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## **Voters' Attitudes On School Nutrition**

*Findings from a national survey of registered voters, conducted by  
**Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint***

### **Key Findings From This Survey**

Americans express broad and deep support for increasing federal requirements for the nutrition of meals served in schools and for increasing funding for the national school meals program by one percent. Despite the challenging political environment, in which nearly half the public believes the government is already doing too many things, this is an area of agreement for many voters, including Republicans and ideological conservatives who are more likely to oppose these proposals than support them. This may be due in part to the fact that the vast majority of voters express concern about the state of children's health today.

#### **Voters are deeply concerned about the state of children's health.**

- 85% of voters say they are concerned about the state of children's health in the United States today, including 51% who are *very* concerned about this. Just 13% say they are not concerned about this.
- The biggest problems with children's health that people tend to see are kids spending too much time watching TV and playing video games (74% big problem\*), not getting enough exercise (67%), and being overweight or obese (66%). "Not getting healthy food in the meals they are served in school" falls further down the list, with 38% saying this is a big problem.

#### **Three in five voters favor increasing nutrition standards for school meals, and the same proportion favor increasing funding for the school meals program by \$135 million per year.**

- In a general sense, we currently are in an environment that is not particularly friendly to government involvement in people's lives. Forty-five percent (45%) of the electorate say that the government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals, while 50% say government should be doing more to help solve problems. Indeed, 56% of voters say that parents have the most responsibility for ensuring that the meals children receive in schools are nutritious.
- But attitudes about government involvement in the school meals program paint a different picture. Sixty-two percent (62%) of voters say government should increase nutrition requirements for school meals to make these meals healthier for children. By comparison, 23% say government should *not* increase requirements, because this will make meals more expensive and require additional funding.

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\* Rating of eight, nine, or 10 on a zero-to-10 scale, in which "10" is very big problem and "0" is not a problem at all.

## Hart Research Associates / American Viewpoint

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- And, by better than two to one, voters favor a one percent annual increase of \$135 million for the school meals program that would help schools pay for healthier food and begin making improvements in cafeteria equipment and worker training. Sixty-one percent (61%) of voters favor this (including 43% who *strongly* favor it), while 22% oppose it.
- Three in four (76%) Democrats favor this funding, as do 60% of independents. A plurality (43%) of Republicans favor it as well, while 38% of Republicans oppose it.
- Even those voters who say government is currently doing too many things are more likely to favor (44%) than oppose (36%) this funding increase.
- And, notably, support for this additional funding is strong among parents who have children in public school (55% favor) and those who do not have children under age 18 (62%).

### **Voters give existing school meals a mediocre rating when it comes to their nutritional content, though they say in instances when school meals are not healthy this is a big problem.**

- Fewer than one in four (23%) voters says that meals served in schools are totally or mostly healthy and nutritious; 50% say they are only somewhat healthy, and 16% say they are not really that healthy. Parents who have children in public schools are slightly more likely to say school meals are healthy (34%).
- And even though 38% of voters initially say that unhealthy school meals are a big problem, 62% say that if they were to find out that school meals frequently are *not* healthy they would consider this a big problem.

### **Voters also strongly favor regulating food served in schools that is not part of the official school meals program.**

- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of voters favor requiring that candy, soda, chips, and other such snacks that are available in school vending machines be replaced with juice, milk, and healthy snacks.
- Seventy-eight percent (78%) favor requiring that all food sold in cafeteria lunch lines meet higher nutritional standards, even those that are not part of the national school meals program.

*These findings are derived from a national survey of 1,007 registered voters conducted December 8 through 15, 2010, by Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint on behalf of the **Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods** campaign. Respondents were contacted by telephone, including 150 who were interviewed via cell phone. An additional 102 voters who are parents of public school students were interviewed, for a total of 359 such respondents. The results of the poll are statistically representative of the opinions of voters nationwide, and carry a margin of error of  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points for the full sample, and higher margins of error for subgroups of the sample. Other factors can increase the sampling error of the results.*