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New Law Would Require Healthier Food In Schools

President Obama is expected to sign into law a bill that would require public schools to offer healthier lunches in order to receive additional funding. The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act would give the US Agriculture Secretary the power to set guidelines for school foods nationwide.

Part of the law would try to make school lunches healthier for kids. The health and nutrition director for schools in South Carolina, Todd Bedenbaugh, says the rules would cover school lunches, *a la carte* programs, vending machines, and snack bars.

Bedenbaugh says the new standards have not yet been announced, but he believes they will follow the Institute of Medicine's nutrition standards. He said students will still be able to buy some of their favorite foods.

We'll still be serving pizzas. We'll still be doing hamburgers. The favorite foods you'll see, they'll just be more nutritionally-sound products in the future.

The exception will be deep-fried foods and sugary foods, which Bedenbaugh says will probably be phased out.

One controversial part of the bill is a section that requires all food sold on campus to follow the new guidelines, with the exception of "infrequent" fundraisers. Bedenbaugh says student clubs who sell food every day or every week to raise money would probably not be exempt.

If you have a meeting every week, that probably wouldn't be considered "infrequent." But, maybe once a month would be considered "infrequent." They haven't given a definition for "infrequent," yet.

He did say an infrequent event could possibly be a bake sale hosted as a fundraiser.

Another part of the bill would make it easier for students to apply for free or reduced lunches. Bedenbaugh said new rules will make it easier for poorer students to apply for the program.

They may have been a paying student. But, say their families lose their jobs. There's no employment. Then they go to DSS and apply for benefits. So, we'll then pick those students up and then we'll automatically approve them without them having to fill out an application.

One possible problem is that the new requirements will likely increase the cost to make lunches in school cafeterias. However, the bill only provides an additional six cents per free meal, bringing the federal reimbursement rate to \$2.74 per student. Bedenbaugh said that, in the past, school districts used the federal reimbursement money to help keep the price lower for kids not receiving free or reduced lunches. But, if the federal rate no longer provides enough, the prices for other students will have to go up.

The House passed the bill in early March by a vote of 264-157. Democratic representatives Jim Clyburn and John Spratt voted for the bill, while South Carolina Republicans Henry Brown, Joe Wilson, and Bob Inglis voted against it. Rep. Gresham Barrett did not vote. It passed unanimously in the Senate.

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