

**Statement of the Society for Nutrition Education
At a United States House of Representatives Briefing
Sponsored by Representative McCarthy
Co-sponsored by Representative Platts
RE: Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization
January 7, 2009**

Thank you, Representative McCarthy for sponsoring this Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization briefing and Representative Platts for co-sponsoring.

My name is Tracy Fox and I am Vice President of the Society for Nutrition Education. SNE appreciates the invitation to speak and share our thoughts and priorities on promoting healthy eating and behaviors in children. SNE is comprised of nutrition educators from soup to nuts – so to speak. Members are professors at colleges and universities, policy experts in nutrition and agriculture, extension agents working with families to help them eat healthfully on a limited budget, and health educators and nurses in schools – just to name a few.

We have played and will continue to play an active role in advocating for adequate funding for nutrition education. In the 1970s, SNE was instrumental in securing funding for what was then called NET – Nutrition Education and Training. Since then, SNE has been working to highlight the importance of well-funded education efforts as an integral part of USDA’s nutrition assistance programs such as the SNAP program, school lunch, and child care.

Nutrition Education and Promotion Impacts Food Choices

Tom Vilsack, the President-elect Barack Obama’s choice for agriculture secretary stated he would put “nutrition at the center of all food assistance programs.” To put nutrition at center in the child nutrition programs will require more than improving the quality of school meals or getting rid of junk food in vending machines. Evidence demonstrates that even if schools serve more nutritious foods, students may not eat them. We also know – and the research has shown – that using a variety of delivery points and communication tools to get the message out about healthy eating increases the likelihood of success. This means not only teaching

kids about nutrition in the classroom – it also means using the cafeteria as a learning lab; developing effective media campaigns at the school, district, state – and even the federal level; working with PTAs and other parent organizations, school and community leaders to further the messages. And, this can only come about with a well funded and comprehensive nutrition education and promotion platform.

In 2004, Congress supported nutrition promotion and education by authorizing USDA's Team Nutrition Network or TNN. Unfortunately, the funds to carry out many of the well-conceived provisions contained in the last CNR have never been appropriated.

Currently, USDA's Team Nutrition program consists of two components. The first is the federal piece that covers the development of training and education materials, as well as some technical assistance and maintenance of a resource database. The second is the Team Nutrition Training Grants piece where states compete for funds to help them implement USDA's nutrition requirements and the Dietary Guidelines in school meals. Funds are also supposed to be used by states to establish or enhance sustainable infrastructures for implementing Team Nutrition.

While the two parts of Team Nutrition are worthwhile, there are problems. The training grants provide a small amount of money for a short period of time. For example, over the last 8 years – or funding cycles, NY has received funds for 3 of the 8 years, and PA has received funds 4 of the past 8 years. The average grant amount is around \$200,000, and states often further divide funding into mini-grants for districts or individual schools – as is the case in PA.

The bottom line is, the current TN training grants provide a small infusion of funds for a short period of time and while state and local efforts are well-intentioned, the lack of coordination and evaluation, coupled with the limited reach, results in a fragmented approach to nutrition education. And lack of adequate funding at the federal level does not allow for the most effective means of communicating best practices nor does it include needs assessments and evaluations to better target funds.

But I want to be clear, we believe that the training grants have a role to play, and certainly we would like to see federal dollars increased to provide for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to delivering and evaluating education and promotion efforts.

In examining the language in the last bill – parts of which are well conceived and thoughtful, and with consideration given to the local wellness policy mandate and other innovations in nutrition education and promotion, SNE and NANA recommend a combination of streamlining – actually deleting some of the current language regarding nutrition education, and enhancing other components that are contained in the 2004 bill but have never been adequately funded.

Most importantly, we recommend that Team Nutrition Networks be funded at the level of one cent per meal served in school lunch, child care, and summer programs to provide approximately \$70 million per year. This will allow for integrated and comprehensive nutrition education and promotion programs coordinated at the national level, administered at the state level to meet unique state needs, and disseminated to the local level based on prioritized community needs.

This type of approach would provide for better collaboration among federal agencies and programs like CDC's Coordinated School Health program; enhance efforts at the local level to develop wellness policies that have an impact; and result in integration of nutrition education messages across the spectrum of nutrition assistance programs.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views regarding child nutrition programs. We are looking forward to working with you and other members of the House to help ensure that the next Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization bill includes a strong emphasis not only on improving the quality of school meals and other foods and beverages, but also on nutrition education and promotion. The two must go hand-in-hand for long term change to occur.