

## What's for lunch? Nutrition in schools

Written by Stephanie Carroll Carson - Minnesota News Connection  
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Most of us will splurge on our diets for a day or two during the holiday, but it's the food offered to Minnesota school children every day that has such organizations as the *American Heart Association (AHA)* concerned. They join more than a thousand groups that sent a letter to Congress urging them to pass the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which would improve nutritional standards for school lunches. The current guidelines were put in place 15 years ago and are seen by many as in need of updating.

With one in three American children overweight or obese, Rachel Callanan, regional vice president of advocacy for *AHA* in Minnesota, explains why changes are needed.

"This law will make a big difference in helping our kids meet those recommendations and hopefully start to reverse that trend of childhood obesity," said Callanan.

The U.S. Senate passed the bill, but the House has not yet voted on the measure. Minnesota is number 32 on the list of most obese states in the country, with the obesity rate being higher among minorities in the state.

Twenty states and D.C. set nutritional standards for school lunches, breakfasts and snacks that are stricter than current United States Department of Agriculture requirements. Minnesota is not one of those states.

Callanan hopes parents can help advocate for better food at schools.

According to Callanan, "what parents can do is really think about what their kids have access to in their schools. Are they getting access to really healthy, nutritious meals?"

If passed, the bill will also improve physical activity and wellness programs in school districts, though some people are concerned over the additional cost of the improved nutrition at schools.

There's more information at [healthyamericans.org](http://healthyamericans.org)