



FORMAL TESTIMONY

“Improving Children’s Health: Strengthening Federal Nutrition Programs”

Before the

Committee on Education and Labor
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By

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Mr. Chairman:

My name is Lucy Gettman, director of federal programs for the National School Boards Association (NSBA). As a former child nutrition advocate and now an advocate for NSBA, I thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this important issue affecting children enrolled in our public schools. The National School Boards Association represents the nation's nearly 15,000 local school districts and over 95,000 local school board members by working with and through our state school boards associations.

At the organizational level, NSBA's School Health Programs department assists school policymakers and educators to make informed decisions about health issues affecting the academic achievement and healthy development of students and the effective operation of schools. Services are provided with and through NSBA's member state associations of school boards, in partnership with other national organizations, such as the National Association of State Boards of Education, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and Action for Healthy Kids.

Additionally, NSBA is very proud of its efforts to promote nutrition in the schools and to prevent childhood obesity through web-based services, educational programming, and publications. A summary of our efforts is provided as an appendix to our statement.

Without question, local school districts believe that child nutrition is vitally important to fostering a healthy and positive learning environment for children to achieve their full potential. Healthy students learn better. Children and youth who eat nutritious foods and are active stay healthier, perform better in school and learn behaviors that will keep them healthier throughout their lifetimes.

School boards are acutely aware of the importance of ensuring that children have access to healthy and nutritious food and many have already taken steps at the local and state level to improve nutrition and healthy eating. One such example is the state of Delaware, where a public/private partnership of education and health stakeholders including the Delaware School

Boards Association established the Edith P. Vincent Healthy School Awards to recognize the work of public schools championing children’s health, including nutrition.

NSBA’s School Health Programs maintains many examples of school district efforts to improve student health and nutrition on its Promising District Practices database. Healthy nutrition success stories include:

- A district in Kentucky that increased breakfast participation rates to 95 percent.
- A district in New Jersey that holds monthly coordinated health team meetings to discuss increasing use of fruits and vegetables, coordinate with food services, and meet with the PTA.
- A Pennsylvania district that created its own “wellness brand” to establish a new culture in the district to promote health.
- An Arkansas district that implemented a water-only policy for sale in the district's vending machines.

There are many other examples of local initiatives, because the commitment to increasing student access to healthy and nutritious food is not unique. What is unique; however, are the circumstances of each school district. What is successful at one won’t necessarily work at another district. The geography, economy, demographics, and resources available in the community vary for each district. The challenges, opportunities and responses to local circumstances will also vary. Local decision makers and stakeholders are in the best position to understand and meet the needs of each district, including child nutrition, with the federal government playing an important supportive role.

Therefore, I have the following recommendations for strengthening nutrition programs in the child nutrition reauthorization:

- Recognize local school district authority and the variance among local circumstances in laws or policy addressing childhood nutrition.
- Refrain from imposing additional regulations or mandates on schools outside of the federally subsidized school lunch and breakfast programs and adequately reimburse school districts for the cost of those services.

- Support school districts, local communities and states that are assuming greater responsibility for health and nutrition through incentives and grants that enable them to further expand their local commitment.
- Ensure that adequate resources are available for school nutrition programs, for meals and administration, equipment and facility improvements, training for staff, educators and other stakeholders, nutrition education and support for local initiatives.

These recommendations are based on NSBA's Resolutions, which are determined by a national 150-member Delegate Assembly, members of which are selected by their states to collectively establish policy representing perspectives of 95,000 local school board members. The process is annual and on-going in that the process of policy development begins in the states and culminates at NSBA's annual convention each spring.

Conclusion: Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act is an opportunity to celebrate the progress made since the 2004 reauthorization and to envision an even healthier future for our children. Improving the quality of and expanding access to school meals is important to our children and our nation. School districts are vital partners in the effort to assure a healthy and positive learning environment for children to achieve their full potential. The Child Nutrition Act reauthorization is an opportunity to acknowledge and support this local leadership and authority.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. NSBA looks forward to a continuing conversation about this critical issue.



APPENDIX

Efforts to Improve Child Nutrition March 2010

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), through its School Health Programs department, supports NSBA's commitment to help school policymakers and educators make informed decisions about health issues affecting the academic achievement and healthy development of students and the effective operation of schools. Services are provided with and through NSBA's member state associations of school boards, and in partnership with other national organizations such as the National Association of State Boards of Education, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and Action for Healthy Kids. NSBA receives funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support much of its work on health issues.

Web-based services through NSBA's School Health Programs webpage (www.nsba.org/SchoolHealth)

- "101" Packets on school health topics such as Wellness, Childhood Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity provide the data, background information, research and sample policies to support local school board decision making. "Promising District Practices" website provides the "stories" of how school districts have acted to address healthy eating and physical activity.
- A Childhood Obesity web page launched in January 2010 provides easy access to data, research, and tools for making policy and environmental change.
- "Updates and Special Announcements" alert school officials to new research and reports on a wide range of health topics, including nutrition, to inform decision making. Users can sign up to obtain the "Updates" via an RSS feed.
- Searchable database of research, information and sample policies provides essential information on a wide variety of school health topics including nutrition.

Educational Programming

- NSBA's annual conference (April 4-7, 2009, San Diego, CA): several sessions focused on school nutrition and wellness were presented in partnership with such organizations as the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Action for Healthy Kids, and the School Nutrition Association. The 2010 conference (April 10-12) in Chicago also will have multiple sessions on school nutrition and related health issues, including a session provided by the California School Boards Association on collaborative leadership for addressing health issues.
- Symposium on Childhood Obesity (July 2008, Little Rock, AR): 12 state teams that included members of state boards of education and local school board members convened to develop action plans to drive childhood obesity initiatives/policy change in their states. Follow-up technical assistance was provided to these state teams.
- Webcast: On December 1, 2009, in partnership with the Missouri School Boards Association's Education Solutions Global Network (www.esgn.tv), NSBA hosted a webcast on strategies for addressing childhood obesity, which targeted school board members and other state and local elected and appointed policymakers.

Publications

- Content in the *American School Board Journal*, including a special report focusing on "Health and Leadership" in addressing childhood obesity (February 2009—access online at www.asbj.com).
- Participation in the development of *Leadership for Healthy Communities Action Strategies Toolkit*, a new toolkit for state and local policymakers to develop policy measures addressing issues around childhood obesity, including nutrition in schools (in partnership with Leadership for Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation).