

**Announcement on School Wellness Policies and**

**Transformation of the School Health Environment**

February 25, 2014

**Background**

A key focus of the *Let’s Move!* initiative has been to transform the school health environment and improve marketing to kids in order to create long-term change that makes the healthy choice the easy choice in schools. Following the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which set nutrition standards for school meals and allowed changes to food served in schools for the first time in over 30 years, schools are improving nutrition and coming up with innovative solutions to improve students’ health. Not only are school meals being improved, but the entire school nutrition environment – from breakfast, to lunch and even snacks – is being transformed. The U.S. Department of Agriculture implemented the new school lunch and breakfast standards starting in the 2012-2013 academic year and implementation of the new Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards will start in the 2014-2015 school year. The Smart Snacks in School standards mean the quality of food sold in school vending machines and a la carte lines will change significantly. The result will be that the hard work many Americans are doing at home as parents will be reinforced when their children are away from home. Additionally, the First Lady started the *Let’s Move!* Active Schools program to help reintegrate physical activity before, during, and after the school day, and since the program’s launch in February 2013, more than 6,000 schools across the country have signed up.

**What is being announced today?**

Mrs. Obama will join Secretary Vilsack to announce the proposed guidelines for comprehensive school wellness policies. In addition to improvements to local school wellness policies in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010,the proposed guidelines would also help ensure that foods and beverages marketed to children in schools are consistent with the recently released Smart Snacks in School standards. To help schools with the implementation of the school wellness policies, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will launch a new “School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources” website, which will include model wellness policies for school districts and a dedicated page of resources for food marketing practices on the school campus.

These new resources will complement another policy announcement highlighting the nationwide expansion of a successful program that is providing schools in 11 states with an innovative method for connecting more children with healthy school meals. Beginning July 1, more than 22,000 schools across the country serving large populations of low-income students will be eligible to serve healthy lunches and breakfasts free of charge to all students by using data that has already been collected from other means-tested programs like SNAP and TANF instead of traditional paper applications. This “community eligibility” will help as many as 9 million American children eat healthy meals at school, especially breakfast, which can have profound impacts on educational achievement. Research shows that students who eat breakfast perform better in the classroom, are better behaved and more attentive, and less likely to visit the school nurse. While schools will still be responsible for covering a portion of the cost of operating the programs, this option eliminates the need for individual households to apply for free meals and significantly reduces burdensome paperwork for schools.

**Why is this important?**

***School Wellness Policies and Food Marketing Standards***

* **Kids spend a significant portion of their time in school**. It is critical that the entire school environment be a place that supports our kids’ health. These efforts help ensure that the hard work many parents are doing at home to keep their kids healthy will be reinforced when they are at school.
* **Food and beverage marketing is prevalent in schools**. In 2009, industry spent approximately $149 million on marketing in schools, with 93% of the funds spent on the marketing of beverages.
* **The healthy choice should be the easy choice**. Food marketing influences children’s food preferences, dietary intake, and overall health. Unfortunately, the majority of foods and beverages marketed to children are low in nutritional value and high in sugar and fat.
* **Some progress has been made at the local level, but more work remains to be done**. The 2012 School Health Policies and Practices Study noted that 38% of districts nationwide required and 28% recommended that schools prohibit advertisements for unhealthy foods and fast food restaurants (representing over 8,400 school districts). In addition, 32% of districts required and 26% recommended that schools prohibit the distribution of products promoting unhealthy foods and fast food restaurants.
* **The proposed marketing guidelines will build consistency with existing Federal requirements for what foods can be sold in schools**. Through these policies schools will not be able to market products to kids that are not able to be sold in schools.

***Community Eligibility***

* **A healthy breakfast matters**. According to analyses of the long-term impact of school breakfast, this morning meal does more than simply provide children with essential daily nutrition. On average, students who eat school breakfast have been shown to achieve 17.5% higher scores on standardized math tests and attend more days of school per year.
* **Research shows that a good breakfast helps students succeed in the classroom**. We know that proper nutrition is essential for effective learning and that hungry children don’t learn well. To learn better, children need to eat good meals, especially at the beginning of the day.
	+ Some studies suggest a relationship between eating breakfast and improved health, memory, and cognitive development.
	+ Participation in the School Breakfast Program improves school attendance, reduces tardiness, and enhances the quality of students’ diets. One study indicated that children who ate school breakfast were more likely to consume adequate amounts of important vitamins, fiber, and potassium, and decrease the amount of calories consumed from fat.
	+ Eating breakfast may help children’s bodies store fat in healthier ways, potentially protecting them from diseases like diabetes.