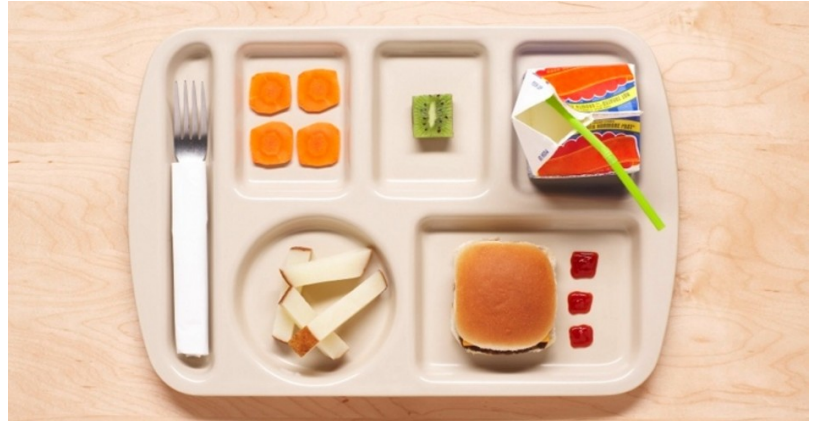




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 5, 2013

## Costly School Lunch Regulations Continue

More federal [regulations](#) focused on school foods and drinks are expected to cost taxpayers millions of dollars. According to the American Action Forum, the regulations, which include caps on serving sizes and calories, will cost schools approximately \$127 million and require more than 900,000 hours of paperwork.



The regulations would be administered by the United States Department of Agriculture and will require schools to forgo the cheaper enriched grains and instead serve more expensive whole grain choices such as brown rice, whole-wheat breads and whole grain pasta. Likewise, schools will have to serve a wider variety of fruits and vegetables including red, yellow, and green leafy vegetables and low-sodium proteins. School federal funding will depend on schools meeting these requirements.

Schools that comply with the regulations will receive an extra six cents per meal to help cover increased costs, but that will hardly defray the increased costs, which will be approximately 10 cents per lunch and 27 cents per breakfast.

Sam Batkins of the American Action Forum told Fox News March 5 that the proposal is another example of an unfunded federal mandate that will hit schools “at a time when many of their budgets are still struggling.”

Officials at the Department of Agriculture have a solution: charge wealthier students more for full-price meals.

But many school districts, such as San Francisco, have decided to absorb the extra costs.

“Our schools will just have to absorb the shortfall, as they always have, driving the deficit for our (district’s) student nutrition department even higher,” said [Dana Woldow](#), founder of PEACHSF.org, a school food advocacy site, back in January of 2012. “We must decide whether it is worth it to spend a little more money now to adequately fund school nutrition programs, so that children can learn to make healthy eating habits a way of life.... There is no free lunch.”

San Francisco already spends \$3 million more on its school meals per year than it gets in federal funding.

The USDA defends the regulations by noting that schools in 39 states already have some snack food standards in place. Thousands of schools “have already taken voluntary steps towards meeting the proposed standards,” states the USDA.

But the new regulations will require schools to meet the standards set by the USDA. Fox News reports:



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The new proposals come as a part of a second wave of regulations stemming from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Administrators are still working to comply with a number of other mandates that have significantly changed school food options in recent years. They include a requirement that each student take a serving of fruit or vegetable as part of their lunch or the federal government may not reimburse the cost — driving up prices for both students and school districts

The [guidelines](#) set minimum and maximum calories per meal by age group and provides sample lunch menus.

Whether the students will actually consume the available federally regulated foods is an uncertainty, however. A student at a West Philadelphia High School told a local Fox News reporter that students typically use fruits to play “food basketball,” which consists of students tossing the food into the garbage.

“Like, if you have an orange or an apple, you take it, and you have a trash can, shoot it in the trash can and see if you can make it,” the student said.

Ironically, that is one of the things First Lady Michelle Obama made reference to on Monday when she appeared in a Google Fireside Hangout. “I want every kid to commit to not throwing out anything,” she said.

Nutrition advocates are applauding the new standards. Parents can now imagine their children coming home from school with a newfound love for spinach, sweet potatoes and whole-wheat spaghetti,” Dawn Undurraga, staff nutritionist with Environmental Working Group, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2012. “That’s a positive development that will have a lasting impact as they grow into strong, fit young adults.”

But for many critics, the new regulations are more examples of seemingly well-intentioned, but costly, mandates that exhibit the Nanny State mentality that has overtaken the federal government.

Chocolate milk has already been removed from school cafeterias across the country, toys are being taken out of fast-food kids’ meals, and cash-strapped states have turned to “sin taxes,” all under the guise of addressing obesity. Meanwhile, healthy options such as raw milk and products grown on family farms continue to face the harsh scrutiny and overreach of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

And while the government has not yet decided it has the authority to take complete control our diets, at least not yet, it has engaged in these sorts of endeavors to “nudge” us in the right direction.

That notion seems to come straight from Cass Sunstein, the Obama administration’s regulatory czar who co-authored the book, [Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness](#).

Sunstein’s book provides a variety of measures that can be taken in order to “nudge” Americans toward healthier lifestyles while appearing that Americans are in fact making the decisions themselves, through the employment of behavioral psychology.

One example that *Nudge* provides to help encourage students to eat healthier is to place healthier food choices at eye level while unhealthy choices are placed out of sight.

Sunstein has indicated that the presence of too many choices can be confusing to the American people. In describing the premise of his book, Sunstein virtually claimed that the American people were too ignorant to make proper decisions. “We think there is a little Homer Simpson in all of us. Sometimes we have self-control problems, sometimes we’re impulsive. In these circumstances, both public and private



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institutions, without coercing, can make our lives a lot better.”

And despite the positive intentions behind these food regulations touted by the federal government, it’s worth mentioning that the government’s insistence on tackling the obesity epidemic in the United States is not as intrinsically inspired by a desire to aid the American people as they would like for us to believe, nor is it entirely driven by money. According to First Lady Michelle Obama, obesity is a national security problem.

In December, 2010, [she said in prepared remarks](#): “Military leaders tell us that when more than one in four young people are unqualified for military service because of their weight, childhood obesity isn’t just a public health threat, it’s not just an economic threat, it’s a national security threat as well.”

After all, how else can they assure that they have enough soldiers to fight in the numerous wars in which they would like for the American military to be engaged?

Critics will have the opportunity to voice their opposition to the proposed standards. The USDA will be taking public comments on the new school food proposals through April 9 [here](#).



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