

House Child Nutrition Bill is a major step backwards for kids' health, says American Heart Association

May 19 2016, by Abbey Dively

American Heart Association CEO Nancy Brown issued the following comments on the "Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016," which is being marked up today by the House Education and Workforce Committee:

"The House deserves a grade of 'F' for failing our nation's children by taking a significant step backwards from the progress we've made to improve the nutritional content of food served in schools.

The House bill, unlike the Senate's counterpart, fails to preserve the strong, science-based nutrition standards for school meals that are now being met by more than 98 percent of schools nationwide. Despite this remarkable success, the House bill contains language that curbs efforts to increase whole grains being served in schools and blocks future sodium reductions all together. Kids are consuming too much sodium, making them more likely to develop [high blood pressure](#) earlier in life that could eventually lead to heart disease, stroke and other chronic health issues. The agreement in the Senate bill, on the other hand, responsibly allows [sodium reduction](#) to move forward with a two-year extension on the next target, and keeps target three on track for the 2022 school year. We had hoped to see this sensible compromise in the House bill, but unfortunately, the committee inexplicably did away with standards that help keep foods with more whole grains and less salt on kids' plates.

In addition to shelving the nutrition standards, the bill guts the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The [program](#) is currently fresh-only – and for good reason. It plays a unique role by providing the most disadvantaged children in our country with much-needed education and exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables that they unlikely get elsewhere. The association will continue to oppose any effort to undermine the program by expanding it to include foods such as candy-filled trail mix in place of fresh apples, pears and carrots.

Finally, this bill would make it more difficult for schools to help feed our most vulnerable children as part of the Community Eligibility Program. This popular program currently benefits 8.5 million school children in low-income neighborhoods, while reducing the administrative burden on schools. By bumping up the threshold to qualify for the program, thousands of children at 7,700 participating schools would be at risk of losing what is for some, the only healthy meal they get during the day.

In short, we are extremely disappointed with the House bill. Perhaps we need to remind the committee that America's [school meals](#) program is working. Kids not only have access to more nutritious foods, but are making healthier choices. We urge Congress to act quickly to finalize a bipartisan bill that earns a passing grade by putting kids' health and science first."

Provided by American Heart Association

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