

HEALTH^{OF}THE CITY

A Partnership for a Healthy Cambridge

RECEIVED BY
OFFICE OF CITY CLERK
98 MAR 25 PM 2:37
CAMBRIDGE MA.

March 25, 1998

RE: School Department Management Support Services Restructuring Recommendation/ School Food Service

TO: School Committee/Superintendent, City Council (Clerk) and advocates/children/parents

FROM: Gerald Bergman, CO-Chair, Hunger and Nutrition Action Group, Health of the City

At this time, I urge you to **oppose** the School Department policy recommendation which would privatize school food services.

- This recommendation is budget driven yet it currently lacks the fiscal and cost/benefit analysis necessary to **guarantee** any **real mid-term** or **long-term** budgetary saving. The "promise" of a short-term reduction in the "reported" subsidy of the school food services program (.0025% of the school budget) which delivers 800,000 meals annually and cuts across all aspects of school life and the school day (as well as summer programming) should not be used as the justification for a rush to privatization!
- There is **no proven** programmatic advantage to food services privatization when compared to a variety of other **proven** food service program options and models. There are essential behavioral and developmental issues related to healthy eating and its impact on **equal education** goals.
- Privatization will result in a **loss** of community control and flexibility which would be in direct opposition to the goals of the Cambridge Food Policy and the needs of our children!

Turning over our children to mega for-profit private management corporations should be the last food services option we consider, not the first and only option brought to the table!

With the buyout of the current part-time school food services director taking effect January 1, 1999, we have entered into a nine-month food services transition period. Now is the time to bring the resources of the School Department/School Committee, Cambridge City Council, Cambridge Health Alliance and the Department of Human Services together with the school community and other advocates and experts to plan goals and strategies.

How do we best meet healthy eating goals for the 21st century? Do we endorse the "magic wand" of privatization with the resultant decrease in community control, or do we commit ourselves to an increase in school food choice and quality, a reduction of stigma, an enactment of a universal breakfast program and increased food opportunities for those who do not now participate in free, reduced and/or paid meal programs?

Do we commit ourselves to fully integrate healthy eating goals into the school day (before during and after school) as well as during the summer as part of a comprehensive endorsement of physical fitness goals and strategies?

Will we hire and enthusiastically support a professional food services director/team which will be totally accountable to the School Department and the Cambridge community rather than endorse privatization and its resultant accountability first and foremost to profit and fees.

Skipping breakfast directly impairs a child's performance in the morning. Frequent skipping of breakfast is linked to mild undernutrition which can lead to increased risk of infections, causing more frequent and more severe illnesses.

We know that in Cambridge hundreds of kids are hungry, and we know that hungry kids can't learn. Recognizing the link between nutrition and learning, and understanding that hundreds of children arrive at school in Cambridge hungry and ill-prepared to learn, parents, children, and advocates have agreed that no child should go hungry in school in Cambridge.

In Cambridge our children are not invisible. We know that for many children, eating breakfast and/or lunch is not a regular occurrence. Since many children do not eat a nutritious breakfast at home, they are hungry when they reach school and either remain hungry until lunch time (or later) or eat less-nutritious food to stave off hunger pains. Issues surrounding school food programs, good nutrition and nutrition education must be cooperatively examined and solutions must be created and implemented.

In June 1993, teachers from all of our city's third, fifth and seventh grade homeroom classes were asked to administer a one-page survey to their students. Surveys were available in Spanish, Haitian Kreyol, and Portuguese. 1,053 surveys were returned.

The survey asked:

- whether and where students had eaten breakfast that day;
- whether students ate breakfast regularly at home or school, and if not, why not;
- whether the students were involved in helping siblings with breakfast.

According to the results of this survey: 20-25% of Cambridge 5th and 7th graders go hungry each school day because they do not eat a breakfast or morning snack. According to Cambridge School Department data, only 13% of elementary school students eat a school breakfast on any given day.

Stand with Us as We Take a Stand Against Hunger

In 1991, the residents of Cambridge passed the first Food Policy Referendum in the country by a 4-1 margin. The referendum mandated that the City of Cambridge respond to the growing nutrition crisis, which affects one in six children, by developing and implementing a Cambridge Food Policy. This policy would also recognize the right of every resident to accessible, safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable and affordable food, without barriers and without stigma. As one of the primary goals of that historic referendum, the City of Cambridge was called upon to take all necessary steps to insure that children do NOT go hungry during the school day.

The results of school surveys and other state and national studies indicate that a primary factor in the failure to equalize educational opportunity is the crisis of childhood nutrition. The Hunger and Nutrition Action Group of Health of the City has as its primary goal the full implementation of the referendum. We are working to develop a school-based and neighborhood based healthy eating food program which would allow all of our children to get an equal education. We can and will work together to ensure that every child will have an equal opportunity for success in school!

Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and advocates for children and quality equal education can work together to fully implement the Cambridge Food Policy Referendum. We can work together to ensure that every child will have an equal opportunity for success in school!

For more information, contact:
Gerald Bergman, Co-chair
Hunger and Nutrition Action Group
Healthy Children's Task Force
Health of the City

Since 1991, when the Hunger and Nutrition Action Group of the Healthy Children's Task Force of Health of the City played an instrumental role in the passage of the Cambridge Food Policy Referendum (attached), we have worked to bring about the citywide coordination and development of high quality food services/programs targeted to children throughout the year. We have taken the lead in urging the development and implementation of a food policy which would guarantee children nutritious, safe and culturally acceptable food made accessible without barriers and without stigma.

We are budget sensitive and we deeply care about the budget impacts of school and community-wide food services. For example, we asked in 1991 that there be a 100% return of free and reduced school food applications which would achieve savings of more than \$100,000 annually. The Cambridge School Department has yet to fully enforce this policy!

Since 1991 we organized community-wide forums on state and federal food policies, recruited and supervised graduate students who developed evaluation strategies for the summer food program for children, introduced food service/health and science curricula options, carried on a comprehensive evaluation and categorization of community emergency food programs and held a series of local parent/student meetings with the support of the bi-lingual parent advisory group, regarding school food quality, diversity and food choice.

We understand the close connection between cognitive development and healthy eating, (attached statements), and we have sponsored and supported many efforts at improving children's accessibility to nutritious food at many entry points in the lives of children throughout Cambridge. We called for planning meetings regarding the summer food program for children, and as a result of these and other efforts, and with the support of the Cambridge City Council, Cambridge now serves thousands of lunches during the summer to kids in playgrounds and at MDC pools, all prepared and distributed through Cambridge School Food Services.

What is the impact of any management change on such coordinated efforts? What about discussions now underway to achieve a universal breakfast program (such as conducted successfully in Somerville) and coordinated food enhancement programs for pre-school, after-school, extended day and recreational programs?

We have long lobbied for the creation of a full time school food service director/management position, perhaps as part of a management team which would include a dietitian with instructor status within the school system. This team management approach would result in a successful comprehensive citywide effort to meet the needs of a diverse population of children over the entire 52 week year, at many entry points, during the school day as well as before and after school and during the summer months. Such a comprehensive effort should be funded jointly by the school budget and the City of Cambridge general budget, thereby substantially reducing the impact on other direct student educational programs.

Think of the possibilities! Think of the resources which could be gathered to meet the needs of our children - Cambridge has always been successful in winning approval of outside grants and resource allocations. Think of the potential to be found in a coordinated approach to meeting food needs in pre-school, after-school, extended day, summer programming, physical fitness and recreational programming, all extending from and related to an innovative school food services program!

We need the support necessary to adopt innovative approaches such as Harvard's "Eat Well and Keep Moving" project which stresses an interdisciplinary fitness and nutrition approach especially designed for diverse urban communities. We need to build on our work with Planet Health and look again at the American Heart Association curricula "What's For Lunch". The Cambridge Agenda For Children must comprehensively present to the Cambridge community physical fitness goals and strategies that coordinate exercise/recreation and healthy eating.

The Hunger and Nutrition Action Group has always called for a careful broad-based planning for change, a consideration of goals and strategies developed in an atmosphere of give and take - a welcoming of individuals and organizations who have nutrition and food service skills and interests, so that decisions would be broad-based and carefully and completely considered. These same goals were endorsed in the 1991 Food Policy Referendum.

We have endeavored to learn more about this privatization plan. We have urged the formation of a special task force which could consider, in depth, current budget and programmatic issues and return to the Cambridge School Committee and the City Council Food Policy Committee with an analysis based on careful and broad-based input. However, any comprehensive effort at analysis and recommendation has been rejected in favor of an apparent "done deal" which would turn over Cambridge resources to a for-profit entity putting them in control of a program serving some 800,000 meals annually.

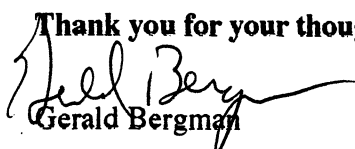
The recommendation regarding the policy on management support services restructuring promises an elimination of the \$225,000 annual subsidy given to the food services program. Without proper information and resultant analysis regarding the current budget which would include cash flow audits, expenditures, school food revolving fund information, posted transaction reports, encumbrances, vendor reports, labor reports on a week by week basis which would isolate the labor being charged to the food services account, annual federal/state summaries, an accounting of inventory, monthly claim supplements, supporting documentation, labor contracts, operating time sheets (who works where, when, job titles, location, hrs./day, wks./year) - information readily available, it is impossible to evaluate the current or future projected budget impacts of policy changes.

The Hunger and Nutrition Action Group could assist in assembling a small group of learned and experienced professional from Cambridge and the region which could, in a very short turn around time, translate these budget documents into coherent budget statements and impacts, if invited to do so.

The privatization of school contracts has traditionally meant that the school will pay a fee and costs to a for-profit entity so that personnel contracts can be altered/eliminated - wage, benefit and job reductions. It has meant a loss of control for school districts and a loss of flexibility regarding diverse populations with special needs. Often so called budget reductions are merely budget transfers, where costs are shifted to other entities within large school budgets. Often inventories are taken by new management which provides short term apparent savings until such time as long-term contracts are written and costs then soar.

In many school systems school food programs serve as an integral instructional tool in regard to health and science curriculum, and students/faculty are deeply involved in the interrelationship of school food to a variety of curricula and physical fitness initiatives and learning opportunities. In the past we have not adequately supported a food service program which was fully integrated into the school day and the school curriculum. That is our challenge. **We can and must do better as we enter into the next century!**

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration,


Gerald Bergman

CAMBRIDGE FOOD POLICY REFERENDUM

PASSED ON NOVEMBER 5, 1991 - 17,384 voters in favor (80%)

Shall the City of Cambridge, in response to the growing hunger crisis which affects primarily elders and one in five children, develop and implement a Cambridge Food Policy which would recognize the right of every resident to accessible, safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable and affordable food, without barriers and without stigma, and shall such a policy include as some of its goals:

- 1) at least 50% participation of all eligible children in the Summer Food Service Program for Children during the summer of 1992, and 100% return of eligibility applications during this 1991-1992 school year in the subsidized School Breakfast and Lunch program;**
- 2) 100% accessibility to all Federally financed food programs, through development of an aggressive outreach campaign reading the Federal Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and nutrition programs for elders, emphasizing the need for translated materials, multilingual human service workers and the elimination of the stigma of participation;**
- 3) integration of nutrition education into elementary and secondary school curricula and ongoing monitoring and staffing of school food programs;**
- 4) financial assistance for food purchases so that emergency food pantries, meal programs and shelters can provide adequate and nutrition food during the period in which other goals of the Cambridge Food Policy are being developed and implemented;**
- 5) examination of overall city development and city policy for its impact on the availability of food to neighborhoods and individuals through non-emergency food sources, and recognition that people's access to safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable and affordable food must be a priority in overall city development and policy;**
- 6) recruitment of a fully representative citywide committee of residents and providers with maximum possible representation by those in need, which would develop further goals and strategies regarding the Cambridge Food Policy and hold hearings every six months so that Cambridge residents can assess the progress being made by city councilors, school committee members, city employees and city agencies on the development and implementation of the Cambridge Food Policy.**

BALLOT QUESTION ARGUMENT

...The goals of the Cambridge Food Policy acknowledges that access to acceptable and affordable food without barriers and without stigma is a basic human right and part of a dignified human existence. The Cambridge Food Policy will direct the city to make federal food programs more accessible. Hundreds of thousands of federal dollars go unspent because people are not signed up for programs which provide summer food for children, school breakfasts and lunches and Food Stamps.

The Cambridge Food Policy goes beyond the work of meals programs and food pantries which serve more than 5000 Cambridge residents each month, by addressing not only the symptoms but the causes for hunger and malnutrition. Access to safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable and affordable food is a right, regardless of economic or social class. The Cambridge Food Policy will provide the framework within which the city, its residents, and all groups in the city can take action.

For more information, contact:
Gerald Bergman, Co-Chair
Hunger and Nutrition Action Group
Healthy Children's Task Force
Health of the City

EDUCATION, HUNGER AND HEALTHY EATING

A Hungry Child Cannot Learn

Any child who starts his or her school day hungry or without access to nutritionally adequate food is not getting an equal opportunity at education. There is a demonstrated relationship between hunger, healthy eating, physical fitness and the capacity of children to develop and learn. A hungry child cannot learn; a child who cannot learn becomes an adult who cannot compete successfully. An essential step toward attaining equal education is ensuring that every child—rich or poor or in between—goes through each school day on an equal nutritional footing with his or her classmates.

You Can't Teach a Hungry Child

Mild undernutrition can have serious effects. Undernutrition increases the risk of illness and its severity, certainly a negative effect on a child's ability to learn. The learning-related effects of undernutrition begin before any visible signs of growth retardation occur.

According to studies released by Tufts University Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, recent research provides compelling evidence that undernutrition during any period of childhood can have detrimental effects on the cognitive development of children and their later productivity as adults. In ways not previously known, undernutrition impacts the behavior of children, their school performance, and their overall cognitive development.

Undernourished children are less physically active, less responsive socially, and less attentive, independent, or curious. They are more anxious and cannot concentrate as well. As a result, their reading ability, verbal skills, and motor skills suffer. These effects do not have to be permanent if better nutrition is provided and the environment is improved.

Iron deficiency anemia, a specific kind of undernutrition, is one of the most prevalent nutritional problems among children. Even mild cases lead to shortened attention span, irritability, fatigue and decreased ability to concentrate. Anemic children do poorly on vocabulary, reading, mathematical problem solving, and psychological tests.

Hunger leads to nervousness, irritability, disinterest in the learning situation and the inability to concentrate. The hungry child is passive, apathetic, timid, and demands little from her/his environment. Hunger disrupts the learning process—one developmental step is lost and it is difficult to move on to the next one.

Studies have documented the significant relationship between eating a nutritious breakfast at school and the ability to perform in school. A study conducted in Lawrence, Massachusetts demonstrated that participation in a school breakfast program by low-income students is associated with significant improvement in standardized achievement test scores and tardiness rates, and a trend toward improvement in absenteeism.

Consent Communication #12 S- 216

A communication was received from Gerald Bergman, Co-Chair, Hunger and Nutrition Action Group, Health of the City, transmitting a memorandum in opposition of the School Dept.'s policy recommendation which would privatize school food services.

In City Council March 30, 1998

PLACED ON FILE