



April 2011

Dear Teachers of Los Angeles,

As you know, the food served at our schools could use improvement. We would like to invite you and your students to write letters to the new school Superintendent and the Board to urge them to prioritize school nutrition.

Background

The current district menus contain a high proportion of processed foods and are lacking in good quality, fresh fruits and vegetables. As an example of the problem, a sample school breakfast of Frosted Flakes, coffee cake, chocolate milk and orange juice contains 51 grams of added sugar, which is more than the sugar in a can of soda and exceeds the World Health Organization limit for added sugar for the entire day. Given the high rates of childhood obesity and related risk for chronic diseases, these menus are unacceptable. Though we know that the District Food Service Branch operates on a tight budget, there are simple changes that could be made to offer more nutritious, fresher alternatives in improved cafeteria facilities.

Why now?

Now is a critical time to voice our opinions about the need for change. New superintendent Dr. John Deasy begins his term on April 15th. The Board will be voting on a new Wellness Policy in the next few months, and now is the time to help shape the revisions. Season 2 of the ABC television show, *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution*, is airing in April and May and will help show the challenges of eating well in Los Angeles.

Ideas for change

Suggestions for improvements include the following:

1. **Sugar:** Set a specific cap on daily sugar content. Begin reducing sugar by limiting flavored milk, discontinuing sports beverage sales, and making drinking water accessible.
2. **Eating environment:** Ensure that every child has sufficient time to eat in an adequate cafeteria space.
3. **Breakfast:** Ensure that every child receives a nourishing breakfast that is low in sugar.
4. **Scratch cooking:** Prioritize fresh, whole foods. Return to from-scratch cooking at schools that have the necessary equipment and invest in better facilities for schools that do not.
5. **Gardens:** Build more school gardens and use them for nutrition education. Allow students to eat what they have grown.
6. **Food education:** Make food, nutrition, and culinary education fundamental aspects of district curricula.
7. **Accountability to parents and students:** Create opportunities for meaningful student, parent, and community involvement. Change Food Service Branch public meeting times and locations, and improve outreach in all languages, to allow for increased participation in the menu planning process.

Our Letter Campaign

Please use the attached lesson plan to lead your students in writing short letters. There is nothing like the voice of a child to help spark change. **Please mail the letters to the Childhood Obesity Research Center by: April 19th (deadline one) or May 15 (deadline two) for a group delivery to the LAUSD.** Or, contact Emily Ventura at emilyventura@gmail.com to arrange for a pick-up. There is also a letter campaign for parents and adults – spread the word: www.schoolfoodletter.com

With hope and appreciation,

Emily Ventura, PhD, MPH



Speak out for Better Food at School! Lesson Plan

This lesson plan can be tailored to school children of all ages. Children in lower grades can simply draw a picture or write one or two simple sentences along with their name and age. Older students can use this letter-writing campaign as an opportunity to begin an ongoing discussion about health, food, and the environment while practicing formal letter composition and persuasive writing.

Part One (5 minutes): Lead a whole-group discussion on students' feelings towards their current school lunch. Chart all responses so they can reference their ideas later for letter writing. Older students can take their own notes or meet in small groups if preferred.

Sample Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What do you think of the food served at your school? Is it healthy? Does it taste good? Is it fresh? Does it contain too much sugar?
- 2) If you could change something specific about the food at school, what would you change?
- 3) If the food at school were improved, how could it change your life?

Part Two (5 minutes): Discuss how the leaders of the school district, like the Superintendent and the Board of Education, work together to make new policies. Explain to the students that there is a new Superintendent (Dr. Deasy) and that we hope he will help us make changes to the school food. Tell the students how much their opinions matter and how important it is that they express themselves.

Part Three (20 minutes): Have each student write a letter addressed to *Superintendent Deasy and the School Board*. A template is included on the next page.

Sample outline:

1. Explain who I am, why I am writing, and my experience with school food
2. Describe the changes I would like to see made to the food served at school. Give specific examples.
3. Draw pictures or include photos if desired.
4. Thank Dr. Deasy and the Board for their time in reading the letter.

Part Four:

Mail the letters to the USC Childhood Obesity Research Center (2250 Alcazar St, CSC 200, Los Angeles, CA 90033) by April 19th (deadline one) or May 15th (deadline 2) for group delivery to the LAUSD. Or contact emilyventura@gmail.com to arrange for another pickup option.

Thank you!!

