

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project
FROM: Hart Research Associates and Ferguson Research
DATE: November 13, 2014
RE: Findings from a Survey on School Nutrition Among Parents in California

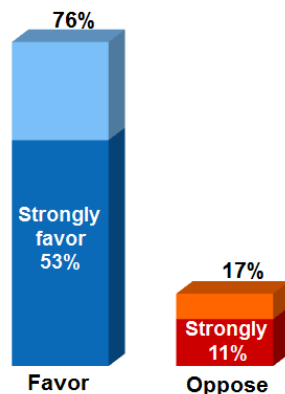
The Pew Charitable Trusts and The California Endowment commissioned Hart Research Associates and Ferguson Research to conduct a statewide survey of public school parents in California who are registered to vote. We conducted 801 interviews with California parents between September 23 and October 1, 2014, as well as an oversample of an additional 104 interviews with Latino parents. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.6% for the full sample, with higher tolerances for subgroups of the sample.

This memo reviews the survey's key findings.

More than three in four parents in California support the current nutrition standards for the national school meal program. Seventy-six percent (76%) of parents say they are in favor of the standards after hearing a description of them, including a 53% majority who strongly favor the rules. Just 17% of parents say they oppose the standards. [Q6ab]

Three in four parents favor the current school meal standards—and a majority do so strongly.

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 it 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, providing free drinking water, 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—it does not include extra items that can be purchased individually for additional money."

Support for the standards is high across-the-board, with majorities of mothers (80%) and fathers (71%), and lower- (84%), middle- (78%), and upper-income parents (72%) endorsing them. Support is particularly high among Latino parents—86% of whom say they favor the standards—but is also quite strong among white parents (72%).

Notably, there is support for school meals standards from across the political spectrum. Many issues in politics today split heavily along political lines—standards for school meals is NOT one of them. Indeed, there is agreement across the political spectrum on this issue: 66% of registered Republicans and 87% of registered Democrats say they favor these standards, as do 82% of parents who “decline to state” (DTS) a party registration.

Moreover, three-quarters or more of parents across the state endorse these standards, including 77% of those in the northern part of the state, 80% in Central California, and 76% of those in the southern portion of the state.

Support for these standards is extremely strong among parents who utilize school meals (although a majority of non-participating parents also support the standards). A full 85% of parents with children who eat a school meal at least once a week favor the nutrition standards, compared with 66% of parents whose children do not participate in the program.

Despite overwhelming support for healthier school meal standards, parents have a mixed reaction as to whether or not meals have improved over the past several years. Twenty-one percent of parents say they are generally better, 26% say they are generally worse, and 25% percent say they are the same. An additional 20% of parents have not talked to their children about this issue. The question asked for parents’ general impression of school meals, and did not mention changes caused by the meal standards or other factors. [8c]

In additional to their overall support, California parents endorse the standards’ individual components, which we also tested in the survey.

In large numbers, parents tell us that schools should be required to do the following with every school meal: [Q7a]

- Include a serving of fruits or vegetables – 87%
- Offer free water – 83%
- Limit the amount of salt – 73%
- Provide foods made from whole grains – 63%

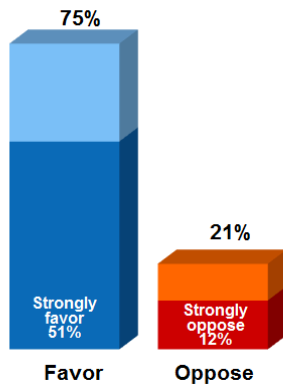
When it comes to the meals program, parents prioritize nutrition over schools’ finances. Seventy-seven percent of parents (77%)—including 70% of Republicans, 83% of Democrats, and 81% of DTS—believe that the main priority of the meals program should be to ensure that children are served

healthy and nutritious meals. Only 11% of parents prioritize a school not losing money over the importance of providing a nutritious school meal. [Q8ab]

In addition to wide support for the federal nutrition standards for school meals, three-fourths of California parents endorse new national nutrition standards for food served *outside* the school meal. California already sets some standards for foods sold a la carte, in school stores, and school vending machines, of which one in three parents is aware [Q9a]. Seventy-five percent (75%) of parents support building on the state standards with the new national Smart Snacks effort. Only 21% oppose the Smart Snacks Standards. [Q11ab]

Parents strongly endorse Smart Snacks standards.

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



* Information prior to question:
"California currently sets standards on all foods sold a la carte or in school stores and school vending machines, including limiting calories, fat content, and sodium in the foods. The new national Smart Snacks standards build on California's standards by encouraging more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy items, and implementing a slightly lower calorie cap on the foods served in high schools. Individual school districts have the flexibility to build on the standards if they wish to, as long as they meet basic, minimum standards."

Support is particularly high among Hispanic parents, 80% of whom favor the standards. And, again, support is very high across the political and geographic spectrums: 84% of registered Democrats, 81% of registered DTS voters, and 65% of registered Republicans are in favor, as are approximately three-fourths of parents in Northern (76%), Central (75%), and Southern (74%) California.

This support for standards is in line with what parents see as the marginal healthfulness in the foods that were available from these sources until the Smart Snack standards went into effect in July of this year. Just 19% of parents say that food sold a la carte in the cafeteria is totally or mostly nutritious, and even fewer say this of food sold in school stores (11%) or in vending machines (8%). [Q10]

Parents recognize that eating healthy meals leads to more productive students. Ninety-three percent of parents agree that serving nutritious school

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foods is important to help ensure that children are prepared to do their best in school, including 70% who believe it is “very important” to do so. [Q12] Providing students enough time to actually eat lunch is also an important concern: 96% of parents say it is important for students to be provided enough time for lunch, including three-fourths who say that providing adequate time is very important. [Q13]

More broadly, a large majority of parents also express concern about children’s health and childhood obesity. Two in three California parents (67%) say that they are concerned about the state of children’s health in the U.S. today—including 36% who are very concerned. Similarly, 70% say they are concerned about childhood obesity specifically (and 41% are very concerned). [Q2,3]

This telephone poll was conducted among 905 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.