



**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES

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

**DATE:** JUNE 16, 2015

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

- Nearly all voters (97%) and public school parents (95%) believe serving nutritious foods in schools is important in helping ensure that children are prepared to learn and do their best in school.
- More than nine in ten voters (94%) and public school parents (93%) believe it is important for schools to provide nutrition education as part of the school curriculum.
- Three-quarters of voters (75%), and 71% 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 Republican (64%), Independent (72%), and Democratic (91%) voters.
  - There is a majority of support among voters in every media market in the state (Birmingham – 74%, Huntsville/Decatur – 72%, Mobile – 85%, Montgomery – 76%, Rest of State – 70%).
- 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.
- The majority of voters (67%), and 64% 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 Republican (57%), Independent (61%), and Democratic (82%) voters.

- There is a majority of support among voters in every media market in the state (Birmingham – 63%, Huntsville/Decatur – 66%, Mobile – 74%, Montgomery – 76%, Rest of State – 61%).

**KEY FINDINGS:**

Nearly all voters (97%) and public school parents (95%) 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 (96% – All Voters, 97% – 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?”*

<b>Public School Parents</b>	<b>All Voters</b>	
95%	97%	TOTAL IMPORTANT
4%	3%	TOTAL NOT IMPORTANT
68%	73%	Very important
27%	24%	Somewhat important
3%	2%	Not that important
1%	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?”*

<b>Public School Parents</b>	<b>All Voters</b>	
97%	96%	TOTAL IMPORTANT
3%	4%	TOTAL NOT IMPORTANT
71%	67%	Very important
26%	29%	Somewhat important
3%	3%	Not that important
*	*	Not important at all

More than nine in ten voters (94%) and public school parents (93%) believe it is important for schools to provide nutrition education as part of the school curriculum.

- Respondents were asked “How important do you think it is for schools to provide nutrition education as part of the school curriculum... very important, somewhat important, not that important, or not important at all?”

<b>Public School Parents</b>	<b>All Voters</b>	
93%	94%	<b>TOTAL IMPORTANT</b>
7%	5%	<b>TOTAL NOT IMPORTANT</b>
56%	62%	Very important
37%	32%	Somewhat important
5%	4%	Not that important
2%	1%	Not important at all

Three-quarters of voters (75%), and 71% of public school parents in the state, support requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals. And, nearly half of voters “strongly favor” (48%) 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 twelfth 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?”*

<b>Public School Parents</b>	<b>All Voters</b>	
71%	75%	<b>TOTAL FAVOR</b>
28%	23%	<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>
41%	48%	Strongly Favor
30%	27%	Somewhat Favor
13%	11%	Somewhat Oppose
15%	12%	Strongly Oppose
1%	1%	Don't Know

- There is a majority of support among Republican (64%), Independent (72%), and Democratic (91%) voters for the national nutritional standards for school meals.
- Majorities of women and men support the school meals standards, though women (78%) are a bit more supportive than men (72%). This stronger support among women is also reflected among public schools parents (moms – 80%/dads – 62%).
- There is a majority of support among voters for the school meals standards in every media market in the state (Birmingham – 74%, Huntsville/Decatur – 72%, Mobile – 85%, Montgomery – 76%, Rest of State – 70%).
- There is a majority of support among White public school parents (63%) and African American public school parents (91%) for the school meals nutritional standards.

Nearly eight in ten public school parents (79%) report that their children participate in the school meals program.

- More than half of public school parents (54%) report their child/children eat lunch that is prepared by the school four to five days per week, 25% report it is one to three days per week, and 20% say their child/children never eats lunch prepared by the school.
- Public school parents whose children participate in the school meals program more regularly are more supportive of requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals.

<i>Public School Parents</i>		
<i>Favor/Oppose requiring public schools to meet the national nutrition standards for school meals, by child participation levels in meals program</i>		
	<u>Eat School Meal 1-3 Days/Week</u>	<u>Eat School Meal 4-5 Days/Week</u>
Favor	67%	76%
Oppose	33%	23%

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>Schools Should Do/Offer With Every School Meal</i>	<b>% Yes</b>	
	<u>Public School Parents</u>	<u>All Voters</u>
Include a serving of fruits or vegetables	96%	95%
Offer free water	93%	93%
Limit the amount of salt	69%	73%
Provide foods made from whole-grains	70%	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 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	8.4
If school meals provided a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain options	8.3	8.3
If school meals included more locally grown fruits and vegetables	7.9	8.0
If school meals included more meats and poultry from local sources	7.4	7.5

The majority of voters (67%), and 64% 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?”*

<b>Public School Parents</b>	<b>All Voters</b>	
64%	67%	<b>TOTAL FAVOR</b>
34%	32%	<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>

42%	42%	Strongly Favor
22%	25%	Somewhat Favor
17%	14%	Somewhat Oppose
17%	18%	Strongly Oppose
1%	1%	Don't Know

- There is a majority of support among Republican (57%), Independent (61%), and Democratic (82%) voters for the national nutritional standards for school snacks.
- Majorities of women (69%), men (65%), public school moms (66%), and public school dads (62%) support the school snack standards.
- There is a majority of support among voters for the school snacks standards in every media market in the state (Birmingham – 63%, Huntsville/Decatur – 66%, Mobile – 74%, Montgomery – 76%, Rest of State – 61%).
- There is a majority of support among White public school parents (57%) and African American public school parents (77%) for the school snacks nutritional standards.
- The majority of voters (59%) and public school parents (53%) 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=600 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=222 public school parents who are registered voters in AL.

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 24-26, 2015. The margin of error on the sample of N=600 registered voters is  $\pm 4.0\%$  and the margin of error on the sample of N=222 public school parents is  $\pm 6.6\%$ .