

American Heart Association presses congress to keep special interests off school menus

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American Heart Association CEO Nancy Brown issued the following comments today on the House Appropriations Committee's approval of a proposed waiver that would allow school districts to withdraw from federal school nutrition standards:

"By giving special interests a seat at the [school lunch](#) table, some members of Congress are putting politics before the health of our children. Any attempt to suspend or abolish [school](#) meal requirements will undermine parents' efforts to keep their kids healthy and put another generation of children on the highway to heart disease and stroke. It's even more frustrating that an amendment to reverse this food folly, offered today by Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.), was defeated in a straight party-line vote.

Schools, where kids spend most of their days, play a critical role in helping students establish [good eating habits](#), which they desperately need to combat being overweight or obese. Already one third of America's children fall into one of these categories. Hitting the pause button on any of the school lunch standards could mean more of the nation's young will eat their way into this terrible trend.

We also cannot dismiss the progress made so far in providing the nutritious foods that will help the young achieve better long-term health and academic success. A study cited by the USDA revealed that kids are eating 16 percent more vegetables and 23 percent more fruit when they sit down for their mid-day meal at school. They are also consuming less

sugar, fat and sodium. Less salt consumption is particularly important because more young people are developing [high blood pressure](#) – once viewed solely as an adult disease.

In addition, cries for more flexibility from schools have and will continue to be met by the USDA. For instance, when schools informed the agency they couldn't obtain the whole grain pastas necessary under the standards, the USDA said traditional pasta could be used for two years until the food industry creates these products. The department is also supporting training sessions to assist schools with the standards and preparation for the Smart Snacks requirement.

We cannot go back to the days when the answer to 'What's for lunch?' was pizza, french fries and chicken nuggets. America's school lunch program works and will help our children live free of [heart disease](#) and stroke. Our urgent plea to Congress is to not undo the program's strong progress by putting special interests back on school menus."

Provided by American Heart Association

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