

Testimony

Perspectives on Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

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Good morning, Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, and members of this committee. I am Josh Mathiasmeier, Director of Nutritional Services for Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS). I have been the Director since July 2014 and previously worked at the Kansas State Department of Education on the Child Nutrition and Wellness team from January 2013 through July 2014. As the Director of Nutritional Services, I am responsible for the implementation of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. Child Nutrition Programs provide a strong safety net for KCKPS children by ensuring their nutrition needs are met while also providing nutrition education. Thank you for inviting me to speak today and for your interest in making sure students have access to healthy meals that impact student success.

Overview

KCKPS is an urban school district in Kansas with approximately 23,000 students with a free and reduced percentage of 84.9%. The school district has approximately 68 known languages spoken and has over 9,300 EL students. Wyandotte County has demographics of 40.9% White, 23.2% Black or African American, 29.0% Hispanic or Latino and 6.9% Other. KCKPS operates USDA Child Nutrition programs in 53 buildings and participates in the following USDA Child Nutrition Programs to promote the health and well-being of children: the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snack Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. KCKPS utilizes the Community Eligibility Provision in 47 of our schools.

Innovative Meal Programs

KCKPS strives to provide our students with high quality food and excellent customer service. During a normal school day, students have access to breakfast, lunch, and an afterschool snack or supper. Through the use of innovative meal programs, we are able to increase the quality and variety of our offerings while appealing to the 21st century student.

KCKPS has implemented Innovative Breakfast Programs such as Grab and Go Breakfast and Breakfast in the Classroom in 28 of our schools. Prior to implementation of Innovative Breakfast Programs, KCKPS averaged approximately 7,000 breakfasts per day. Currently, KCKPS averages over 14,000 breakfasts per day. By hosting breakfast meal service in the classroom or near the building entrances, we were able to increase access to healthy meals and incorporate the breakfast meal program into the school day.

KCKPS is located in Wyandotte County where food insecurity impacts 16.8% of the population and 23.7% of children. With such a high food insecurity rate in our county, Nutritional Services department strives to provide access to healthy food for all students. On top of the breakfast and lunch programs offered during the school day, KCKPS offers afterschool snack or suppers at 38 schools and 2 libraries. Schools incorporate the snack or supper meal into their afterschool event or activity while including an educational or enrichment component. On a daily basis, KCKPS serves approximately 600 afterschool snacks or suppers.

KCKPS serves over 32,000 meals per day during the school year through breakfast, lunch and afterschool snack or supper programs. KCKPS understands that hunger continues to be a concern during the summer months. Through partnerships with hunger advocacy groups, KCKPS bridges the gap between school meal service by operating the Summer Food Service Program with summer meal sites at over 40 locations. With locations of summer meal sites in areas such as schools, pools, libraries, community centers, public parks, urban farms, community colleges, farmers markets and community housing complexes, KCKPS provides broad access to children during the summer months. KCKPS was awarded a Cities Combating Hunger Through After School and Summer Meal Programs (CHAMPS) grant to increase access to summer and afterschool meals. Through partnerships with local officials and hunger advocacy groups, KCKPS increased access to summer meals by identifying underserved areas and improving access by bringing meals to where children were using a Food Truck. The vehicle used for the food truck was an inoperable district vehicle brought to life through a complete overhaul of the all working parts and branded with a wrap designed by a middle school student. On a daily basis during the summer, KCKPS serves over 4,000 meals to children.

Operation of Multiple USDA Child Nutrition Programs

KCKPS strives to provide access of healthy meals for our students in KCKPS and all children in Wyandotte County. To do so, KCKPS operates the aforementioned USDA Child Nutrition Programs.

While many of the Child Nutrition Program regulations are the same, it is challenging to streamline when there are several differences in regulations between USDA Child Nutrition Programs. This causes a great deal of confusion when administering multiple programs. KCKPS encourages USDA to create consistency between USDA Child Nutrition Programs. Examples include:

- The Child and Adult Care Food Program meal pattern for Pre-K requires more meat/meat alternate than the meal pattern for K-5 in the National School Lunch Program.
- Milk fat and flavor requirements are not consistent between programs. In the Summer Food Service Program, there are no restrictions on fat content or flavor of milk served. Flavored milk cannot be served in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The National School Lunch Program allows skim and low-fat flavored and unflavored milk as long as there is one unflavored option.
- The National School Lunch Program allows 2 ounce equivalent grain based desserts per week, while the Child and Adult Care Food Program does not allow any grain based desserts. For instance, granola bars cannot be served for Child and Adult Care Food Program At-Risk Afterschool Meals but students can have a granola bar as a part of the National School Lunch, Breakfast and Afterschool Snack Programs.

Each USDA Child Nutrition Program has oversight by the State Agency through reviews. Each USDA Child Nutrition Program has a unique review cycle. During the 2017-18 school year, KCKPS received audits by the State Agency for each of the following USDA Child Nutrition Programs: the Administrative Review which includes the National Schools Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snack Program, and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Procurement Review. KCKPS understands the importance of compliance and accountability but the reporting requirements are overwhelming and require in excess of 100 hours of administrative time to ensure smooth and successful reviews. KCKPS encourages USDA to simplify and streamline the compliance and accountability reviews and

return to a five-year Administrative Review Cycle for School Food Authorities (SFAs) that consistently operate in compliance.

In addition to the State Agency reviews, KCKPS is required to complete onsite monitoring site visits for the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snack Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program. During the 2017-18 school year KCKPS completed over 340 onsite monitoring visits which require over 150 hours of administrative time, many at the same location due to operating multiple USDA Child Nutrition Programs. KCKPS encourages USDA to simplify and streamline the onsite monitoring process to become more efficient.

Meeting Needs of Customers

KCKPS strives to meet the individual needs of our customers with their unique background and demographics. The customers at KCKPS are unlike any group of customers in surrounding school districts. The school districts in Kansas that immediately border KCKPS do not share many of the same demographics as our customers. It is important for KCKPS to remain focused on the needs of our customers through local control of food, equipment, supplies and resources. Through local control, KCKPS is able to stay nimble in meeting the constantly changing needs of our customers. KCKPS encourages USDA to continue giving local control for the many decisions that impact our customer's unique needs.

Community Eligibility Provision

KCKPS participates in the Community Eligibility Provision in 47 of our schools. On April 1, 2016, KCKPS had 10,974 students Directly Certified. On April 1, 2019, KCKPS had 9,008 students Directly Certified, down 17.9% over a 3-year period. Many factors at the local, state and federal level impact the drop in Directly Certified students including SNAP Eligibility, SNAP Outreach, Socioeconomic Status Change, and Immigration Status. KCKPS encourages USDA to continue to offer the Community Eligibility Provision to SFAs to increase access of healthy meals to children.

Conclusion

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, known as the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, provided historic changes in child nutrition programs to give students healthier meal options. Implementation has resulted in increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and whole grains. Schools are leading culture change to instill healthy habits for a lifetime. KCKPS has a passion for making sure students have access to healthy, safe and tasty meals. KCKPS encourages USDA to ensure SFAs can efficiently and effectively serve students these meals because they are critical to children's lifelong success.