

## SCHOOL CHILDREN - POLITICAL HOSTAGES



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Children are now political hostages as school nutrition regulations are included in massive federal spending legislation bills. Led by Mrs. Obama and the USDA, these interested parties want high nutrition standards for school menus: more whole grains, less calories, less sodium, more protein...the list goes on.

Fighting this doctrine, strange as it may seem, is the School Nutrition Association. Based upon reports that schools cannot afford the costs such standards impose, the SNA is becoming the champion for fewer rules for better nutrition. Studies showing that kids dump more “nutritious” food than ever lends more support to the SNA’s position.

In the schools, food service directors and nutritionists now face enormous pressure to mathematically meet all the government standards, while trying to stay within budget and prepare foods their students will eat. Ethnic dietary preferences further complicate the equation. Food manufacturers struggle to keep up with the changing regulations. To meet government standards, they must constantly re-create foods that have no trans fats, have the right percentages of whole grains, meet animal equivalents, bread servings, eliminate high fructose corn syrup, and meet a host of other requirements so that food service directors can select their products in the bid process.

Across the country, more schools are initiating Farm-to-Table programs, bringing in fresh local products for incorporation into school menus. Other schools have already opted out of federally funded school menu programs, gaining more flexibility to serve foods their kids enjoy eating. The battle to feed kids and prevent them from being hungry because they are reportedly dumping “nutritious” foods is an overwhelming challenge to school systems across the country.

Recent reports state that meals packed by parents are more often than not less healthy than menu items provided by schools. Looks like the USDA has failed to send parents a memo on how to feed their own kids.

Enter the political hostages. With minds strongly influence by mass media advertising, kids’ desire for processed chicken nuggets is unstoppable. Such foods products are so easy to serve at home or elsewhere, and in many homes, the hectic schedules of everyone calls for easy food prep. Today’s lifestyles show that fewer parents eat with their children. Conversation about what they consume is not popular. In the schools, pressure to teach children to pass tests has nearly eliminated health and lifestyle education. Where such education is offered, the instruction is being performed by Physical Education departments, and not the school nutrition professionals. How did that happen?

Kids are like sponges. They absorb vast amounts of information at an amazing rate. By first grade, children know every super hero, music star, and fast food menu. But who takes time to teach them about themselves? What school system has time to help kids to learn why they should exercise and eat healthy? If kids are smart enough to learn about recycling and picking up their toys in Kindergarten, then they can certainly learn how fat builds up in their bodies by eating large amounts of “unhealthy” foods. They can learn that their body and their future lives and health are based upon the preferences and choices they make for food, activity and environment, every day.

Every year, the School Nutrition Association has a national conference. Except for a handful of programmed participants, kids are not involved in knowing about how they are focus of so much political activity, and the challenges that face industry and their own school to feed them so many meals a week. It is time to involve the kids, have national or regional conferences for them to learn about the struggles that surround each of them, and be involved in food tasting and establishing personal health goals. Kids are smart. Let’s make them smarter to live a healthier life.