <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED557961>

The CEP has two potential advantages, compared to conventional reimbursement methods: (1) it can potentially increase student participation in meal programs by expanding access to free meals for all students, and (2) it can decrease household and administrative burden by not requiring regular applications to establish eligibility, and by simplifying the counting of reimbursable meals.

CEP reduces administrative burden

Abt Associates under contract with US Dept of Agriculture 2014. “Community Eligibility Provision Evaluation” Feb 2014 <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED557961>

Section 104(a) of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 made the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) available to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and schools in high poverty areas. Under the CEP, families are not required to submit applications for free or reduced price meals, and schools must provide free lunch and breakfast to all students. Schools are reimbursed for meals using a formula based on the percentage of students identified as eligible without an application (the identified student percentage, or ISP), using direct certification and other lists of eligible students. The potential benefits are to increase low income students’ access to nutritious meals, and to reduce the administrative burden LEAs experience with the school meals programs.

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