

West Hartford Public Schools



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Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee on the Department of Education Budget

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Trish Molloy, Food Service Director for West Hartford Schools. I am a Registered Dietitian and on the Executive Board for the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut.

I am asking you to maintain the current Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Program for Connecticut schools, with current funding of .10 cents per student meal served for those schools who opt to follow strict nutrition guidelines, and to maintain state funding for severe need school breakfast, which enables schools to nourish our most vulnerable population at the start of their school day.

West Hartford Schools have been following Healthy Food Certification standards since the program began in 2006. The guidelines pertain to all food sold to students during the school day, outside of the school breakfast and lunch meals. With these standards in place, students are not eating brownies and candy bars for lunch that they bought at a bake sale or from a vending machine, and they are not having deep-fried french fries for lunch. Instead, what we found in our district when these practices were eliminated, was a 15 percent increase in student meals at our 2 high schools. Our a la carte revenue went down at all grade levels, but the HFC funding helped make up for that revenue stream and it was a win-win! Students were making healthier choices at lunch, and the state funding helped us maintain our revenues needed to run the food service program.

The additional revenue that our district receives for the Healthy Food Certification program is about \$70,000 per year. With this added revenue, we have gone from offering fresh fruit and fresh vegetables 1 to 2 days a week, to offering them daily with all meals at all grade levels. We have upgraded our entrée items to higher quality products with less fillers and cleaner labels, and the

snacks we offer are small portions, low sugar, low fat, and whole grain products. Recent studies have shown that school lunches are healthier than lunches brought from home (1, 2), and that there is a strong link between the consumption of eating well-balanced meals and academic performance (3, 4). We need to continue to support these efforts.

The State Severe Need School Breakfast Funding has allowed me to expand the number of schools that offer school breakfast in my district from 5 schools to 12 schools. This program is critical to the academic success of hundreds of students in my district, giving children from low income families a nourishing meal of whole grains, lean protein, fruit, and low fat milk to start their school day. Studies have shown that students eating school breakfast have experienced higher achievement scores in math, science, and reading than students in schools that don't participate in a school breakfast program (5). It makes good economic sense to continue to support this effort.

We cannot take a step backward on the progress we have made. The cost of purchasing and producing healthy meals keeps going up, and there will always be a need to nourish our state's children so they have the fuel they need to learn and succeed in life. School food service programs struggle to remain financially self-sufficient, and are losing the ability to be able to cover all costs of running their program with the revenues received from daily sales and government subsidies. Please support Connecticut students' good health and learning by maintaining the Connecticut Healthy Food Certification Program and the Severe Need School Breakfast Program and their associated funding. Thank you for your consideration.

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