

**“Child Nutrition Assistance: Looking at the Cost of Compliance for States and Schools”**  
**House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education**  
**June 24, 2015**  
**Stories from School Districts Across the Country**

**Arizona:**

“I believe that the new regulations were rushed to implementation without taking into consideration the impact they would have on plate waste, food costs or customer acceptability. My grandkids go to one of the schools in my district and they used to LOVE eating lunch at school. NOW I get complaints from them every day! They want to know why they HAVE to take something they won't eat. For the first time in my 37 years as a School Nutrition Director, I'm not exactly shouting to the world what I do for a living. It's just not fun anymore.” **Jane L. Johnson, School Nutrition Director, Crane Schools, AZ**

**California:**

“The new Smart Snacks regulations have not had the intended effect in our district. Many students are upset that healthy reimbursable meal entrees can no longer be sold a la carte and that some popular options like hummus and pretzels are off the menu. With a la carte choices so limited, many students go off campus for fast food, soda and sugary snacks. We have experienced a 10 percent drop in revenue and anticipate a nearly \$175,000 loss this school year. Allowing reimbursable entrees to be sold a la carte every day would provide students with a larger variety of nutritious choices and help to restore our financial solvency. Food is only nutritious if they eat it.” **Siri Perlman, RD, Nutrition Specialist, San Dieguito Union HS District, CA**

“School nutrition professionals want to teach lifelong healthy choices and reinforce the good habits that parents encourage at home. We also want to be good stewards of the environment, particularly in the midst of California’s record drought. Forcing children to take, over and over again, foods they don't want to eat, and are consequentially thrown away, runs contrary to both of these important goals.” **Sally Spero, SNS, Child Nutrition Director, Lakeside Union School District, CA**

“In Santa Clarita Valley, we are committed to serving nutritious school meals that students consume and enjoy. We even hired a trained chef to help improve menus, making our nutritious dishes more enticing. Nonetheless, our program is losing money under the new rules, primarily because of rising costs. Our produce budget alone is up 10%.” **Lynelle Grumbles, MS, RDN, SNS, Chief Executive Officer, Santa Clarita Valley School Food Services Agency**

**Florida:**

“The food waste that I have seen in the schools due to the requirement of a 1/2 cup fruit or vegetable (or 1 cup at breakfast- grab and go) is saddening. As a dietitian, I do believe it is important for children to get the vitamins and minerals they need to support a healthy lifestyle, but when a lot of that ends up in the trash, it becomes a financial issue as well. There has to be a more cost effective way to get children the nutrition they need- but requiring them to take something that is going to go straight in the garbage is wasteful.” **Ana Weekley, RD, LD, Pensacola, FL**

“Smaller, health-conscious portions prompt sales declines in school cafeterias”

[Tampa Bay Times](#), October 25, 2014

Complaints about the size and type of snacks and single-item offerings in school cafeterias have taken their toll on school district budgets. "Our a la carte sales are a concern," said Mary Kate Harrison, food services director for Hillsborough County schools. "In our high schools, we are down in total sales 37 percent."

**Georgia:**

“School System Hits Lowest Lunch Participation Rate in Decades”

WJBE, September 3, 2014

[Columbia County Schools' Nutrition Department Director Jane Wiggins] said participation has been declining for the last two years. This comes after new federal dietary regulations went into effect in 2012. Higher food costs paired with fewer students means less money coming in. Wiggins said if the fund balance falls too low, the next step would be to ask for money from the school board, but she said that's never happened before.

“We've worked hard to maintain student participation and are fortunate that meal counts have been steady. However, operations costs continue to climb and we're losing supplemental revenue. Our a la carte sales are down about \$80,000 through March 2015 compared to the same time period last year, prior to implementation of the Smart Snacks in School regulations. My costs for purchased food alone have increased by more than \$500,000 year-to-date in 2015 than in 2014.” **Peggy Lawrence, Director of School Nutrition, Rockdale County Public Schools, GA**

**Indiana:**

“Tippecanoe schools are struggling to make some of the new rules work for our students. We had to partially eliminate our popular chicken and noodle recipe because we couldn't find a whole grain rich egg noodle. Low sodium mashed potatoes are not palatable and the students barely touch them now. It isn't all about the cost; it is about our students and their acceptance of certain menu items.” **Lori Shofroth, FMP, Director of Nutrition Services, Tippecanoe School Corporation, IN**

"We were in classrooms encouraging children to choose and eat from our 4-5 daily fruit and vegetable options long before the requirement. But our students don't like to be forced to take food they don't want. We've found that nearly a quarter of the food on our elementary school trays now ends up in the garbage. Meanwhile, the new Smart Snacks in Schools sodium restrictions prevent us from selling an oven baked chicken breast filet with whole grain breading on a whole grain bun, but a 20 ounce diet Mountain Dew can be sold as a snack. Some of these regulations just don't make sense." **Sara Gasiowski, SNS, Food Service Director, MSD of Wayne Township, IN**

**Massachusetts:**

"Students in Waltham Schools are eating more whole grains, but they really don't care for whole grain macaroni and cheese. As a Registered Dietitian, I know a little white pasta is ok for students to eat as part of a balanced diet. We need some flexibility on whole grain requirements to help us plan menus that appeal to all our students. Students would also benefit from an increase in the reimbursement rate to help schools manage rising costs and invest in high quality foods, but we shouldn't be forced to raise lunch prices on Waltham's working class families. Many of our families who don't qualify for free or reduced priced meals are still struggling to make ends meet." **April Liles, RD, Food Service Director, Waltham Public Schools, MA**

**Michigan:**

“Ever since the implementation of the new HHFKA regulations, Bloomfield Hills School's food service department has seen a decrease each year in the number of students buying lunches. In addition we have seen a decrease in our a la carte sales after the Smart Snacks rule went into effect. The students need more time to adjust to the new foods that meet the new regulations. If we were allowed to have more flexibility with the regulations we could find the items our students want to eat. They vote with their wallets and their vote is no without flexibility.” **Mandy Sosnowski, Food Service Director, Bloomfield Hills Schools-Aramark, MI**

"Our schools are constantly working to improve meals and encourage kids to accept whole grains, lower sodium foods and fruit and vegetable options. But under these standards, we are at serious risk of undermining that progress. More requirements placed on meal programs will drive costs up and prevent us from offering the

variety that students have responded very well to. Decreased choices will turn even more students away from healthy school meals." **Lori Adkins, MS, SNS, CHE, Child Nutrition Consultant, Oakland ISD, MI**

#### **Northern Mariana Islands:**

"PSS mulls changes to school lunch"

Marianas Variety, December 17, 2014

BOE Chairman Herman T. Guerrero in a meeting last week said during his recent school visits, the lunch menu was one of the things that was brought to his attention. "I think some of the kids are getting tired of the same menu so maybe we should give it some variety," Guerrero said, adding that he himself tried the food. He said some students complained about the grainy texture of the brown rice served during lunch.

#### **Ohio:**

"Lakota's high school cafeterias compete with a dozen fast food restaurants right outside their doors. We are extremely innovative and are offering sushi, made-to-order paninis, rice bowls, tacos and burritos, prepared fresh right in front of the students. Despite these efforts, lunch participation under the new standards is down 15 percent. We are serving 100,000 fewer meals, but costs are up significantly. We have no funding left to invest in further improvements, and our program is ineligible for federal equipment grants or other assistance available to districts with higher free and reduced price participation." **Chris Burkhardt, Director of Child Nutrition and Wellness, Lakota Local School District, OH**

Kettering School District (OH) has always marketed healthy choices to students. The district has earned numerous USDA HealthierUS School Challenge Awards and was selected as a semi-finalist in USDA's Recipes for Healthy Kids Challenge. Despite ongoing nutrition education programming, the district experienced a 7% decline in student lunch participation since the standards took effect. Because less than 50 percent of Kettering students are eligible for free or reduced price meals, these districts cannot benefit from the Community Eligibility Provision, equipment assistance grants, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grant Program and several other USDA programs designed to help school districts manage costs and increase student acceptance.

#### **Oklahoma:**

"School meal programs desperately need more funding to meet the new regulations. Especially in high schools, where we offer a full cup of fruit, a full cup of vegetables and all whole grain rich foods, it makes no sense at all to think that an additional 6 cents is enough to cover the additional volume of food mandated under the new standards. And at breakfast, we have doubled the amount of fruit offered, but were provided no additional funding to cover costs."

"As a dietitian, I have been offering and encouraging students to choose more 100% whole grains, but there are certain items that just don't go over well in a whole grain-rich variety. Our Thanksgiving lunch was embarrassing - the whole grain-rich corn bread dressing was sad, sad, sad. We need flexibility to allow exceptions for a few menu items." **Deborah S. Taylor, RDN/LD, SNS, Associate Director, School Nutrition Services, Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK**

#### **Oregon:**

In Portland Public Schools (OR), 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.

#### **Pennsylvania:**

"Armstrong school lunch prices increasing by 10 cents"

TribLive, June 11, 2015

After a year of financial losses in the cafeteria, Armstrong School District officials are raising lunch prices by 10 cents this fall. Luann Fee, the district's food services director said, "We've seen very strict food guidelines, and that's created a loss for us." This year, the district's food services department lost about \$79,000, which Fee blames on federal snack guidelines. "Our lunch sales remained the same but, district-wide, we ended up losing almost \$500 per day because of the restrictions on Smart Snacks in School regulations," Fee said. "It's something school districts across Pennsylvania are seeing, unfortunately."

"Chester County school district to forgo U.S. lunch guidelines"

The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 27, 2014

Saying stricter federal nutrition guidelines are too much to swallow, the Unionville-Chadds Ford School District has decided to remove its 1,300 high school students from the program that is to go into effect next school year. The district calculated that under the new guidelines, its revenue would decrease from \$2.32 per high school student per day to \$1.73, since the students would be buying fewer items. That represented "a significant financial impact on the food-service operation," said Marie Wickersham, the district's supervisor of food services.

"I think all of the foodservice directors I know want to feed their students nutritious meals. But money is a big issue. Whole grains, fruits and vegetables cost more. My nutrition program is supposed to break even. I have lost money the past two years. How do I explain that to my school board? I will do the best I can this year, but if I lose money again I will be looking for a new job. The regulations are too strict. My lunches have gone down 3% for the past two years." **Anna Donato, Food Service Director, Lampeter-Strasburg, PA, in a letter to the editor of Food Management**

**Virginia:**

"School meal sales seeing steady decline"

Powhatan Today, September 3, 2014

The Powhatan County Public Schools has seen a steady decline in school meal sales in the last few years, a trend largely attributed to student reaction to changes required by federal mandates, according to school officials. All Powhatan schools have seen a drop in school lunch sales, with a district-wide average of about a 30 percent decrease, [assistant superintendent for finance and business operations Larry] Johns said. Valarie Ayers, District 3, said the mandates are not accomplishing what they want in getting students to eat healthier if they drive them to bring lunches, which often are not healthy. "Honestly, you see kids who bring their bag lunch. They pull out two or three bags of Doritos and a handful of grapes and that is their lunch," she said.

"BCPS school lunch purchases decline over 30 percent since 2010-11"

The Roanoke Times, July 24, 2014

Superintendent Dr. Tony Brads delivered the bad news on the School Nutrition Program, a once thriving entity. The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act implemented in 2010-11 had an unintended result. Over the next three years, The Botetourt County School Nutrition served less meals in 2013-14 than it did in 1994-95 and almost two hundred thousand meals less than it did in 2010-11. Meal sales are at the lowest in 20 years. Chris Morris who heads up the School Nutrition program is pragmatic about what happened. "The new food guidelines simply do not appeal to the students in this area." Vegetables like corn and green beans have been bumped by kale, carrots, sweet potatoes and other vegetables that most kids avoid. "We have found once the elementary student leaves us, they don't come back," she explained.

**Wisconsin:**

"School lunch prices rising in Manitowoc"

HTR Media, June 10, 2015

School lunch prices in the Manitowoc Public School District are going up an average of 10 cents next school year — the fourth consecutive year prices have risen as a result of federal mandates. The continued increase in the price has caused more students to bring bagged lunches, not eat lunch, or leave campus during lunch at the high school to purchase food elsewhere. "Even small price increases have a damaging effect on the lunch

participation," [District Business Administrator Ken Mischler] said. The federal requirements also have strict calorie, sodium and saturated fat requirements for foods offered in the school lunch program. The requirement has caused the district to reduce portion sizes to meet guidelines. "Complaints about not having enough to eat are common this year," Mischler wrote in a memo to board members. "Basically, students are getting less food, at a higher price." "I'm amazed by all this government micro-managing," school board member Catherine Shallue said. "It really bothers me."