



July 24, 2014

The First Lady
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mrs. Obama:

On behalf of the School Nutrition Association's (SNA) 55,000 members, I write in disappointment regarding your [July 22nd comments](#) disparaging school nutrition professionals who work hard every day, despite limited resources and overwhelming regulatory challenges, to serve healthy, appealing school meals that help students succeed in the classroom.

It is offensive to America's frontline cafeteria professionals to say that those who struggle with the national decline in school lunch participation have simply said, "Well, the kids like junk food, so let's just give 'em junk food." SNA members have, as you requested, "embraced higher standards and more nutritious options," and SNA supports new mandates to offer a wider variety and larger servings of fruits and vegetables, new calorie and fat limits and reasonable sodium limits for school meals. Our members are not offering their students junk food.

As SNA's Board of Directors wrote to you in our [June 19th letter](#) requesting a meeting with you to discuss challenges under the new standards, "SNA members have launched student taste tests, chef partnerships, Harvest of the Month programs, Farm to School initiatives, community health fairs, social media campaigns and other creative approaches to promote healthier meals to students."

Yet, [according to USDA](#), student participation in the National School Lunch Program is abruptly down in 49 states with over a million fewer students choosing school lunch each day since school cafeterias began implementing new nutrition standards. This slide in participation has occurred despite nationwide efforts to encourage students to embrace healthier meals.

SNA celebrates the fact that there are some meal programs that have not suffered from declining participation or financial hardship. Some districts with very high free and reduced price eligibility benefit from higher meal reimbursements, have access to more federal grants and the new Community Eligibility Provision, and are less likely to experience a decline in student participation under the new standards. Others benefit from lower labor and food costs, or additional state meal reimbursements or support.

But USDA's data points to a national problem under the new standards, and it is not, as you imply, simply because schools have failed to "put some effort into marketing the new meals to the kids."

For instance, in Portland Public Schools in Oregon, student lunch participation has decreased by 3 percent, despite student taste tests, appealing new scratch-prepared recipes, [42 edible school gardens](#) that supply fresh produce to the cafeteria and a robust [Farm to School](#) program, including Harvest of the Month and Local Flavors promotions that encourage students to try the wide variety of healthy choices available with school meals.

In Missouri, Park Hill School District has been pro-actively transitioning their menus over the last seven years, adding whole grain rich foods, offering a variety of fruits and vegetables daily, and adapting many of their students' favorite homemade recipes to make healthy school meals more enticing. The district has hosted Iron Chef competitions, a Fresh from the Farm Marketing Program and Rainbow Day events to encourage students to eat a rainbow of produce with school meals. However, Park Hill's lunch participation has dropped almost 3.2 percent since the 2012/13 school year when the new standards were implemented, resulting in the program's first negative food service fund balance in seven years.

SNA and its members have been proud to partner with you, USDA, and numerous organizations in our collective efforts to improve the nutrition and quality of school meals. We again request the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these challenges and others that school meal programs have faced in recent years.

Our members would appreciate the opportunity to explain to you why [SNA is requesting common-sense flexibility](#) in the rules to help students adjust to healthy changes in their school cafeterias, to increase the number of children who benefit from healthy school meals, and to keep their programs financially stable.

Sincerely,



Patricia Montague, CAE
SNA Chief Executive Officer