

Rep. Lynn Woolsey
Testimony
Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee
Hearing on "Using School Wellness Plans to Help Fight
Childhood Obesity,"
May 10, 2007

Thank you Chairwoman McCarthy and Ranking Member Platts for inviting me to testify at this important hearing on school wellness plans and childhood obesity.

We've all heard the statistics:

1. Childhood obesity has become a dangerous public health epidemic.
2. The percentage of overweight children has more than doubled since 1980.
3. The percentage of overweight adolescents has more than tripled.
4. Only one in three high school students take part in daily physical activity

If these trends continue, the next generation of adults is going to be at much greater risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer, and other diseases.

Congress through the work of this Committee took some steps to address the child obesity epidemic during the reauthorization of the school meals programs in 2004. There was bipartisan support to help school districts develop "school wellness policies," which include nutrition education, physical activity, and nutrition guidelines for food served at school. School districts and parents can use School Wellness Policies to teach children the healthy habits they'll need for a lifetime, but schools cannot carry out this program alone. With our help, School Wellness Programs can succeed.

Last summer, I was honored to be invited to speak at a conference sponsored by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, led by former President Clinton and the American Heart Association. Working with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other groups they successfully bring schools, businesses, and the healthcare community together to make kids healthier. They train staff, help schools create wellness programs, and check in afterwards to see how the wellness programs are progressing. We need more of these support systems for our schools.

I also met with Alice Waters, who created the Edible School Garden. This great program shows children how to create a fruit and vegetable garden

and serve the fruits and vegetables in the school cafeteria. Children learn the importance of a healthy diet and how fruits and vegetables are a key component, as well as seeing how fruits and vegetables go from garden to table.

At the conference, I spoke to cafeteria workers and other school employees who were learning about nutrition and how to encourage a healthy diet for their students. They were excited to be there and for many of them, that was the first time they were getting any real training on nutrition—two years after Wellness Programs were created!

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Alice Waters and these schools are doing a great job at trying to make children healthier and they need all the support we can give them. However, these schools are facing serious obstacles in order to make students healthier.

School nutrition programs face budget shortfalls because we are not fully funding the student lunch program or No Child Left Behind. In order to continue to buy new ovens or pay for healthcare for their cafeteria workers, schools often make up for these shortfalls by increasing the cost of meals and selling a la carte and vending machine items, food that usually does not have the same nutritional guidelines that meals have.

Right now, ice cream is allowed in schools but seltzer water isn't. Doughnuts are allowed but lollipops are not. Cookies are fine, but breath mints are not. This doesn't make sense. It undermines the federal nutrition standards for meals if students spend their money on unhealthy options. It also undermines the role of parents who give lunch money to their children expecting them to eat something wholesome and nutritious and their money is spent on unhealthy options instead.

That is why I've introduced legislation, the Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act, H.R. 1363 that will protect our children by ensuring that *all foods* sold in schools during the *entire* school day meet sound nutrition standards. The bill would require that food sold in schools take into account caloric intake, saturated fats, trans fats, and refined sugars. H.R.1363 assesses the affect of certain foods on obesity. The bill would also allow for recommendations by leading scientific experts.

This is a bipartisan bill, which enjoys support from the American Heart Association and an array of health advocacy groups. Republican Chris Shays is my lead co-sponsor. There is also a Senate version, offered by Democrat Tom Harkin and Republican Lisa Murkowski. This idea isn't a new one—the Democrats on the Committee on Education and Labor have gone on record in support of similar legislation.

When schools need to sell unhealthy food and drinks in order to make up for budget shortfalls, we are forcing them to abandon their School Wellness programs. That's why this legislation along with Chairwoman McCarthy and Chairman Miller leading the way, we have a real opportunity to stop the obesity epidemic. Working together, we will ensure that cafeteria and wellness programs are funded; the support and training required to create the wellness programs is available; and there are sound nutritional standards for all foods sold in schools.

Again, I thank you Madame Chair for this time.