



# **American Bridge**

## **Trump Policy Brief: Gutting Michelle Obama's School Lunch Standards**

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## GUTTING MICHELLE OBAMA'S SCHOOL LUNCH STANDARDS

On May 1, 2017, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that schools would be permitted to roll back student lunch health standards made famous by Michelle Obama. Targeting the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, the Trump administration will allow schools to relax whole grain requirements, delay sodium content restrictions, and serve milk with higher fat contents. The policy change ignores scientific recommendations from the Institute of Medicine and fails to put children first.

- ✓ Before the implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, researchers identified school lunches as a risk factor for childhood obesity.
- ✓ The American Heart Association noted that Trump's policy allowing more sodium and sugar in school lunches would increase students' blood pressure and put them at greater risk of heart disease and stroke later in life.
- ✓ Healthier school lunches could raise student achievement by an average of four percentile points and be more cost-effective than other policies with the same goal.

### The Trump Administration Rolled Back School Lunch Standards Promoted By Former First Lady Michelle Obama

#### THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ROLLED BACK THE HEALTHY, HUNGER-FREE KIDS ACT OF 2010 THAT IMPROVED SCHOOL LUNCH NUTRITION STANDARDS

**Agriculture Secretary Sonny Purdue Announced That School Lunches Would No Longer Be Required To Adhere To Certain Nutrition Standards.** According to The New York Times, "The Trump administration took aim Monday at two signature programs of the former first lady Michelle Obama, rolling back her efforts to promote healthy school lunches nationwide and potentially rebranding her program to educate adolescent girls abroad. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that school meals would no longer have to meet some requirements connected with Mrs. Obama's initiative to combat childhood obesity by overhauling the nation's school menus." [New York Times, [5/1/17](#)]

- **The Rollback Targeted The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act Of 2010 Promoted By Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" Campaign.** According to The New York Times, "The Trump administration took aim Monday at two signature programs of the former first lady Michelle Obama, rolling back her efforts to promote healthy school lunches nationwide and potentially rebranding her program to educate adolescent girls abroad. [...] The nutrition regulations were part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 and were advocated by Mrs. Obama's 'Let's Move' campaign. For the last five years, schools have been required to reduce the amount of calories, fat and sodium in their cafeterias and increase offerings of whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and nonfat milk to the roughly 32 million students who receive federally subsidized meals." [New York Times, [5/1/17](#)]
- **The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act "Was Aimed At Improving Nutrition And Reducing Child Obesity."** According to CNN, "The School Nutrition Association's recommendations would roll back key provisions of the 'Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act,' legislation spearheaded by Obama, and her 'Let's Move!' campaign. The 2010 law, implemented in cafeterias across the country at the

beginning of the 2012-13 school year, was aimed at improving nutrition and reducing child obesity and authorizing funding for federal lunch programs. It called for more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk products and less sodium and fat. It also awards additional funding to schools that meet the standards -- to the tune of six cents per healthy lunch.” [CNN, [3/14/17](#)]

**Perdue Said The Rollback Would “Make School Meals Great Again.”** According to the New York Times, “Mr. Perdue said the Obama-era rules had resulted in increased costs for school districts and declining participation in the federal school lunch program. He said relaxing the rules was part of the administration’s effort to ‘make school meals great again.’” [New York Times, [5/1/17](#)]

## **THE ROLLBACK WILL ALLOW SCHOOLS TO RELAX STANDARDS ON WHOLE GRAINS, SODIUM, AND FAT CONTENT IN MILK**

**The Rollback Would Allow Schools To Request Exemptions From The Whole Grain Requirements, Delay The Sodium Reduction Mandate, And Serve Higher-Fat Milk.** According to The New York Times, “The Trump administration took aim Monday at two signature programs of the former first lady Michelle Obama, rolling back her efforts to promote healthy school lunches nationwide and potentially rebranding her program to educate adolescent girls abroad. [...] Beginning next school year, schools can request an exemption from the whole grain requirements and delay the sodium mandate. They will also be able to serve 1 percent flavored milk instead of nonfat.” [New York Times, [5/1/17](#)]

- **Schools Would Be Allowed To Waive The Requirement That Grain Products Be At Least 50 Percent Whole Grain.** According to CBS, “The proclamation, which will take effect in the 2017-2018 school year, delays an upcoming requirement to reduce sodium levels in school meals. It also allows schools to waive another regulation that required grain products given to students to be at least 50 percent whole grain.” [CBS, [5/1/17](#)]
- **Schools Would Be Allowed To Delay The Requirement That School Lunches Contain No More Than 1,080 Mg Of Sodium.** According to the BBC, “Health campaigners say they are most concerned by the failure to reduce sodium, which is linked to high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. The sodium limit for a high school lunch is now about 1,400 mg, or three-quarters of the recommended daily maximum, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) said. Mr Perdue’s move delays plans to reduce that figure to 1,080 mg in this school year. ‘This will lock in very high levels of sodium in school lunches,’ said Margo Wootan from CSPI.” [BBC, [5/2/17](#)]
- **Schools Would Be Allowed To Serve 1-Percent Flavored Milk Instead Of Nonfat Milk.** According to The New York Times, “The Trump administration took aim Monday at two signature programs of the former first lady Michelle Obama, rolling back her efforts to promote healthy school lunches nationwide and potentially rebranding her program to educate adolescent girls abroad. [...] Beginning next school year, schools can request an exemption from the whole grain requirements and delay the sodium mandate. They will also be able to serve 1 percent flavored milk instead of nonfat.” [New York Times, [5/1/17](#)]

### **Relaxing School Lunch Standards Will Be Harmful To Children’s Health And Development**

### **UNHEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCHES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A RISK FACTOR FOR CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

**2011: Researchers Identified School Lunches As A Risk Factor For Childhood Obesity.** According to The New York Times, “Researchers say they have identified another risk factor for childhood obesity: school lunch. A study of more than 1,000 sixth graders in several schools in southeastern Michigan found that those who regularly had the school lunch were 29 percent more likely to be obese than those who brought lunch from home.” [New York Times, [2/4/11](#)]

### **Childhood Obesity Has More Than Tripled Since The 1970s**

**According To The CDC, Childhood Obesity Has More Than Tripled Since The 1970s With One In Five School-Aged Children Being Obese In 2014.** According to The Wall Street Journal, “Childhood obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s—with one in five school-aged children being obese in 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.” [Wall Street Journal, [5/1/17](#)]

### **Researchers Believe Healthy School Lunches Have Begun To Help Reverse Obesity Trends**

**Public Health Researcher Miriam Nelson Said Healthy School Lunch Programs Have Helped To Begin To Reverse The Trend In Childhood Obesity Rates.** According to the Washington Post, “‘I feel that we have made such progress in schools meals over the past five years,’ said Miriam Nelson, a public health researcher who helped advise Michelle Obama’s nutrition initiatives. ‘This progress has contributed to reversing the trend in childhood obesity rates nationwide. ... We want to continue the progress we have made.’” [Washington Post, [5/1/17](#)]

## **LIFTING SCHOOL LUNCH STANDARDS WOULD MAKE CHILDREN MORE VULNERABLE TO DISEASE**

**The American Heart Association Denounced The Trump Administration’s Relaxation Of School Lunch Standards, Noting That Allowing More Sodium And Sugar “Would Increase Students’ Blood Pressure And Put Them At Greater Risk Of Heart Disease And Strokes.”** According to The New York Times, “Nancy Brown, chief executive of the American Heart Association, said in a statement that schools were moving forward to meet the requirements. The organization denounced the Agriculture Department’s relaxation of the rules, noting that more sodium and sugar would increase students’ blood pressure and put them at greater risk of heart disease and strokes.” [New York Times, [5/1/17](#)]

**The Center For Science In The Public Interest Noted That The Trump Administration’s Relaxed Standards On Sodium Would “Lock In Very High Levels Of Sodium In School Lunches.”** According to the BBC, “Health campaigners say they are most concerned by the failure to reduce sodium, which is linked to high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. The sodium limit for a high school lunch is now about 1,400 mg, or three-quarters of the recommended daily maximum, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) said. Mr Perdue’s move delays plans to reduce that figure to 1,080 mg in this school year. ‘This will lock in very high levels of sodium in school lunches,’ said Margo Wootan from CSPI.” [BBC, [5/2/17](#)]

- **The Center For Science In The Public Interest Director Of Nutrition Policy Margo Wootan: “Ninety Percent Of American Kids Eat Too Much Sodium Every Day.”** According to NBC, “‘It’s discouraging that just days into his tenure, one of the first things that Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue will do is to roll back progress on the quality of the meals served to America’s children,’ margo [sic] Wootan of the Center for Science in the Public Interest said in a statement. ‘Ninety percent of American kids eat too much sodium every day. Schools have been moving in the right direction, so it makes no sense to freeze that progress in its tracks—and allow dangerously high levels of salt in school lunch.’” [NBC, [5/1/17](#)]

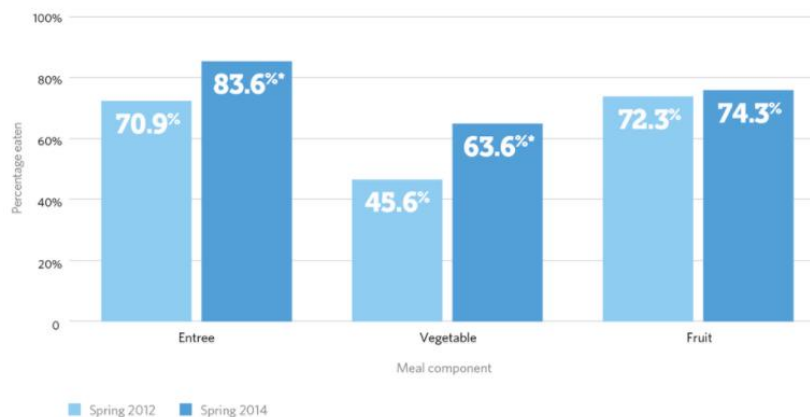
**American Academy Of Pediatrics Spokeswoman Dr. Tanya Altmann Said Lessening The Availability Of Whole Grains Could Impact Growth And Development.** According to CNN, “Dr. Tanya Altmann, a California pediatrician and spokeswoman for the American Academy of Pediatrics, said children get a third to half of their daily calories at school. ‘So school lunch programs are critical for helping a child reach their nutrient goals throughout the day,’ she wrote in an email. ‘I’m fine with 1-percent (fat), flavored milk since all milk has important protein, calcium and (vitamin) D that growing kids need.’ When it comes to loosening standards that regulate salt, which ‘has no nutrition benefit and can contribute to unhealthy diet as a whole,’ and those regulating grains, Altmann is a little less ‘fine.’ ‘We already know that kids don’t eat enough whole grains,’ she said. ‘Whole grains are important for growth and development, and I think that all of the grains kids eat should be whole grains whenever possible.’” [CNN, [5/2/17](#)]

### **School Lunches Influence Lifelong Eating Habits And Healthier Options Had Begun To Improve Child Eating**

**Pew: “Schools Play An Important And Unique Role In Influencing Children’s Eating Habits And Lifelong” Behavior, And Research Has Already Shown That Healthier School Lunches Improved Kids’ Eating Habits.** According to The Pew Charitable Trusts, “Schools play an important and unique role in influencing children’s eating habits and lifelong behavior through the food and drink choices offered in cafeterias, hallway vending machines, and elsewhere on campus. Kids consume up to 50 percent of their daily calories at school: More than 30 million students eat school lunches, and 14 million eat school breakfasts. Research shows that availability of healthier school lunches has already improved kids’ eating habits. One study found that offering more variety led to healthier choices; each additional fruit option was associated with a 9.3 percent increase in the number of fruit servings selected by students.” [Pew Charitable Trusts, [4/5/16](#)]

### **KIDS ATE MORE WHEN SCHOOL LUNCHES GOT HEALTHIER, DESPITE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION CLAIMS TO THE CONTRARY**

Figure 1  
**Kids Ate More When School Lunches Got Healthier**  
Average percentage consumed, by meal component, 2012 and 2014



[Pew Charitable Trusts, [4/5/16](#)]

**Agriculture Secretary Purdue’s Claims That Children Were Not Eating Healthy Lunches Was Unsupported By The Research.** According to CNN, “Purdue said that when kids don’t eat, they don’t get

the nutrition they need, and this undermines ‘the intent of the program.’ [...] Marlene Schwartz, director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut, said the argument that food is ending up in the trash ‘is not supported by the research. There have been studies, ours included, that have found plate waste has not increased.’” [CNN, [5/2/17](#)]

## Healthy School Lunches Have Been Linked To Higher Student Achievement

### IMPROVING SCHOOL LUNCH NUTRITION HAS BEEN LINKED TO HIGHER TEST SCORES AND IS MORE COST-EFFECTIVE THAN OTHER POLICIES WITH THE SAME GOAL

**The Atlantic: Students At Schools With Healthier School Lunches Performed Better On State Testing.** According to The Atlantic, “The intense policy interest in improving the nutritional content of public-school meals—in addition to vendors’ efforts to market their school meals as good for the body and the mind—sparked the researchers’ curiosity and led to an unexpected discovery: Students at schools that contract with a healthier school-lunch vendor perform somewhat better on state tests—and this option appears highly cost-effective compared to policy interventions that typically are more expensive, like class-size reduction.” [The Atlantic, [3/22/17](#)]

- **The Atlantic: Healthier School Lunches Could Raise Student Achievement By An Average Of Four Percentile Points.** According to The Atlantic, “To put that statistic into perspective, healthier meals could raise student achievement by about 4 percentile points on average.” [The Atlantic, [3/22/17](#)]

**The Atlantic: Research Suggests That Healthier School Lunches Could Be More Cost Effective In Raising Student Academic Performance Than Policy Changes Like Smaller Class Sizes.** According to The Atlantic, “What’s more, he said, districts are almost getting these improvements free of charge. After tabulating the average price per meal in the vendor contracts—and estimating the cost of in-house school meals based on National School Lunch Program reimbursements—the study found that it cost about \$222 per student per year to switch from in-house school-lunch preparation to a healthier lunch vendor that correlated with a rise of 0.1 standard deviations in the student’s test score. To put that statistic into perspective, healthier meals could raise student achievement by about 4 percentile points on average. In comparison, it cost \$1,368 per year to raise a student’s test score by 0.1 standard deviations in the Tennessee STAR experiment, a project that studied the effects of class-size on student achievement in elementary school. The paper notes that established research in the field supports the need for ‘lower-cost policies with modest effects on student test scores [that] may generate a better return than costly policies with larger absolute effects.’” [The Atlantic, [3/22/17](#)]

## The Corporate-Backed School Nutrition Association Pushed Trump To Lift The Regulations

### THE SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION CLAIMS DOMINO’S, PEPSICO, AND GENERAL MILLS AMONG ITS DONORS

**The School Nutrition Association Praised The Trump Administration Policy Scaling Back School Health Guidelines.** According to The Washington Post, “It was the second blow to the Obama administration’s nutritional legacy in less than a week. On Friday, the Food and Drug Administration signaled

its intent to rewrite long-delayed menu-labeling rules passed as part of the Affordable Care Act. Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee also attached several nutrition-related riders to this week's appropriations bill, including one that targeted voluntary industry sodium reductions. They were also welcomed by the School Nutrition Association, a powerful lobbying group which represents school food workers and administrators, and which has said schools need more time and flexibility to meet the stricter rules." [Washington Post, [5/1/17](#)]

**The Washington Post Described The School Nutrition Association As “A Powerful Lobbying Group.”** According to The Washington Post, “They were also welcomed by the School Nutrition Association, a powerful lobbying group which represents school food workers and administrators, and which has said schools need more time and flexibility to meet the stricter rules.” [Washington Post, [5/1/17](#)]

**The School Nutrition Association Has Lobbied Congress For Flexibility In Meeting School Nutrition Standards.** According to The Hill, “The School Nutrition Association, which represents nutrition directors at schools across the country, was quick to praise Perdue. The group has been lobbying Congress for more flexibility in what the have called ‘overly prescriptive regulations.’” [The Hill, [5/1/17](#)]

**The School Nutrition Association’s Largest Donors Have Included Food Industry Giants Such As Domino’s, PepsiCo and General Mills.** According to an op-ed by public health lawyer Michele Simon for Aljazeera, “My first inclination was to suspect influence from the SNA’s food industry sponsors; after all, the organization’s largest donors include Domino’s, PepsiCo and General Mills.” [Michele Simon – Aljazeera, [8/8/14](#)]

**Schwan, The Largest Provider Of School Pizzas, Has A Seat On The School Nutrition Association’s Board.** According to an op-ed by public health lawyer Michele Simon for Aljazeera, “The answer may lie — at least partially — in the SNA’s complicated connections with the food industry. Let’s take a closer look at one of SNA’s patrons (and top donors): Schwan. The Minnesota-based company’s pizza products can be found in 75 percent of the nation’s 96,000 K-12 schools. Of course, Schwan’s products meet the new rules, as pictures from its booth boasting ‘regulation ready’ food indicate. According to the Star Tribune, the company says it has not taken a position on the controversy. But Schwan has a seat on the School Nutrition Foundation’s board (as does PepsiCo); through it, Schwan offers scholarships to SNA members for professional development. More importantly, as the Washington Post explains: At a 2012 SNA meeting, a Schwan executive and other industry advocates pushed for the group’s leadership to be more aggressive in asking for changes in the school lunch program, according to a person who witnessed the exchange but requested anonymity because he was not authorized to talk about it.” [Michele Simon – Aljazeera, [8/8/14](#)]