

January 20, 1999

Members of the Cambridge City Council
City Clerk, Council Communication

I want to congratulate the initiative taken by School Committee member, and neighbor, Denise Simmons regarding issues of race and class. Her community presentations and most recently her presentation before the Cambridge School Committee put many of the critical race and class issues in historical context.

The 1990-1991 campaign to end hunger in Cambridge had its roots in race and class concerns. What were some of the critical race and class questions that were raised in the successful Cambridge Food Policy Referendum Campaign?

- Equality of education
- Stigma
- Multi-cultural/multi-racial/multi-ethnic sensitivity to food needs and likes
- Parent and student involvement --- race and class empowerment

The referendum campaign was successful because there was widespread involvement from all neighborhoods in the city. Implementation of the vision has been difficult.

Has the pattern of racial and class stigma been confronted? NO! Have we moved forward on issues of universal breakfast programs? NO! Is there guaranteed access to nutritional food for all? NO! Do we have parent and student involvement in program planning, implementation and review? NO!

A Cambridge City Council Food Policy Committee was appointed. Their mandate was "to consider all matters relating to the problem of hunger in the city and study and recommend solutions as well as establishing a food access policy for the City of Cambridge."

This committee has refused to meet for more than two years, stretching over two city councils and two different mayors! While the basic issues of hunger and food access, with its roots and consequences in race and class inequities and division cry out for action, those whose elected duty it was to work on those issues have refused to meet and take action.

Mayor Frank Duehay appointed the committee. The Chair of the Food Policy Committee is Ken Reeves. Members of the Committee are Anthony Galluccio and Kathy Born.

Holding people accountable for their actions and inaction is the next step toward solving critical race and class issues!

Sincerely,


Gerald Bergman
82 Elm Street

(3) attachments

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

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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 reaching 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

Cambridge Hunger and Nutrition Action Coalition

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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. Recently, dozens of schools across Massachusetts offered a free breakfast and lunch to all students taking the MCAS tests in order to improve test scores. 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.

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. 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:

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I ate
Breakfast



drawing by:
Nicole Suggins, Age 7

I didn't



Table Scraps/CPF

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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Consent Communication #9

S-6/8

A communication was received from Gerald Bergman, transmitting congratulations on the initiative taken by School Committee member Denise Simmons regarding issues of race and class and for the formation of A Cambridge City Council Food Policy Committee.

In City Council January 25, 1999

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