

**Article of the Week (AoW) Directions**

1. Mark your confusion – either highlighting or underlining.
2. Mark up the text. Annotate the article with comments, questions, inferences, etc. You can use a variety of sentences, phrases, and symbols to show your thinking.
3. Write a developed paragraph response to one of the prompts below.

## **Food fight brewing in Washington over school lunch standards**

Source: Lindsay Wise/McClatchy Washington Bureau/March 9, 2015

WASHINGTON — Nothing is more exasperating to Brad Kramer than watching high school students take mandatory servings of fruits or vegetables in the cafeteria line, saunter past the cashier and dump them in the trash can.

“We have some of the healthiest trash cans in the nation,” Kramer, director of food services for the Grain Valley R-V School District, in a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri, quipped Wednesday.

Behind the joke, frustration simmers. Kramer and other critics of the federal standards for healthy school lunches say the rules, imposed in 2012, are too costly and restrictive, and that Congress should loosen them.

“We want to serve nutritious food,” Kramer said. “But it’s only nutritious if students eat it.”

“What we’re asking for is flexibility so we can go back to making some of those decisions at a local level,” said Ronda McCullick, director of food service operations for Park Hill School District in Kansas City.

McCullick and Kramer belong to the School Nutrition Association, a professional organization that represents school cafeteria workers as well as companies that supply food and equipment to districts. A thousand of the group’s members converged on Capitol Hill this week to lobby lawmakers to change the school lunch standards.

They want to stop further sodium reductions, to require that only half the grains offered in school lunches and breakfasts be whole-grain-rich — rather than all of them — and to end the mandate that students must take half-cup servings of fruit or vegetables as part of every meal.

It is the latest salvo in a food fight raging in Washington over the fate of the 2010 law that mandated the new standards. That law — the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act — is about to expire and must be renewed.

“It’s not about government standards,” Kansas Republican Senator Pat Roberts said in a speech to the association’s members as they wrapped up their lobbying efforts Wednesday. “It’s about taking the opportunity to make government programs work for the people and not the other way around.”

Providing more flexibility to school districts is emerging as a top priority for Roberts, the newly minted chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, which has jurisdiction over the lunch program. He’s been visiting schools in Kansas to sample meals and talk to students and administrators.

“There are 300 school districts in Kansas,” Roberts said. “If you think about how many school districts there are in the U.S. and how different they all are, it’s clear that a one-size-fits-all approach won’t work.”

Last month, the senator ate with students at his alma mater, Holton High School in northeast Kansas, where the local newspaper reported he dined on a biscuit with sausage gravy, a sausage patty, two hash brown cakes, a carton of milk, green beans and an apple.

Roberts told students that while obesity is a problem, the government is over-involved in “our daily lives and pocketbooks,” according to The Holton Recorder.

In Roberts’ home state, nearly 15 percent of 10- to 17-year-olds are obese, as are 30 percent of adults, according to a report by the Trust for America’s Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The battle over school lunches pits Roberts and other Republican lawmakers against First Lady Michelle Obama, who has defended the rules as part of her “Let’s Move” campaign to end childhood obesity.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) says the new rules are working. The agency cites a new study from the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut that shows children are eating more healthfully at school and tossing out less food since the rules kicked in.

The study found that 66 percent of students added fruit to their lunch trays last year, up from 54 percent in 2012. Students also ate 20 percent more vegetables and 13 percent more of their lunch entrees, according to the study.

“Updated healthy school meal standards were developed based on doctors’ recommendations to help ensure our children would be able to get healthy food at school,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a statement Wednesday.

“For Congress to meddle with doctors’ recommendations and go back to less-healthy meals now would not be in the best interest of our children,” Vilsack said.

Senator John Hoeven, a Republican from North Dakota, announced Monday that he plans to introduce a bill endorsed by the School Nutrition Association that would amend the sodium and whole-grain rules.

Hoeven said in a statement that the bill “ensures our schools are providing kids with good, nutritious meals but provides the flexibility they need to serve meals that are not only well-balanced but also appealing to students.”

The USDA already has shown flexibility in the timing and implementation of the school lunch rules without the need for legislation, USDA spokesman Cullen Schwarz said.

“We’re going to continue to do that where it’s legitimate,” Schwarz said, “but we’re going to be wary of allowing politicians to override the recommendations of pediatricians to the point where these standards are no longer meaningful and helping kids to be healthy.”

In his speech Wednesday, Roberts called for a civil policy debate, saying he wanted to bring all sides to the table.

“Sometimes we’re preaching a little bit or moralizing a little bit and when people disagree it gets a little volatile,” Roberts said. “We don’t need that. We don’t need fear and rhetoric. We need solutions.”

**Respond to one of the following prompts. Use the a separate sheet of paper.**

1. Do you agree that some of the food regulations need to change? Explain your position with details from the article.
2. How can schools encourage students to make healthier choices in what they eat? Explain.
3. Select a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph and respond to it.