

Revolution Foods

Research and Background Information

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The exponential increase of obesity and being overweight* among children is becoming a problem that can no longer be ignored. Obesity rates have been skyrocketing such that numbers have doubled among children ages 6 to 11, and have tripled among adolescents aged 12 to 19 over the last 20 years.^{1,2} Although researchers have recently noticed that childhood obesity rates may have reached a plateau with a possible decrease among 6th to 8th graders;³ these results were confined to 42 schools in seven sites nationwide.

Obesity is a problem that will have enormous health costs in the long term. In fact, direct and indirect costs of obesity are currently around \$147 billion per year, according to a 2009 study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and RTI International.⁴ Direct costs include those of diabetes or heart problems that have originated directly from the impact of extra body weight, while indirect costs include those developed from secondary health issues arising from diabetes and heart issues.⁴

These costs are not surprising considering that, in 2010, the U.S. childhood obesity statistics were staggering: 12% of high school students were obese and 15.8% were overweight.^{5,6} Of these students, 78% did not meet the recommended daily fruit and vegetable intake of five times per day, 66% did not drink 100% fruit juice or eat fruit at least two times per day, and 86% did not eat vegetables at least three times per day.^{5,6} While White, Black and Hispanic students were equally unlikely to eat their daily recommended vegetables, Black and Hispanic students were more likely to be obese compared to White students.⁷ In fact, Hispanic boys were at greater risk for having a high body mass index (BMI) compared to non-Hispanic White boys, while non-Hispanic Black girls were more likely to have higher BMI compared to non-Hispanic White girls.⁸ Male students were more likely than female students to be obese, while both genders were at equal risk for being overweight.⁹

Due to poor dietary habits and a decreased amount of regular exercise, obese and overweight children are at greater risk for a plethora of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, joint problems, and poor health status.¹⁰ In addition, children and adolescents who are obese or overweight are more likely to be obese or overweight as adults.¹⁰ This sets the stage for a world where "this generation of children will not live as long as their parents,"¹¹ an extremely troubling prediction for our children's futures.

As a result of these disturbing statistics, it is not surprising that there are several efforts geared towards tackling this health-threatening problem. For instance, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees the Food and Nutrition Service that guides school lunch programs, has required all local educational agencies participating in the National School Lunch Program to have a "Local Wellness Policy" since 2006 in order to make sure that each district's individual needs are met.¹² Setting up these policies at the local level allow for nutrition education and other school-based wellness activities to be tailored to the district's monetary limitations.¹² More recently, the USDA has been supporting the Obama administration's "Let's Move" campaign, by introducing plans for increased education, access to healthy foods, nutrition standards, and training among all U.S. schools.¹³

In addition, the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act on December 2, 2010, which will provide low income children access to healthier food.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Several concerned citizens and groups have been lobbying over the past year to revise the language within the Act to improve nutrition in the student meals.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ One such group is the American Public Health Association (APHA), which proposes limiting junk food and sugar-sweetened drinks in schools,

* Obese individuals are "≥ 95th percentile for body mass index" while overweight individuals are "≥ 85th percentile for body mass index."¹

increasing funding for nutrition education in schools, and creating programs to increase the availability of fresh foods by establishing a joint venture between farms and schools.¹⁴

Another group, the National Alliance for Nutrition & Activity (NANA), has called for strengthening nutrition education because even though the 2004 Reauthorization supported doing this, funds were never allocated to implement it.¹⁷ It is well documented that the more knowledge a person has about the nutritional value of a food, the more willing he/she might be to eat appropriately.¹⁸ Also, NANA states that foods sold outside of school meals, such as those provided in vending machines or à la carte, are held to outdated standards that require revision due to the current obesity crisis among children.¹⁹ The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has recommended that these “competitive food sources” be made of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy products, but instead recognizes that these foods “compete with federally regulated school meals, often offering foods and beverages high in calories, sugar, sodium, and fat.”²⁰ Since the National School Lunch Program is predicated upon providing meals to “30.5 million children each school day”²¹ who qualify for low-income status, they will be greatly affected by the outcomes of reauthorizing this bill.

First Lady Michelle Obama has stepped in to work on the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization as well as step up obesity prevention efforts with the introduction of her “Let’s Move” campaign launched in February 2010.¹¹ Her goal is to eradicate obesity within a generation, and President Obama has established a taskforce on childhood obesity that will help implement Michelle Obama’s campaign goals.¹¹ There are four aspects to the Let’s Move initiative, including “more nutrition information, increased physical activity, easier access to healthy foods and, ultimately, personal responsibility.”¹¹ The formal kick-off for “Let’s Move” was on June 4, 2010, and during this event Michelle Obama asked chefs to take action and work with schools to help them create nutritional and healthy meals that were also tasty for children.²² On July 7, 2010, the campaign ended a massive call for technology applications aimed at preventing childhood obesity through fun games and tools for children.²³ The public had the opportunity to vote for the best applications which were available online starting July 14, 2010, and finalists were selected September 29, 2010.²³

Mrs. Obama is not advocating that kids completely avoid unhealthy foods, but rather, learn to make better choices over time,¹¹ a stance that is supported by the American Dietetic Association which has stated that teaching people how to make healthier food choices over time is more effective than teaching food avoidance.²⁴ In further support of this statement, the HEALTHY Study Group recently published a report in which they observed that in addressing childhood obesity, it is important to look at the total picture of children’s activities and dietary habits, and not necessarily just the nutritional quality of the foods they are eating.³ The HEALTHY Study Group is a consortium of investigators and institutions that ran a cohort study in 42 schools in seven sites nationwide.³

In addressing nutrition, the CDC recommends that schools develop Coordinated School Health Programs (CSHPs) to work in collaboration with school food services, nutrition education, and staff training, in order to be effective in improving students’ overall health in grades K-12.²⁵ One notable CSHP has been developed in Texas, called the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH), and it utilizes a school nutrition education model along with at-home resources for families to work together towards a healthier lifestyle.²⁶ As of 2010, the CDC is providing \$13.6 million towards CSHPs nationwide to encourage the adoption of healthier behaviors.

By the time students reach college, “they have already developed their own eating patterns.”^{27(p84)} Therefore, it is very important to reach them while they are still in elementary, middle and high school, where educators and school administrative staff can impart a positive influence on their eating habits.²⁷ Plus, schools may have an impact by their decisions on providing an environment with certain foods, physical education, class curricula, and encouraging healthy behaviors.³

Revolution Foods™, a company based in Oakland, California, is already making an impact of better eating habits on 220+ schools in Oakland and Los Angeles, CA, Washington, DC, and Denver, CO.²⁸ They serve approximately 45,000 students with a mission “that all students should have access to healthy, fresh food on a daily basis.”²⁸ Revolution Foods™ began as an idea created by two MBA

graduate students, Kirstin Tobey and Kristen Richmond, who found investors who also believed in their idea, and it took off from there once they graduated.²⁹ The company now extends into four markets in California, Colorado and Washington, DC, and consists of headquarter staff in Oakland, Office Managers in all locations, as well as with Student Account Managers (SAMs), chefs, and food service line staff.²⁸ The company creates two different types of products that align with mission: an in-school lunch program and nutritious snacks that can be ordered online, as well as bought in Whole Foods, Babies 'R Us and a few other locations.²⁸ The students primarily served through Revolution Foods' in-school lunch program are in grades K-12 and about 80% of them qualify for low-income food programs, or more specifically, the Federal School Lunch Program.³⁰

While only 4% of states require that fruits or vegetables are available to students in schools,³¹ Revolution Foods™ provides a fresh fruit with each meal, as well as fresh vegetables and all the nutrients a student needs for breakfasts, lunches, and snacks.³² In addition, Revolution Foods™ provides nutrition education curriculum via their School Account Managers (SAMs) who regularly visit the schools and conduct sugar and fat demos, as well as arrange Iron Chef-style competitions in certain markets.³² As of 2006, between 67 to 77.7% of U.S. schools had teachers who taught elementary, middle and high school students about dietary guidelines, MyPyramid, and “[p]reparing healthy meals and snacks.”³³ The total number of hours of instruction to children in elementary schools has further decreased from 4.6 hours to 3.4 since 2000.³³

Within the last two years, Revolution Foods™ has been recognized for its efforts to provide healthy, fresh, and when possible, organic foods to children in the schools it serves. The *New York Times*, *Bloomberg Business Week*, *Time Magazine*, *USA Today*, and *Reuters* have all noticed Revolution Foods' accomplishments making meals that are economical with the National School Lunch Program reimbursements.³⁴⁻³⁸ In April and August, the co-founders met with the Obama campaign to discuss “economics and food,” the Healthier U.S. Schools Challenge, and the Revolution Foods' school partnership model.²⁹ In addition, Jamie Oliver, also known as the “Naked Chef,” recognized Revolution Foods™ and its co-founders as “Food Warriors,” inspiring people who are part of the food revolution to help kids eat healthier.³⁹

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