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Schools, Communities Share Responsibility for Child Nutrition

The American Dietetic Association has published an updated position paper on local support for nutrition integrity in schools that calls on schools and communities to work together to provide healthful and affordable meals for all children and to promote educational environments that help students learn and practice healthy behaviors for their entire lives.

ADA's updated position paper, published in the August issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, represents the Association's official stance on this health issue:

It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that schools and communities have a shared responsibility to provide students with access to high-quality, affordable, nutritious foods and beverages. School-based nutrition services, including the provision of meals through the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, are an integral part of the total education program. Strong wellness policies promote environments that enhance nutrition integrity and help students to develop lifelong healthy behaviors.

ADA's position paper was written by registered dietitians Ethan A. Bergman, associate dean and professor of food science and nutrition at Central Washington University; and Ruth W. Gordon, owner of Gordon Consulting LLC, Atlanta, Ga.

"Nutrition integrity means that, when all foods and beverages are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and when nutrition education, physical activity and a healthful school environment are ensured, learning is enhanced and students develop lifelong, healthful eating habits," according to the authors.

ADA believes child nutrition programs are vital to help children stay healthy and prevent excess weight and obesity: Since dietary habits are established early in life, it is important to teach proper nutrition as early as possible. Healthy eating and physical activity can prevent many health problems later in life.

Registered dietitians and dietetic technicians, registered are especially well-qualified to provide local support for nutrition integrity in schools by forming community coalitions, working on environmental changes to prevent obesity, providing professional development to educational staff and community leaders and serving on school wellness committees.

ADA is working closely with Congress to reauthorize the nation's child nutrition programs. ADA commends the U.S. Senate for its bipartisan action on August 5 to reauthorize the nation's crucial child nutrition programs. The legislation includes numerous ADA policy priorities, such as provisions that establish professional qualifications for school nutrition directors; expand nutrition standards to all foods sold in schools; strengthen nutrition education in child nutrition programs; increase meal reimbursement rates for meals meeting specific nutrition standards; and bolster nutrition guidance for child care providers.

In its updated position paper, ADA emphasizes:

- * School-based nutrition services, including the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are an integral part of the total education program.

- * Schools and communities have a shared responsibility to provide students with access to high-quality, affordable, nutritious foods and beverages.

- * The Dietary Guidelines for Americans should apply to all foods and beverages sold or served to students during the school day.

- * Strong local wellness policies promote healthy school environments and nutrition integrity.

- * Daily access to healthful foods through the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program will help provide adequate nourishment and may positively influence the development of healthful eating habits.

- * More students need to participate in the School Breakfast Program. Eating breakfast has been shown to improve students' overall diets and may improve cognitive function, memory, test grades and school attendance rates.

Story Source: The above story is reprinted from materials provided by American Dietetic Association.