

New Haven Public Schools

#19

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Executive Director

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Good Evening,



You are hearing from many others about the many challenges faced by school districts in these inflationary times, including food services.

In many cases, as in New Haven, school districts are required to contribute general fund budget money in order to allow the program to balance. Without such significant contributions the program would have no alternative but to run a deficit – at a time when we are serving healthier meals to very needy children.

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There are 17 million children in America that are at a risk of hunger; in CT 11% of households are food insecure: meaning they lack access to enough food for an active healthy life; the economy is in a downturn and once again we are here testifying in an attempt to stop the Governor from taking food out of the mouths of our children!

One month ago Governor Rell supported an increase in funding from the USDA.

A January 28th letter from the National Governors Association co-signed by Governor Rell urges Congress *"to significantly increase funding for school nutrition programs contained in child nutrition legislation in order to reduce child hunger and improve the health and nutrition of children across the nation."*

"[b]y providing increased funding, Congress can ensure that child nutrition programs can effectively protect the health and well-being of low-income children."

Now the Governor has changed her tune and intends to cut funding to Child Nutrition programs in Connecticut!

Promoting healthy eating

Since converting back to a self operating program in July 2008, New Haven has increased the students' consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. We are serving more REAL foods and limiting the processed food offerings. We have increased our whole grain products. The children are eating food items that they may never have seen before including roasted chicken with tangy cherry sauce and shepherd's pie with real mashed potatoes.

This school year alone we have purchased **48,102 lbs** of fruits and vegetables from local farms! New Haven has embraced the Healthy Food initiative but without increases in the reimbursement rates the grant must continue or Districts will be forced to go back to processed and unhealthy foods produced by for-profit corporate giants. We join in Governor Rell's call to increase reimbursement rates on the federal level. But as we wage that fight with her we cannot dramatically cut the state program which we know is working!!

We work with many community groups in New Haven to promote healthy eating and educate our children on where our food comes from. Farmer's markets are becoming destinations for the families of our school children. As a parent, chef and the Executive Director of Food Services, I see firsthand how serving healthy food impacts our children personally. Our Local 217 food service workers have embraced our healthier food program and together we work as a TEAM to serve our children the best food we can afford.

New Haven has been awarded a variety of grants related to healthy food alternatives and has been recognized in the local and national media for our cutting edge healthy meals program.

Part of the Solution

New Haven School Food Service is a strong partner in the Bold Reform Initiative in New Haven that is receiving National attention. We firmly believe that our production of healthy food and good meals for children has, at least in a small way, contributed to the across the board test score gains that New Haven has seen. As the Reform takes off this year and New Haven seeks to move to transformative and exponential academic gains these kids need fuel. They need healthy food. A healthy child is ready to learn!

Saving costs

New Haven's strategies include exploring regionalization opportunities, procuring local items to save on fuel costs, buying produce in season and making economical but healthy menu substitutions where possible. We are also exploring increasing our school gardens and developing our own farm. While improving efficiencies of our operations, we are ensuring that we do not compromise on the nutritional integrity of meals provided.

What will happen if five (5) cents is eliminated from our reimbursement?

Food service programs will struggle even more to provide healthy real foods to our students.

In New Haven the meals we provide account for the ONLY meals that some of our students consume daily. With the current economy some families cannot afford to feed their children a healthy balanced meal on the weekends so the children are clamoring to eat lunch on Fridays in schools to make it through the weekend. Come Monday morning at breakfast, the children are starving. A cut of \$150K will force us to make purchasing decisions based on cost alone. **THIS IS THE REALITY!** We as School Nutrition professionals not only hear these stories but we see them with our own eyes in our schools.

THIS IS THE ECONOMY WHEN OUR CHILDREN NEED US THE MOST!