



TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

**FROM: BILL McINTURFF/ELIZABETH HARRINGTON – PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
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**RE: KEY FINDINGS – MISSISSIPPI STATEWIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF REGISTERED VOTERS
AND PUBLIC/CHARTER SCHOOL PARENTS**

DATE: MAY 20, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Nearly all voters (97%) and public school parents (97%) believe serving nutritious foods in schools is important in helping ensure that children are prepared to learn and do their best in school.
- Eight out of ten voters (80%), and 76% of public school parents in the state, support requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals.
 - There is a majority of support among Republicans (69%), Independents (81%), and Democrats (93%).
 - There is a majority of support in every region of the state (Coast – 72%, Delta/River – 88%, Jackson Metro Area – 77%, North Hills – 82%, South Hills – 80%, Tennessee Valley Authority Area – 76%).
- The majority of voters and public school parents think schools should be required to serve more nutritious food options such as fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains with every school meal. Respondents also think if school meals provided a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain options it would make school meals much better.
- Seven out of ten voters (71%), and 67% of public school parents in the state, support requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school snacks (food sold in school stores, food and drink vending machines, and a la carte items in the cafeteria).
 - There is a majority of support among Republicans (65%), Independents (73%), and Democrats (79%).
 - There is a majority of support in every region of the state (Coast – 69%, Delta/River – 77%, Jackson Metro Area – 75%, North Hills – 69%, South Hills – 69%, Tennessee Valley Authority Area – 69%).

KEY FINDINGS:

Nearly all voters (97%) and public school parents (97%) believe serving nutritious foods in schools is important in helping ensure that children are prepared to learn and do their best in school. Respondents also overwhelmingly believe it is important for children to have enough time during the lunch period to eat their lunches (98% – All Voters, 96% – Public School Parents).

- Respondents were asked *“Do you think that serving nutritious foods in schools is...very important, somewhat important, not that important, or not important at all in helping to ensure that children are prepared to learn and do their best in school?”*

Public School Parents	All Voters	
97%	97%	TOTAL IMPORTANT
3%	2%	TOTAL NOT IMPORTANT
72%	79%	Very important
25%	18%	Somewhat important
2%	2%	Not that important
1%	*	Not important at all

- Respondents were asked *“Do you think that children having enough time during the lunch period to eat their lunches is...very important, somewhat important, not that important, or not important at all?”*

Public School Parents	All Voters	
96%	98%	TOTAL IMPORTANT
4%	2%	TOTAL NOT IMPORTANT
70%	73%	Very important
26%	25%	Somewhat important
3%	1%	Not that important
*	1%	Not important at all

Eight out of ten voters (80%), and 76% of public school parents in the state, support requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals. And, more than half of voters “strongly favor” (52%) requiring public schools to meet these standards.

- Respondents were read the following information and question: *“Thinking now just about the meals program served in kindergarten through twelve grade public school cafeterias...The national school meals program provides breakfasts and lunches 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.

Do you favor or oppose requiring public schools to meet these national nutrition standards for school meals? And do you strongly (favor/oppose) or just somewhat (favor/oppose) requiring public schools to meet these national nutrition standards for school meals?"

Public School Parents	All Voters	
76%	80%	TOTAL FAVOR
23%	19%	TOTAL OPPOSE
42%	52%	Strongly Favor
34%	28%	Somewhat Favor
9%	7%	Somewhat Oppose
14%	12%	Strongly Oppose
1%	1%	Don't Know

- There is a majority of support among Republicans (69%), Independents (81%), and Democrats (93%) for the national nutritional standards for school meals.
- Majorities of women and men support the school meals standards, though women (86%) are more supportive than men (73%). This stronger support among women is also reflected among public schools parents (moms – 85%/dads – 64%).
- There is a majority of support for the school meals standards in every region of the state (Coast – 72%, Delta/River – 88%, Jackson Metro Area – 77%, North Hills – 82%, South Hills – 80%, Tennessee Valley Authority Area – 76%).

The majority of public school parents (86%) in the state report that their children participate in the school meals program.

- Six in ten public school parents (60%) report their child/children eat lunch that is prepared by the school four to five days per week, 26% report it is one to three days per week, and 13% say their child/children never eats lunch prepared by the school.
- Public school parents whose children participate in the school meals program are very supportive of requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals.

Public School Parents		
Favor/Oppose requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals, by child participation levels in meals program		
	Eat School Meal 1-3 Days/Week	Eat School Meal 4-5 Days/Week
Favor	81%	79%
Oppose	19%	21%

Majorities of voters and public school parents believe schools should be required to serve more nutritional food options with every school meal.

- We tested different things public schools could be required to do or offer with every school meal. Respondents were asked whether they thought public schools should be required to do each or not. The table below shows the percentage of voters and public school parents who said yes public schools should be required to do each with every school meal.

<i>Public Schools Should Be Required to _____ With Every School Meal</i>	% Yes	
	<u>Public School Parents</u>	<u>All Voters</u>
Include a serving of fruits or vegetables	98%	96%
Offer free water	91%	94%
Limit the amount of salt	76%	80%
Provide foods made from whole-grains	65%	71%

Voters and public school parents believe there are changes that schools could implement that would make school meals better.

- We tested different changes that could be made to public school meals. Respondents were asked to rate each change on a scale of zero to ten. *“For each one, please tell me whether you think this would make school meals better or worse using a scale from zero to ten. On this scale, a ten means this would make school meals much better, and a zero means it would make school meals much worse. A five is right in the middle. You may use any number from zero to ten.”* The table below shows the average mean rating on the scale of zero to ten among voters and public school parents.

<i>Would this make school meals better or worse</i>	Average Rating	
	<u>Public School Parents</u>	<u>All Voters</u>
If school meals were prepared and cooked in the school cafeteria kitchen rather than pre-packaged and reheated	8.5	8.5
If school meals provided a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain options	8.4	8.4
If school meals included more locally grown fruits and vegetables	7.8	8.1
If school meals included more meats and poultry from local sources	7.3	7.5

Seven out of ten voters (71%), and 67% of public school parents in the state, support requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school snacks (food sold in school stores, food and drink vending machines, and a la carte items in the cafeteria).

- Respondents were read the following information and question: *“Thinking now about food available to students that is not a part of the public school meals program...In many schools, there is also food available to students that is not a part of the public school meals program. This includes food that is sold in school stores, food and drink vending machines, and a la carte items, such as a slice of pizza, a container of yogurt, or a piece of fruit. There are national Smart Snacks nutritional standards that provide for more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy*

items. There are calorie caps on the food sold in school stores, food and drink vending machines, and a la carte items.

Do you favor or oppose requiring public schools to meet these national nutrition standards for food sold in school stores, food and drink vending machines, and a la carte items? And do you strongly (favor/oppose) or just somewhat (favor/oppose) requiring public schools to meet these national nutrition standards for food sold in school stores, food and drink vending machines, and a la carte items?"

Public School Parents	All Voters	
67%	71%	TOTAL FAVOR
31%	27%	TOTAL OPPOSE
41%	44%	Strongly Favor
26%	27%	Somewhat Favor
13%	11%	Somewhat Oppose
18%	16%	Strongly Oppose
2%	1%	Don't Know

- There is a majority of support among Republicans (65%), Independents (73%), and Democrats (79%) for the national nutritional standards for school snacks.
- Majorities of women and men support the school snack standards, though women (77%) are more supportive than men (65%). This stronger support among women is also reflected among public schools parents (moms – 76%/dads – 55%).
- Voters in all age group categories support these standards for school snacks, with younger voters being especially in favor (18-34 years old – 82%, 35-44 years old – 78%, 45-54 years old – 72%, 55-64 years old – 68%, 65 or older – 58%).
- There is a majority of support for the school snacks standards in every region of the state (Coast – 69%, Delta/River – 77%, Jackson Metro Area – 75%, North Hills – 69%, South Hills – 69%, Tennessee Valley Authority Area – 69%).
- A majority of voters (65%) and public school parents (61%) favor the national nutritional standards for both school meals and school snacks.

METHODOLOGY:

Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research Associates conducted a statewide telephone survey of N=500 registered voters. In order to have a large enough sample size to examine attitudes among the population of public school parents who are registered voters, we also conducted oversample interviews among registered voters who are parents or guardians of children in K-12 public/charter schools. In total, we interviewed N=200 public school parents who are registered voters in Mississippi.

The sample was drawn from the voter file proportional to the statewide registered voter populations. Quotas were set by specific demographics such as region, age, gender, and ethnicity based on data from the U.S. Census and the voter file in order to ensure the samples are representative statewide.

The survey was conducted February 3-5, 2015. The margin of error on the sample of N=500 registered voters is $\pm 4.4\%$ and the margin of error on the sample of N=200 public school parents is $\pm 6.9\%$.