
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairwoman McCarthy Statement At Subcommittee Hearing
On Examining Innovative Practices to Improve Child
Nutrition**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), chairwoman of the Healthy Families and Communities for a subcommittee hearing on “Examining Innovative Practices to Improve Child Nutrition.”*

I’d like to welcome our witnesses to this hearing. Today we will examine innovative practices which can help increase access to child nutrition programs and to more healthy food for our children in schools.

Increased access for our schoolchildren is a critical issue as we move forward in our work on the child nutrition reauthorization.

Given the current harsh financial realities for many families in my district and throughout the nation, schools have an increasingly important role to play in providing children with nutritious food during their days.

As a nurse for over 30 years, I have seen firsthand the risks and illnesses that can result from poor eating habits.

There is also a surplus of data that indicates that well nourished students perform better throughout the day and are less likely to become obese.

We have all heard our parents say “breakfast is the most important meal of the day.” Studies have proven that parents know best.

Research has shown that children who regularly ate breakfast had better standardized test scores, better behavior, and were less hyperactive than children who skipped breakfast.

Eating breakfast gives you energy, increasing your physical activity during the day.

Eating breakfast reduces hunger which avoids making it easier to avoid overeating and can help reduce obesity in students.

Unfortunately, less than half of students eligible for school breakfast participate in this important program.

When you skip breakfast, you're more likely to skip fruits and vegetables the rest of the day too. We need to change that.

We know our school children are not eating enough of fruits and vegetables. Just last week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report that found that less than 10 percent of U.S. high school students are eating the combined recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables.

We all also know the importance of eating healthy food, including fruits and vegetables to the overall health of our children and in the fight against obesity. The child nutrition meal programs can make a great impact because they may provide more than 50 percent of a student's food and nutrient intake on school days.

We know that change for adults is hard, but if we start to educate our kids early enough, we can establish lifelong habits and the values of healthy living and wellness for the future. By providing access to nutritious food like fruits and vegetables, we have a wonderful opportunity to establish these positive lifelong habits.

And of course we cannot reach eligible schoolchildren at all without adequate access to the programs themselves. To reduce administrative waste and improve the accuracy of the school meal eligibility determination process, the school meals programs use a process known as "direct certification."

Under direct certification, children are automatically enrolled for free school meals based on data gathered by other means-tested programs. The 2004 reauthorization required all school districts, by the 2008-2009 school year, to directly certify for free school meals children in households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as "SNAP" benefits.

This means that instead of a parents having to fill out a form each year for free or reduced price meals, they are automatically enrolled in the meal programs if they are already enrolled in SNAP.

Districts may also directly certify children in households receiving cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant or benefits under the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

Nearly all states are complying with the requirement that they conduct direct certification, but not all of them are capturing all the students that they could. If we are to ensure all eligible kids have access to these important meal programs, we need to improve our direct certification capabilities.

The decisions we make during reauthorization are very important to a great number of children, and that is why we have assembled such a knowledgeable panel. We will hear testimony today about some terrific innovative practices which increase access to programs and better food.

We have our work cut out for us. But by taking a comprehensive approach to nutrition, our children, families and communities will all be healthier.

Thank you all for being here and I look forward to your testimony.

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