

New Haven Public Schools

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Good Evening-

As a nurse practitioner who has worked in school based health clinics in New Haven Public schools for 12 years, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to voice my strong opposition to the proposed cuts to funding for Child Nutrition Programs in Connecticut.

New Haven: Promoting Healthful Eating:

As a large urban district, New Haven has been a model for its commitment and actions to improve nutrition offered in our schools in the past 5 years:

- In 2004, we successfully removed soda/junk food from school vending machines, stores and fundraisers
- We built and utilize a large central kitchen that provides healthier meals and standardized food preparation district wide
- Our district wellness policy, ranked #1 in the State, created health promoting school cultures through district policies, initiatives and education
- Last year, the district hired a progressive, health minded food service director, who has made significant improvements in school meals by increasing fruits/vegetables from local farmers, integrating more whole grains and by using healthier food preparations

The Need for Increased Funding for School Nutrition Programs:

School districts are doing more than their part to improve the quality of food that is available to students with minimal resources, but cannot continue to meet the increasing need for quality nutritious meals, particularly, in these desperate times. In New Haven, recent research has found that 12% of our children skip meals and go hungry because there is not enough food in the home. Most of our families are poor and are made even more vulnerable by this economy. For many students, the school meals are the only balanced meals they will receive every day, and many go hungry over the weekends or are eating low nutrient, high caloric diets that are simply cheaper to buy.

A cut in reimbursement would force districts to purchase even more lower quality foods based on quantity rather than nutrient quality. It is shameful that more than 1 in 10 children go hungry in the richest state, and that our schools are the only reason that number isn't higher.

At the same time, we have a nationwide childhood obesity epidemic. In New Haven, about 48% of students are either overweight/obese, well above the national estimates of 30%.

Both of these serious conditions stem from the same problem, **poor nutrition**, in quantity, quality or both.

As a school based clinician, I've counseled hundreds of obese students about how to eat healthy diets and maintain healthy body weights. However, even the most effective counseling or treatment gets undermined when students leave the clinic, nurses office or classroom and cannot practice what they've learned in our own cafeterias. We know that eating habits are established in early childhood and persist into adulthood and that there are serious lifelong consequences to eating a poor diet that affect health, wellbeing, and the ability to learn. In only the last 3 years, it is becoming more common to diagnose Type 2 diabetes and hypertension in children.

Kids are bombarded with marketing, social pressure and countless opportunities to purchase unhealthy foods every day and in every setting. Schools can and should be the most influential place to counter these mixed and harmful messages by **providing the opportunity to practice** healthful eating behaviors and attitudes in our own cafeterias.

Perhaps the most harmful "mixed message" that affects the most children in CT is the one from Governor Rell that, on one hand supports more federal funding of our nutrition programs, and then proposes to cut this same funding at the state level to save money two weeks later.

This is NOT the time or place to cut State funding! Nutritious food is NOT a luxury for our neediest children, it is a necessity that their long term health, learning and wellbeing depends on! Hungry and poorly nourished students are not healthy and cannot focus on learning. And schools cannot address the crises of food insecurity and poor nutrition alone, that our children face, without additional support!

The state needs to send **one clear message of support:** to increase nutrition funding to our schools so they can offer quality food to every student, every day, at every meal. Our children deserve schools that promote healthy lifelong behaviors, and allow students to develop and learn to their potential, free from the distractions and health conditions caused by hunger and poor nutrition.

I urge you, on behalf of all our students and families who are struggling to survive, to step up and block any attempts to cut funding to child nutrition programs in Connecticut.

Thank you-