

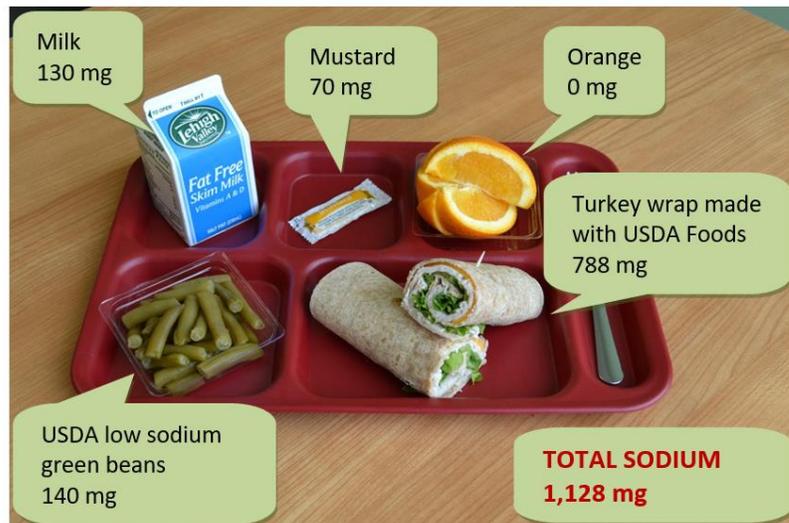
Federal Nutrition Standards

Provide Schools Practical Flexibility for Healthy Menu Planning

Background:

SNA supports maintaining robust federal nutrition standards to ensure all students receive nutritious, well-balanced meals at school. However, some overly prescriptive rules have resulted in unintended consequences, including reduced student lunch participation, higher costs and food waste. A recent [report](#) from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that despite strategies to promote healthier school meals, more than 60% of school nutrition directors faced challenges meeting the standards in the 2014/15 School Year. Sodium and whole grain requirements were cited as the top challenges.

This healthy lunch exceeds Target 2 sodium limits.



Federal nutrition standards should be modified to help school menu planners manage these challenges and prepare nutritious meals that appeal to diverse student tastes. In particular, USDA should:

Maintain the Target 1 sodium levels and eliminate future targets:

Schools made significant sodium reductions to meet Target 1, effective July 2014. Before advancing to Target 2, the Institute of Medicine recommended assessing the impact of Target 1 “on student participation rates, food cost, safety and food service operations to determine a reasonable target for the next period...**reducing the sodium content of school meals as specified and in a way that is well accepted by students will present major challenges and may not be possible.**” (*School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children, 2010*)

Naturally occurring sodium present in meat, milk and other low-fat dairy foods will force schools to take nutritious choices off the menu, including many soups, entrée salads and low-fat deli sandwiches.

The [Government Accountability Office](#) warned that forthcoming limits on sodium would remain problematic with cost and product availability making sodium targets difficult for many schools to implement.

Restore the initial requirement that at least half of grains offered through school lunch and breakfast programs be whole grain rich.

SNA supports the July 2012 requirement that half of all grains offered with school meals be whole grain rich. However, the current mandate that *all* grains must be whole grain rich has increased waste and costs, while contributing to the decline in student lunch participation.

Students are eating more whole grain breads and rolls. But schools are struggling with limited availability of specialty whole grain items and meeting students' regional and cultural preferences for certain refined grains. Schools should be permitted to serve white rice, pasta, grits, bagels or tortillas on occasion, just like most families do.



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