Hart Research Associates / American Viewpoint

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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project

FROM: Hart Research Associates & American Viewpoint

DATE: March 27, 2012

RE: Public Support For Competitive Food Standards

From January 11 to 16, 2012, Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint conducted a nationwide telephone survey of 1,010 registered voters regarding nutrition standards for competitive foods sold in public schools. The survey includes an oversample of public school parents, and was conducted on behalf of the Kids' Safe & Healthful Foods Project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts. The margin of error is ±3.1 percentage points among all voters and ±5.0 percentage points among all public school parents.

Key Findings

- **Parents and voters show broad and deep support for a rule to improve the nutritional value of competitive foods in schools across the country.**
  - 80% of both voters and public school parents support a national nutritional standard for competitive foods, including majorities who *strongly* favor it. By comparison, 17% of voters and 16% of parents oppose such a standard.
  - Support exceeds 75% in all regions of the country and among voters of all income levels.
- **Importantly, this issue elicits rare agreement from all sides of the political spectrum.**
  - 89% of Democrats, 78% of independents, and 71% of Republicans favor a rule that requires all schools to meet minimum nutrition standards.

    Exact wording of proposal: "In fact, many schools are not required to meet nutrition standards for the foods and beverages served in their a la carte lines and vending machines. Suppose there was going to be a rule that all foods sold in schools in these ways would have to meet basic minimum nutritional standards, such as limiting calories, fat content, and sodium in the foods while encouraging more fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy items. These standards would be set nationally, but individual school districts would have the leeway to build on the standards if they wished to, as long as they met basic, minimum standards."

- **The nutritional value of competitive foods receives mixed to poor reviews.**
  - A la carte lines and school stores get mixed reviews regarding the nutritional value of the food offered. Few voters or parents believe that vending machines sell healthy and nutritious foods during the school day.

	Not Really Healthy/ Nutritious %	Only Somewhat Healthy/ Nutritious %	Totally/ Mostly Healthy/ Nutritious %
Vending machines	61	22	5
School stores	33	35	10
A la carte lines	21	47	21

- **Though many schools allow access to food outside of the official school meals program, voter reaction to the importance of having these foods available is mixed.**
  - 52% of voters believe that it is important for students to have access to so-called "competitive foods" during the school day, but 46% say that access to these foods is not important.
  - Parents are slightly more likely to say it is important to have access to these foods; 55% say that it is either very or fairly important for their children to have access to this type of food while they are at school, while 44% say access is not important.
- **Public concern about the state of children's health is an important underpinning to this issue.**
  - The large majority of voters are concerned about the state of children's health in the United States (84%). This is equally true of parents (85%) and those who do not have children at home (83%).
  - Childhood obesity is of particular concern for voters. A full 81% report being concerned by this issue. Moreover, more than half (54%) of these voters report being "very concerned."