

TO: Dr. Thomas L. Richey

FROM: Sabrina Jewell, Director of Child Nutrition

DATE: March 13, 2013

RE: Report on the School Nutrition Association Legislative Action Conference

ATTACHMENTS: 2013 Legislative Issue Paper; March 8, 2013 New Release from SNA

It was a privilege to attend the 2013 Legislative Action Conference in Washington, DC, from March 2-6. Over 800 School Nutrition Association members from across the nation converged in our Capitol to meet with legislators about the nutritional health of our children.

Our goal was simple. We were not asking for money or sweeping reforms. We asked for revisions to the current New Meal Patterns and the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act. In our issue paper we addressed 4 topics.

- We asked that the temporary leniency of the weekly limits of grains and proteins become permanent.
- We asked that the Breakfast Meal Pattern be put on hold for 1 year to allow us time to finish addressing Lunch.
- We asked that the Paid Lunch Equity, Section 205 of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, be amended so that districts that operate efficiently and in the black do not have to raise meal prices to satisfy a national norm but rather respond to the local economy.
- We asked that a national policy on unpaid meal charges be established.

We were fortunate that even before we arrived in DC, Congress was listening. Senators John Hoeven (R-N.D.) and Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) introduced Senate Bill 427, the "Sensible School Lunch Act," to make the grains and proteins weekly limit elimination permanent. Knowing that the Senate was aware of our challenges, it was very easy to address our House Representatives to encourage them to sponsor a companion bill. Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.) announced at the Tuesday evening reception her intention to sponsor the House bill.

All of the Kentucky Congressmen were visited by our KSNA contingent. I was able to meet with aides for Senator Rand Paul and Representative Ed Whitfield, both of whom were supportive of the School Meals programs in general. Rep. Whitfield in particular has always been very gracious to our efforts to provide quality meals for our children.

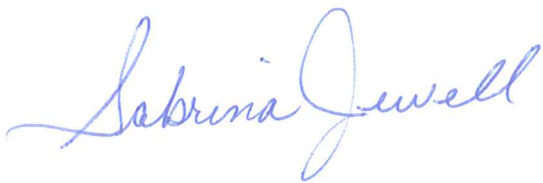
While we wait for the legislative process to take its course, I am hopeful that there is light at the end of the tunnel. I am working with our managers to update our menus with the current temporary leniency on the grains and proteins. We will continue to adjust our breakfast menus under the assumption that we will have to completely implement that meal pattern as of July 1, 2013. We have been blessed with

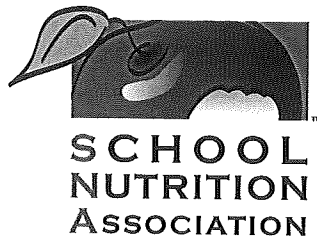
only a small decrease in participation this year. We should begin to recoup that as we continue to update our menus.

As for the Paid Lunch Equity, I recommend that we sit in holding pattern for this year. We raised meal prices last year due to this requirement. I do not think that our families are in a position to absorb another increase. I am cautiously hopeful that the amendment will be passed before July 1, 2013.

Unpaid meal charges are a continual challenge. In 2010, our district established a sound charge policy. Since then our overall charges are down, and we are better able to identify and help the families that charge on a regular basis. But a national policy would be a benefit to all districts in how to collect the money at the end of the school year.

I would like to thank this Board and Administration for your support of the Child Nutrition Program.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sabrina Jewell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'S' and a distinct 'J'.



2013 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE PAPER

Since 1946, the National School Lunch Act has functioned successfully as a grant-in-aid program. We believe Congress has made the correct decision in exempting school nutrition programs from sequestration. We request that Congress continue to invest in our children by providing nutritious school meals under the current funding structure. It is this structure that has allowed the program to succeed and become a model for the world. With this sense of history, SNA makes the following recommendations to protect the nutritional health of our children:

- **SNA supports the elimination of the weekly limits on Grains and Meat/Meat Alternates served in the National School Lunch Program.** SNA strongly urges Congress and USDA to make this temporary solution for SY 2012-2013 permanent immediately.
- **SNA urges a delay in the implementation of the School Breakfast Program modifications pending resolution of outstanding issues related to the School Lunch Meal Pattern.** Upon implementation of the School Breakfast Program modifications, SNA urges the elimination of the weekly limits on Grains served in the School Breakfast Program and also recommends allowing full substitutability of Meat/Meat Alternates for Grains.
- **Section 205 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act mandates that certain School Food Authorities annually increase their paid meal prices regardless of their financial solvency.** SNA asks Congress to amend Section 205 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act by narrowing Section 205 to only those School Food Authorities that have a negative fund balance at the end of the previous school year.
- **Unpaid meal charges owed to the School Food Authority by participants in the program have increased significantly.** Congress should require USDA to establish a consistent national policy on how to address the debt incurred by the unpaid meal charges.



SNA News

2013 LAC SHOWCASES PRAGMATIC PASSION

Permanent link

March 8, 2013 – Bitter winds gusted across the nation's capital just days after bitter words were exchanged (again) on Capitol Hill following yet another failure of bipartisan compromise regarding the nation's debt woes. But at the J.W. Marriott, situated blocks between the Capitol and the White House, a record-breaking number of school nutrition professionals, industry partners and other advocates remained undeterred by either the forecasted snow nor the recent sequester. These 800+ attendees of the School Nutrition Association's 41st Legislative Action Conference (LAC) were fired up and ready to make the most of a long history of bipartisan support for child nutrition.

Indeed, the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs were among the few to have been exempted from the sweeping sequestration budget cuts and support from both major political parties was evident with the pre-LAC announcement of a bipartisan bill introduced in the U.S. Senate. Senators John Hoeven (R-N.D.) and Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) introduced S. 427, the "Sensible School Lunch Act," which would eliminate the weekly maximums for grains and meat/meat alternates established in the nutrition standards regulation published in January 2012. Although the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had waived that requirement for the rest of SY 2012-13 and through 2013-14, SNA, in its *2013 Legislative Issue Paper*, has requested permanent elimination of this provision. Addressing LAC attendees at the closing session on Wednesday, March 6, Sen. Hoeven remarked, "This is how it should work. This is a good example of how we can work together to get the job done." The bill already has several other cosponsors from both parties.

The 41st LAC officially kicked off on Sunday, March 3, with a number of inspiring breakout sessions showcasing and sharing best practice innovations from districts of all sizes and demographics. From learning of the marketing tips in Minnesota to nutrition/physical education breaks in Kansas to new product sampling procedures in Florida, attendees could find any number of useful "nuggets" to take home and try out for themselves. After the breakouts, the agenda turned squarely to what operators, industry and other advocates needed to know about working with lawmakers in Washington.

NBC News Political Director and Chief White House Correspondent Chuck Todd conceded that the climate in Washington these days was not conducive to productivity. "I'm a little ashamed to get up and speak about the inability for Washington to get *anything* done in light of all that *you* get done every single day," he noted. He equated the communications clashes between the dominant political parties to those discussed in popular relationship advice books: "Republicans are from Mars and Democrats are from Venus, and none of us here on Earth feel like they are listening to *us*."

Todd went on to project his optimism for future budget battles, outline the likely transformative priorities for each major party in the years ahead and reflect on the lessons of history as our country labors to redefine itself for the future. "You're feeding kids to do *what*? Training them to do *what*? We're still struggling as a society to define what that is," he remarked.

LAC is also an important occasion for dialogue between school nutrition advocates and representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), which has oversight of the federal child nutrition programs. FNS representatives acknowledged and thanked school nutrition operators and industry for rising to some difficult challenges in meeting the new meal pattern requirements,

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emphasizing the importance of working together in partnership for America's kids. "If you're not successful at *your* job, then we're not successful at USDA," reiterated Dr. Janey Thornton, SNS, deputy under secretary.

Presentations about several related research studies will help to arm school nutrition professionals with the data they need to support a variety of initiatives and priorities, from expanding school breakfast service to upgrading outdated facilities and equipment. The annual Charge to the Hill was supported by real-world examples from industry and operators struggling with such issues as paid meal equity and unpaid meal charges. SNA's Washington Counsel reminded attendees that the positions of the *Legislative Issue Paper* are "small enough and precise enough" that they are issues that members of Congress *can* solve.

Monday's official program ended with a surprise visit from NFL greats Brian Mitchell, retired from the Washington Redskins, and Torrey Smith, of the Super Bowl champion Baltimore Ravens. The football players expressed their appreciation and admiration for the work of school nutrition employees at all levels. "On behalf of all the students who *act* like they don't care, know that you *are* appreciated," lauded Smith. Mitchell urged attendees to own their expertise: "When you go to Capitol Hill, don't you take 'no' for an answer. You put your foot down!"

Other conference highlights:

- Hundreds helped to raise funds for the Global Child Nutrition Foundation at its annual "A Possible Dream" Gala. Arlene Mitchell was honored as the latest recipient of the Gene White Lifetime Achievement Award for Child Nutrition. Also honored were SNA's 2012 Outstanding Director of the Year Sherri Knutson, SNS, and 2012 Industry Member of the Year Barbara Jirka, PhD, SNS.
- Industry members enjoyed a special luncheon featuring insightful reflections from a panel of school nutrition directors and state agency directors. The panelists reviewed the ongoing challenges of meeting the new meal pattern provisions, as well as some of the positive consequences. "The new regs gave us a great platform for school meals, nutrition and wellness," noted Elizabeth Wallace, SNS, director of food and nutrition services, Cherry Creek Schools, Englewood, Colo. And June Barrett, CNP program coordinator, Alabama Department of Education, thanked all of the vendors in the room for their "proactive approach to reformulating products."
- While a doom-and-gloom forecast for heavy snows sent some LAC attendees off to the airport for earlier flights back home, a special Capitol Hill Reception in the Cannon House Office Building was "packed." Participants reported a "lovely networking" event with fellow attendees, Hill staff and some members of Congress. Among them, Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.) addressed those assembled, expressing her interest in sponsoring the House version of the grains/meats maximums bill.
- Although the federal government shut-down made in anticipation of significant snow accumulation meant much of D.C. was shut down as well, LAC attendees were grateful that Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) and Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio) still were able to join Sen. Hoeven and offer reflections about the recent election and expectations for the 113th Congress. All the lawmakers made generous and sincere comments of appreciation for the great work of school nutrition professionals in schools across America and reiterated their support for pragmatic changes that benefit kids. "I will support any bill that focuses on healthy children," said Fudge, noting that "a nation that ails its children, fails." And Hoeven encouraged SNA members to continue to share their experiences and stories. "It makes such a big difference to hear from the experts," he explained. "When you talk to your member of Congress, it matters!"
- Sens. Hoeven and Pryor called a press conference on Wednesday to announce their sponsorship of the "Sensible School Lunch Act" bill and applaud SNA for its advocacy. "We're working with a fabulous group," credited Hoeven. "These are the people who are on the front lines across this nation, every single day, making sure that our children get the nutrition that they need." SNA President Sandra Ford, SNS, was invited to speak at the event, and offered her appreciation for legislation that will "provide cafeterias the flexibility that they need to plan healthy menus that appeal to the students.... Under this bill, school menus will make sense again." The

rest of the SNA Executive Team, as well as delegations from North Dakota and Arkansas also were featured guests at the press conference.

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