

Senator Scavello and Senate Majority Policy Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to hear the information concerning school nutrition. My name is Christine Ebersole RN, BSN, CSN. After working 24 years in the hospital setting, I decided on a career change and have been working as a school nurse since 2007 at Williamsburg Community School District in Williamsburg, PA Blair County. In 2008, the Federal Government began prohibiting public schools from serving whole milk to students, presumably to decrease obesity in children. Whole milk has 3.25 % milk fat that's 97% fat free. Currently schools are giving students a choice of skim milk, 1% and 1 ½ % flavored milk. Examples of flavored milks are chocolate, vanilla and strawberry milk. Also, skim and whole milk have the same carbohydrate count which we calculate for our students with diabetes.

Each year school nurses are required to record height and weights on students. These are called BMI's or Body Mass Index which measures body fat based on height and weight. A BMI of 85-95 % is considered overweight and 95-100% is obese. I thought it would be interesting to compare screenings when whole milk was served in schools with the recent screening where students have been served skim, 1% and 1.5% flavored milk through out their years in school. Our graduating seniors would have been served reduced fat milk during their entire school experience. In the cafeteria, I have observed students not even take their milk because they don't like the taste of reduced fat milk and prefer the taste of whole milk.

The results of the comparison are striking. The overweight and obese categories for students in grades 7-12 in 2007-2008 school year was 39% with 60% in the proper BMI scale. In the year 2020-2021, after being served reduced fat milk during school hours, the overweight and obese categories were increased to 52% while the proper range was decreased to 46%. That is a 13% increase over the past 13 years! While one cannot assume that the low fat milk alternatives are the only determining factors, they certainly did not have the intended outcome of reducing obesity in school age children.

I have two suggestions to leave with you today. First and foremost is to put whole milk back in the school breakfast and lunch programs. The miniscule fat content is more than offset by the fact that students will actually drink their whole milk instead of sugary drinks with empty calories. Secondly, I would suggest an afternoon "milk break". As a child, I remember having milk breaks in the afternoon. I would like to see this practice implemented in our schools again. Many students need an energy boost in the afternoon and this would help with meeting their nutritional needs as well as giving them the energy needed to complete their school work. Many junior and senior high school students participate in after school activities, practices and sporting events. The milk would be a nutrient rich drink, that contains 9 essential nutrients to strengthen their mind and bodies.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this important nutritional and health issue. Remember to get your 3 serving of dairy each and every day.

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