

I would like to wholeheartedly express my support for the Healthy Schools Act of 2009. I am the parent of a prospective DC public school student and a research economist by profession. In my work, I conduct economic analysis on many aspects of the school meals programs on a national level. As a DC parent, the implementation of this bill would make me very happy to have my son attend a DC public school, as I believe it would significantly improve the ability of DC food service operations to provide quality meals. It could also—if implemented in the full spirit of the law—make DC a leader in the rapidly growing national movement to improve school foods.

I especially applaud the elements of the bill that: (1) promote the purchases by schools of locally produced, non-processed foods; (2) establish the school gardens program; (3) establish minimum time requirements for recess and for the consumption of school lunch; (4) restrict the marketing of foods to children at school; and (5) the collection of data on children's BMI, waist-hip ratios and physical activity. This last element, which may be perceived as somewhat intrusive to students, is very important for evaluation purposes. I also commend the thought that has gone into the farm-to-school section. The specification of a local food preference when costs are favorable, the rebate tied to local, non-processed foods, the central kitchen, and the mandatory reporting are all important.

My main concern about what is missing from the bill is a specific restriction on the amount of sugar that can be present in the reimbursable meals. It is great that there is a restriction on the amount of sugar in foods that are not a part of reimbursable meals (Sec. 207 (a)), but there is ample evidence that children are getting way too much sugar in current reimbursable meals. And curiously, the federal nutrition requirements do not specify any restrictions on sugar, even though the Dietary Guidelines for America (2005), on which federal meal standards are based, did recommend reductions in added sugars. Even the higher nutrition standards provided in USDA's Healthier US School Challenge do not include restrictions on sugar (or added sugar) in reimbursable meals. This is a glaring omission in the USDA standard that the DC Council can remedy as part of this bill. Common sense tells us that children should not have to have sugar added to normal food in order for them to want to eat it. The idea that children will only drink sugar-flavored milk is just wrong. At least with my son, the more sugar he gets accustomed to, the more he wants. We, the parents and schools, need to set reasonable limits. Dessert is one thing, and as in a family environment, what we should teach children is that they can have dessert after they eat a delicious locally-sourced, dark green, deep orange, whole grain, protein-rich, diverse lunch.

Specifically, I would like to see the same restriction on sugar that is specified for competitive foods in the Healthier US School Challenge be set for reimbursable lunches and breakfasts and added to the Healthy Schools Act of 2009 (Sec. 202. Nutritional standards for school meals). That restriction is:

Sugar: Total sugar must be under or equal to 35% sugar by weight (includes naturally occurring and added sugars). Excludes fruits, vegetables, and milk.

Thank you for accepting public comments. I look forward to seeing great improvements

in the coming years in DC public school food.

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