

Thank you, Chairman Chambliss for calling this hearing. It's always a pleasure to be joined by our friends from the School Nutrition Association. I also want to welcome the Iowans in the audience today - Virginia Bechtold, the President of the Iowa School Nutrition Association, Teresa Nece, and the rest of the Iowa delegates in town.

Last year this committee successfully reauthorized federal child nutrition programs with enormous bipartisan support. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 not only improved the access of low-income children to federal child nutrition programs, but also included provisions that I believe will dramatically improve how our kids eat while at school.

Kids today face a minefield of nutritional risks. From the moment they get up until they go to bed at night, they have dozens of opportunities to consume an unhealthy diet and far too few chances to eat healthy diets. It is no wonder the Department of Agriculture found that scarcely any school-age children and adolescents meet all scientific recommendations for a sound diet.

Even our public schools have been inundated by candy, soft drinks, and snacks high in sugar, salt, and fat. And too often, children don't have the time or opportunity for exercise and physical activity.

But we are making some progress. Last year's child nutrition bill included a provision under which schools will establish local "school wellness policies." These wellness policies will include goals for nutrition education and physical activity, as well as nutritional guidelines for all the foods sold and made available on school grounds.

The legislation gives local communities the authority to set the standards themselves, according to local needs, but in doing so are required to involve a diverse group of individuals, including parents, students, school officials and the public.

Local school wellness policies represent an historic opportunity for our schools to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity among children and adolescents. I am eager to hear from our witnesses today about their efforts to give kids healthier choices at school and to implement their local wellness policies. I thank our witnesses for their participation in this hearing today.

Before we begin, however, I do wish to point out that our successes in nutrition are in jeopardy. Both the House and Senate versions of the congressional budget resolution include instructions to the agriculture committees to cut funding under their jurisdiction that poses a very real risk to nutrition programs generally, and especially to the Food Stamp Program.

In fact, the Food Stamp Program is our nation's largest child nutrition program. Fifty percent of food stamp participants are children, and 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to families with children. This committee has a long tradition of bipartisan support for all of the federal nutrition programs, and I am hopeful that this tradition will continue in the 109th Congress. It's important to note that the error rate in the Food Stamp Program is now at an all-time low. I doubt that we can find savings in food stamp fraud and error that some have suggested.

