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Public Policy Memo

American public schools have direct contact with over 95% of children between the ages of 5 and 17 for around 6 hours per day over the course of 13 years. That adds up to roughly 14,000 hours spent in a public school. During that 14,000 hours, students are bound to get hungry. For many of those students, school lunches are the only meal they receive which makes it vital that those meals offer optimal nutrition. When we improve school meals, we are also addressing public health, equity, economics, and academic performance.

School lunches and nutrition are dictated by guidelines established by the CDC and implemented by the Department of Agriculture. Those guidelines are very loose in nature giving individual school districts significant leeway for interpretation. With the richest 25% of schools spending on average \$1,500 more per student than the poorest 25% per year, money must be saved somewhere for those less affluent schools. Unfortunately, for many schools, this means providing inadequate and often times inappropriate school lunches. With onsite monitoring of school nutrition programs only occurring every 3 years and such loose guidelines in place to begin with, it's easy to understand why so many schools are serving sub-par food.

By converting school kitchens from "reheat kitchens" to actual cooking kitchens and utilizing locally sourced, seasonal foods, we have the ability to not only improve the health and well being of our children, but level the playing field between rich and poor schools, which in turn helps in closing the income gap between white and minority groups. By supporting local food suppliers, the overall economics of the community improves, while the expense to the school remains roughly the same, if not less, according to experts.