

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project  
**FROM:** Hart Research Associates and Ferguson Research  
**DATE:** August 29, 2014  
**RE:** Nationwide Polling Regarding Parents' Views of School Meal and Smart Snacks Standards

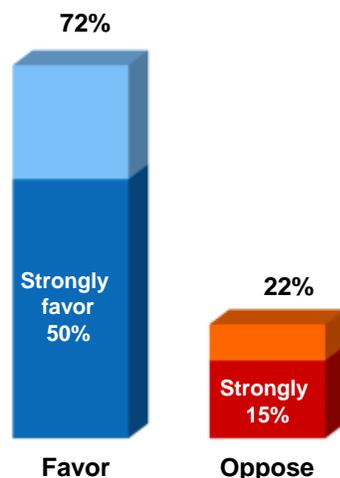
From June 19 to 28, 2014, and on behalf of the Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project, Hart Research Associates and Ferguson Research conducted a telephone poll among 1,112 parents who are registered to vote (MOE  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points). Oversample interviews also were conducted in order to more fully analyze targeted subgroups, including:

- African-American parents (177 interviews, MOE  $\pm 7.4$ )
- Hispanic parents (150 interviews, MOE  $\pm 8.0$ )
- Parents with household incomes under \$40,000 (260 interviews, MOE  $\pm 6.1$ )

This memo is a brief review of key findings.

**More than seven in 10 parents support the current nutrition standards for the national school meal program.** Seventy-two percent (72%) of parents say they favor the standards after hearing a description of them, including a notable 50% who strongly favor the standards, compared with just one in five (22%) who oppose them.

### *Do you favor or oppose requiring schools to meet these nutrition standards\* for school meals?*



\* Description prior to question:

"The national school meals program provides lunches and breakfasts to many school children across the country, and provides them for free or at a reduced cost to children from low-income families.

In this program, the federal government reimburses school districts for the costs of meals that meet certain nutrition standards, such as **providing fruits and vegetables, limiting the use of salt, and following age-appropriate calorie limits.**

Individual school districts have the flexibility to build on the requirements, as long as the meals meet basic, minimum standards.

To be clear, this school lunch is a full meal that can only be purchased as a full meal--it does not include extra items that can be purchased individually for additional money."

## Hart Research / Ferguson Research

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Support for these nutrition standards cuts across racial lines: 68% of whites, 85% of Hispanics, and 91% of African Americans support the standards.

Support spans the political spectrum: 56% of Republicans, 71% of independents, and 84% of Democrats say they favor the standards.

And intensity among the opposition is noticeably weak, with only 15% of parents expressing strong opposition, compared with 50% who express strong support.

While the majority of parents across subgroups favor the standards, parents whose children participate in the school meals program express support in the highest numbers.

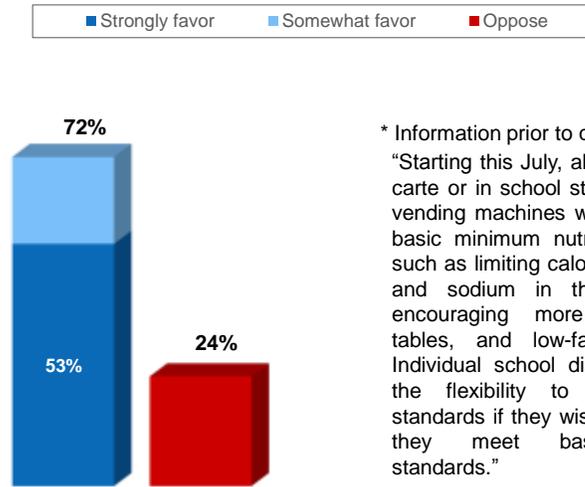
- 64% of parents whose children get lunch one or two days a week support the standards,
- As do 74% of parents whose children get school meals three or four days a week, and
- 75% of parents whose children get the school meal every day.

**All of the major components of the standards that were asked about in the survey also draw significant support from parents.** Respondents were queried on four parts of the standards:

- 91% say that schools should be required to include a serving of fruits or vegetables with every meal
- 88% say the same of free water
- 75% say schools should have to limit the amount of salt in meals
- 64% say every meal should provide foods made from whole grains

**This survey (conducted prior to the new Smart Snacks Standards taking effect) shows that very few parents believe that the food sold a la carte (23%), in school stores (11%), or in vending machines (8%) is nutritious. We find that the large majority of parents favor having nutrition standards that apply to foods that are available outside the school meal program.** Awareness of the new Smart Snacks Standards is relatively low, but after hearing a description of the proposal, 72% of parents support it—including fully 53% who express strong support.

**Do you favor or oppose requiring schools to meet nutrition standards for the foods and beverages sold a la carte and in vending machines?\***



Again, support cuts across both demographic and political lines, and includes 74% of mothers and 69% of fathers, as well as 56% of Republicans, 70% of independents, and 87% of Democrats. Support is also strong regardless of the grade of the child: 71% of elementary school parents support these new Smart Snacks Standards, as do 70% of parents with children in middle or high school.

**Parents' endorsement of standards for school meals and for food served outside the school meal program aligns with their significant concerns about the state of children's health in the United States, and, more specifically, about childhood obesity.** Four in five (80%) parents say they are concerned about the state of children's health, and nearly as many (74%) say they are concerned about childhood obesity. Concern for the latter crosses demographic and socioeconomic lines, with 74% of Caucasian parents, 76% of Hispanic parents, and 83% of African-American parents saying that they are somewhat or very concerned. Likewise, 72% of lower-, 74% of middle-, and 79% of upper-income parents express the same sentiment.

*This telephone poll was conducted among 1,112 parents who are registered to vote. A sample list was purchased from a third party vendor, and respondents were screened to ensure that interviewees are registered to vote, are parents, and have children in public schools.*