

Assembly Concurrent Resolution 16 (Joe Nation)

Healthy School Lunches

Problem

A large percentage of the student population who qualify and receive free or reduced lunches through the National School Lunch program are the very children who are considered “at risk” for developing diet related diseases such as obesity, cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Yet, countless studies show that the vast majority of children are not getting their recommended servings of fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains – especially in the school setting.



Existing Law

The National School Lunch Act mandates that school meals “safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children.” Participating schools must serve lunches that are consistent with the applicable recommendations of the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans including: a variety of foods and a diet with 30% or less of calories from fat and less than 10% of calories from saturated fat. In addition, lunches must provide, on average, at least 1/3 of the daily Recommended Dietary Allowances for protein, iron, calcium and vitamins A and C.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally funded program which assists schools and other agencies in providing nutritious lunches to children at reasonable prices. Meals served must meet nutrition standards established under the USDA School Meals Initiative.

The Pupil Nutrition, Health, and Achievement Act of 2001 (Senate Bill 19) was signed into law by Governor Davis in October of 2001. This bill established school-wide nutrition standards for all foods sold on campus in elementary schools. SB 19 also established a pilot program in middle and high schools to evaluate the feasibility of implementing comprehensive school-wide nutrition standards.

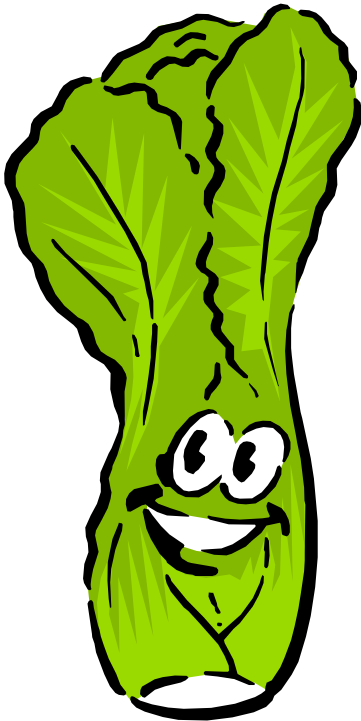
This Resolution

ACR 16 (Nation) requests that the state departments of Education, Food and Agriculture and Health Services develop nutritionally sound school lunch menu plans that would provide daily optional plant-centered vegetarian school lunches, prepared without meat or dairy products, in such a way that all pupils are assured nutritionally balanced diets, regardless of their food preferences and avoidances.

Summary

Assemblyman Nation through ACR 16:

- Requests state agencies work in collaboration with each other to develop school lunch menu plans which provide a plant-based lunch option for students with alternative eating habits.
- Requests that the Director of Health Services, the President of the State Board of Food and Agriculture, the President of the State Board of Education and the President of the California School Food Service Association report to the Legislature by January 1, 2008 on the efforts and progress of schools to offer a plant-based lunch option to students.



Facts (continued):

- According to ABC News, “nationwide, about 13%, or one out of every eight kids, are overweight. According to the Centers for Disease

Facts

- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Cancer Society, the American Dietetic Association, the American Diabetes Association, the American Heart Association, the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Institutes of Health all recommend a greater emphasis in the American diet on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes with a reduction in the consumption of animal foods.
- Recent studies, including a report by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, indicate that more than _ of California children are overweight or obese and therefore, at higher risk of developing health problems including: heart disease, diabetes, asthma and cancer.
- Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes are generally lower in fat and calories than meat and dairy products, contain no cholesterol and promote good health because they contain fiber and essential nutrients including vitamins and minerals.
- A rapidly growing number of California school children either identify themselves as vegetarian or vegan, come from vegetarian or vegan families or come from families who avoid meat and dairy for religious or health reasons

Control and Prevention, the percentage of children and adolescents who are defined as overweight has more than doubled since the early 1970s.”

Comments

The California Department of Education's Nutrition Services Division (NSD) is currently engaged in some efforts to promote healthy eating in schools. Through its Garden Enhanced Nutrition Education (GENE) program and its "A Garden in Every School" initiative, the Department is able to promote linkages between the school cafeteria, school classroom, school garden, local agriculture and waste management (such as recycling). Students are consequently becoming more motivated to make healthier food choices.

Nevertheless, most schools continue to rely upon the **NSD's Food Distribution Program** which delivers foods purchased and donated by the USDA to eligible public and private nonprofit agencies in California. The most popular USDA-donated foods sent to processors are: beef, pork, chicken and turkey. This invariably encourages schools to cut costs by using the above-mentioned donated foods. Thus, while schools may, in fact, provide a variety of lunch options, they typically contain meat or dairy products, placing students who are vegetarian or lactose-intolerant at a distinct disadvantage.

Furthermore, the farm bill passed by Congress last May directs the Agriculture Department to buy **irradiated beef** for the federal school lunch program. Irradiation is a process that uses electrons or gamma rays to kill harmful bacteria like salmonella and E. coli, which causes food poisoning. There is widespread concern that this process has not been well-tested.

Support

(as of 02/21/03):

Therefore, when schools begin to provide this meat, there may be more students requesting a plant-based option during lunch.

According to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, teenagers are the fastest-growing demographic of vegetarians. Teenage Research Unlimited corroborates that theory by reporting that one out of every four teens thinks vegetarianism is "cool." In addition, the Vegetarian Resource Group estimates that 11% of teenage girls avoid beef.

School districts are beginning to respond to this trend. In 1999, 69% of schools surveyed told the American Food Services Association they had options for those on special diets, including vegetarians and those with lactose intolerance or food allergies.

Assemblyman Joe Nation, through ACR 16, hopes that the numbers will continue to rise, and that the state will take an active role in promoting healthier lunch options in schools by



establishing a school lunch menu plan which includes a plant-based choice.

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100 Individual letters from adults,
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4 Individual letters from students

Opposition

None

Votes

For More Information

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2006