

Strategy Brief & Talking Points

Response to the Possibility of Roll-backs in the New Regs

Version 1: May 29, 2014

Our best current advice

This issue is still in serious flux, but just in case you are asked to comment we want to give you something to refer to. I think the key thing for you in any public pronouncements right now is to try to stay above the fray: your go-to position should be that you'll continue to do whatever it takes to feed the kids healthy meals so they can learn well. It doesn't do much good to bad-mouth your own product or dwell on negatives in your public statements. And, for now, be reactive with this, not proactive: that is, don't act at all unless you are asked to respond/comment.

Read over the talking points below, and let me know if you have any suggestions for making them more useful for you. We will be monitoring the situation carefully and listening to your concerns, as well as watching the news and other developments carefully, so don't hesitate to ask for a full press release or other help should you feel you need it.

And should you be asked to respond, keep in mind that it is always acceptable, when a reporter calls, to tell him or her that you are taking care of something right now and to please give you a number to call back in just a few minutes. Then, gather your thoughts and composure look over the talking points again, call us if you feel you need to, and call the reporter back promptly.

It's also acceptable to use the talking points when addressing the media as a group or individually. Get to know the material and try not to simply read, but use the points to refer to and keep yourself on track.

Finally, don't feel pressured to say more than you know or can accurately say. Stay "on message" and stick to the points below, even if you have to repeat key phrases, and resist the all-too-human urge to blather on. Say what you have to say and then stop – it's up to them to frame a new question, so don't let them use "the roaring silence" to get you to keep going kind of aimlessly.

Try to come off as accommodating and eager to help, rather than defensive or trying to hide something.

AND PLEASE – call or contact us if you need more extensive or specific help or preparation.

New Regs Talking Points -- May 29 -- (revise as necessary for your local situation):

1. Regardless of what the regulations are, ***(Name of your district and department) will be there every school day to provide our students healthy, balanced meals so they can learn well in school and live healthy lives.***
2. We've adapted to the regulations put in place under the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids act by, among other things, serving more fruits and vegetables and whole grains. ***We'll continue with these improvements regardless of the rules because that's the right thing to do for our students.*** If we're given more flexibility, we'd certainly take that into account in our meal planning, too – whatever it takes to provide kids healthy meals that they'll eat.
3. ***We haven't done a specific study in our district on how much food kids throw away, but anecdotally there's not much difference from before the fruit or vegetable requirement was put in place 2 years ago.*** One study by the Harvard School of Public Health found that so-called "plate waste," while high, was no greater than before the new regulations. They found that kids were choosing and eating more fruits and vegetables and throwing away about the same proportion as they ever had. That's been our experience, too. Waste has always been a problem, partly because, as parents know, kids tend to be picky eaters and they don't have a lot of time to eat.
4. ***We said this from the beginning of this effort two years ago: It's more expensive to serve healthier meals.*** What we'd really like to see is better funding for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs and more access to the highest quality fresh produce through the commodity program. We get no direct funding at all from the district and less than \$3 per lunch from the feds for students who qualify based on family income. And paying students pay less than \$3 for their meals. Out of that \$3 or less per full meal, we have to pay food costs, labor, equipment costs. We'd like to see support from parents and other voters for more realistic funding, but in the meantime we'll keep trying to provide healthy meals to kids with the resources we have.
5. At the end of the day, we'll make the rules work, because we have to – the job we do is just that important for our kids. They have to eat well to do well in school, so, again, whatever the regulations are, ***we will be there every school day to provide our students healthy, balanced meals so they can learn well in school and live healthy lives.***