

2011

# Spicing Up School Lunch: A Look at One School District's Attempts to Remedy America's Convoluted School Lunch Policies, Case Study Analysis of Claremont Unified School District

Allison McElwee  
*Claremont McKenna College*

---

## Recommended Citation

McElwee, Allison, "Spicing Up School Lunch: A Look at One School District's Attempts to Remedy America's Convoluted School Lunch Policies, Case Study Analysis of Claremont Unified School District" (2011). *CMC Senior Theses*. Paper 303.  
[http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc\\_theses/303](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/303)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE**

**SPICING UP SCHOOL LUNCH-**

**A LOOK AT ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ATTEMPTS TO REMEDY**

**AMERICA'S CONVOLUTED SCHOOL LUNCH POLICIES**

***CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF CLAREMONT UNIFIED SCHOOL***

***DISTRICT***

SUBMITTED TO  
PROFESSOR JILL GRIGSBY  
AND  
PROFESSOR JENNIFER PERRY  
BY  
**ALLISON McELWEE**

FOR  
SENIOR THESIS  
FALL/ 2011  
DECEMBER 10, 2011

**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements ----- 3

Preface ----- 4

**Part One**

I. Introduction ----- 6

II. History of School Lunch Program ----- 8

III. Methods of Improvement ----- 23

**Part Two**

IV. Methodology ----- 26

V. CUSD Meal Program ----- 29

VI. CUSD- What was wrong with their program? ----- 30

VII. CUSD-What mechanisms have been used to improve their program? ----- 32

VIII. CUSD-What still needs to be addressed? -----45

**Discussion**

IX. Worst Case Scenario- Existing Resources ----- 50

X. Best Case Scenario- Community Resources ----- 51

XI. Best of Both- CUSD’s Hybrid Model ----- 52

### *Acknowledgements*

Above all, I would like to thank my readers, Jill Grigsby and Jennifer Perry. Professor Grigsby was nothing but encouraging throughout the entirety of the paper- from narrowing in on a topic, to editing drafts, to helping practice my presentation. Professor Perry was instrumental in framing the paper's structure and providing much necessary feedback. This paper never would have come to fruition without their support. I appreciate their time, energy, and sincere effort. I would also like to thank Rick Cota and Dessa D'Aquila at the Claremont Unified School District for allowing me to be part of their wonderful program. Their willingness to accommodate me was crucial in putting life and flavor into this project. Finally, I want to thank my parents Suzanne and James McElwee for their love and twelve years of peanut butter sandwiches on white bread.

*Preface-*

### **My Experience with school lunch**

I attended three different public schools prior to attending a private college and experienced a variety of school lunch phenomenon. In the first grade I received monthly menus for school lunch and breakfast in the take home folders. My eyes lit up when I saw pizza and calzone on the menu and requested that I buy hot lunch on those days. However, I was quickly disappointed to find that what I was served resembled a hot pocket wrapped in clear plastic (this rang true for most dishes on the menu). Thus my school-purchased lunches were soon limited to “Pizza Day”, a weekly mob scene in which the local Pizza Hut would deliver to the small lunchroom. Granted, as a member of an upper middle class family, I always had the option of bringing my own lunch. School lunch was just an occasional “treat” that often fell short of my expectations.

My encounters with “hot lunch” in middle school continued to be infrequent but all the more unhealthy due to the abundance of processed snack foods available. I was occasionally given money to buy a snack, often consisting of a Twix bar, cookies, or frozen lemonade. Despite attending a different school, “Pizza Day” remained a staple, as it was likely a lucrative source of revenue for the district. I was also privy to the occasional corndog or fried chicken burger.

Remarkably, I never once bought school lunch in high school (that is not to say what I was eating was of the utmost nutritional value). My lack of participation can be attributed to the crowded unruly lines students had to fight through to purchase meals. Over half of my high school consisted of students who were bused in from East Palo Alto, a low-income Mecca for crime and poverty. I now realize that the students battling the lines were likely those eligible for

free or reduced lunch. Like many kids, they had no choice. Pizza and Flaming-Hot Cheetos were likely their best and only options for sustenance during the week.

**Why am I writing about this?**

My coursework in AP Environmental Science and Pomona's Environmental Analysis Program has taught me a lot about how eating locally grown ingredients can be beneficial nutritionally, for the environment, as well as for local economies. Learning and thinking more about food has changed my life for the better. I say this from both a nutritional and environmental standpoint. I did not receive some of the information taught in today's school food programs until college. In some ways, I am still catching up. Local ingredients are often more fresh and less likely to be wrought with pesticides. And since they are traveling shorter distances, they have smaller carbon footprints. Furthermore they provide local farmers with a direct market, helping them stay in business. Most importantly, fresh ingredients have more flavor, and therefore taste better (Poppendieck 15). Therefore, this paper rests on the assumption that using local and sustainable ingredients is beneficial for school lunch programs.

## **Part One**

### *I. Introduction*

#### **Why is School Lunch Important?**

School lunch is an investment in the future of America. School is a valuable place for shaping and improving the nutrition and diet habits of children in America (Johnson et. al 2009). Many of the chronic health problems faced by Americans later in life begin in childhood (Two Angry Moms). Thus, a nutritious school lunch is a small price to pay compared to steep medical bills. If kids go hungry or are given unhealthy food, classroom performance can be hindered (Bevans et. al 424, Poppendieck 9). On an average day 90 percent of kids in America are at school, making it the most effective venue to shape the nutritional habits of America's future (Poppendieck 10, Bevans et. al 424). A study looking at links between school lunch offerings and child eating behavior found that the degree to which schools made nutritious foods available during lunch periods was highly associated with improved eating behavior among students over time (Bevans et. al 427). This suggests that schools can be influential in shaping a student's future habits.

While school lunch is often thought of as welfare food, lunch programs can also benefit those who can afford to bring their own. A study comparing the nutrient content of home packed with school lunches found that many home packed lunches had "processed fruit drinks, deli meats, prepackaged lunches, cakes, cookies, and potato/ corn chips" leading them to fall short of USDA nutrient standards (Johnson et. al). When effective, school lunch programs increase children's consumption of low fat dairy, fruits, and vegetables. Since public policy cannot manipulate the eating habits inside the home, it is crucial to take advantage of school as a venue for change.

School lunches were originally offered with the intent of ensuring all students have a healthy meal, allowing them to take full advantage of their educational experience. However, a string of government policies intended to regulate the U.S. agricultural economy and health standards have steered lunch programs in American schools in both unhealthy and environmentally destructive directions. This has had a variety of negative consequences for students. Although well intentioned, these policies have woven a complex web between agriculture, income, and nutrition to which there is no simple remedy. The United States now possesses a well intentioned but misguided lunch program, leaving children overfed but malnourished.

Currently, a revolution is under way to transform programs around the country by incorporating locally grown and fresh ingredients, as well as integrating hands-on educational experiences with gardening and nutrition. The Claremont Unified School District (CUSD) makes up a group of schools that once heavily relied on unhealthy processed foods for providing lunch. Through a series of modifications in the past three years, CUSD's program has been remodeled to feature more local produce and fresh ingredients, independent of USDA commodities or large-scale agriculture. This has led to a healthier student body as well as a more cohesive school community.

I had the opportunity to observe the program first hand over the course of the fall semester of 2011. Despite its progress over the past three years, the program can still benefit by cooking more meals from scratch, eliminating unhealthy options, and reducing food waste. Ultimately, the CUSD demonstrates that it is possible for a school district to implement a more nutritionally and environmentally beneficial lunch program by using its staff, community, and USDA resources to their full potential.

*II. History of School Lunch Program- What factors led to an unsatisfactory school lunch program?*

**Origin- The Progressive Era (1890's to 1920's)**

The primary forces behind school lunch programs have always been both charitable and political. Thus the advent of serving lunch at American schools was not the product of one large policy decision. Instead, lunch programs began to pop up in major U.S. cities as the product of local philanthropy and grassroots movements in the 1890's (Poppendieck 47, Cooper & Holmes 33). Compulsory school attendance laws led to more poor and hungry children attending school, rather than working outside the home. Churches and women groups stepped in to provide food for these students. This was the start of a long tradition of school lunch welfare programs. Increased advocacy for nutritional science education and a hygiene movement emerged simultaneously, leading to health classes and more lunchrooms (Poppendieck 47).

New York City was influential in setting food safety standards as well as demonstrating how a large urban city could implement a successful lunch program. In 1904 Robert Hunter released his report "Poverty", asserting that there were between 60 and 70 thousand children going to school hungry each day in NYC (Cooper & Holmes 33). This inspired more investigative reports, including John Spargo's "The Bitter Cry of Children" in 1906 as well as several publications produced by physicians assessing NYC school children for malnutrition (Cooper & Holmes 34). This literature did not tread lightly.

William Maxwell, the superintendent for NYC public schools requested there be a lunch program featuring both low cost and healthy lunches. A successful trial program was started, followed by a physician-supervised program two years later. Participating students showed overall improvement in health leading the program to spread to more schools. The NYC program set a precedent for food safety in schools and other public venues. Food servers were subject to

physical exams as well as required to get small pox vaccines (Cooper & Holmes 34). New health standards for students and employees addressed the lunch program's goal of improved public health.

### **WWI (1914–1918)**

Meanwhile, similar initiatives appeared in other urban areas. Parent committees from both Boston's "New England Kitchen" and Philadelphia's "Penny Lunch Program" both blossomed and expanded to school lunch programs (Cooper & Holmes 33). Thirteen states and Washington D.C. had school food programs as America entered WWI. However, it was soon evident that American school lunch was in dire need of improvement. Around one third of the men who attempted to enlist in the Army were turned away due to malnutrition (Cooper & Holmes 34). This was largely blamed on being malnourished during childhood. Thus states wrote laws that allowed cities to funnel some tax dollars towards school lunches (Poppendieck 48). While State Government indirectly had a hand in lunch programs, it was not until later that the federal government stepped in.

### **Great Depression (1929)**

The Great Depression did not improve the number of starving urban students. In extreme cases children were so hungry they fainted in school. More parent and community groups stepped up to the plate and organized school lunch programs (Poppendieck 47). However, efforts were cut short as private charities and individuals could no longer afford to support lunch programs, let alone themselves (Cooper & Holmes 34). Many schools had to cut back or stop their lunch programs (Poppendieck 47). Economic setback hindered the progress of school lunch programs.

### **The New Deal (1933- 1936)**

Even though hunger was everywhere, there was not a shortage of food in America. Many farmers had surplus crops they could not sell due to falling farm prices. Much of this food was thrown out and left to rot. At this point President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered the Federal Relief Administration and the Secretary of Agriculture to conceive a program that would buy surpluses from farmers and give them to the unemployed (Poppendieck 48). This coincided with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s agenda to improve the nutrition of lower income individuals as well as dispose of purchased surplus commodities (USDA 215). They now had control over what the poor ate.

The federal government influenced both the food and staffing of school lunch programs as America crawled out of the depression. After the emergency phase was declared over in 1935, the USDA continued to purchase excess crops from farmers and give them to schools (Poppendieck 48). However, recipient schools still had to agree to buy from their regular sources as not to throw off the recovering economy (Poppendieck 49). This marked the beginning of the school lunch program's long and complex ties to United States Agriculture.

In 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) placed unemployed female factory workers to use in school kitchens and cafeterias (Poppendieck 49). In 1941 WPA workers were cooking and serving lunch in every state to 2 million school children. The labor provided by the 65,000 WPA workers serving school lunch substantially helped the growth of lunch programs (Cooper & Holmes 35). By 1942, there were a remarkable 6 million children participating in the 95,000 school lunch programs around the country (Cooper & Holmes 35, Poppendieck 50). Thus the New Deal was an age of government-fueled growth for school lunches.

### **WWII (1939-1945)**

The momentum school lunch programs gained during the New Deal came to a stand still as America entered the Second World War in 1939. Once abundant farm surpluses were directed

away from schools and given to the military (Cooper & Holmes 35). European Allies also bought crops from U.S. farmers (Poppendieck 50). While the agricultural economy was once again thriving, malnutrition became an issue once again for soldiers as men continued to fail military physical exams on account of childhood malnutrition (Two Angry Moms, Poppendieck 50). General Lewis Blaine Hershey, the director of the Selective Service System, even referred to malnutrition as a national security issue and informed Congress that America saw 155,000 casualties as a direct result of it (Cooper & Holmes 35). This led the National Research Council (NRC)'s committee on Food and Nutrition to construct recommended daily allowances for soldiers and workers (Poppendieck 50). Nutrition standards would soon weave their way in to school lunch programs after the war.

The NRC also developed nutritional standards for students that were used for decades to come. The NRC's model for school lunch was referred to as the "Type A Meal" and sought to provide one third to one half of the recommended daily allowance for calories (Poppendieck 50). Initially the meal featured a minimum of a half pint of whole milk, two ounces of an animal or fish protein, or another protein source such as beans, six ounces of produce, bread, as well as two teaspoons of margarine or butter (Poppendieck 50-51). This model endured until the 1970's. The "Type A Meal" would later be regarded as a mixed blessing as budget infringed on its nutritional integrity.

### **Signing of NSLP (1946)**

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was created after World War II as to ensure schools could afford to maintain meal programs. Following the war, schools were provided with agricultural subsidies (Two Angry Moms). Congress's Steagall Act maintained crop prices for two years after the war, leading to surpluses once again (Poppendieck 50). However, school lunch programs got too expensive for many schools (Poppendieck 51). President Harry Truman

created and signed the National School ACT, Public Law 396, in June of 1946 (Cooper & Holmes 35 Poppendieck 50). PL396 created the NSLP and provided states with grants in aid as well as other support to supply food as well as maintain, operate, and start programs (Cashman et. al, Poppendieck 51). PL396 allotted permanent funds for the Secretary of Agriculture to “1. Assist with the health of the nation’s children, and 2. Ensure a market for farmers” (Cooper & Holmes 35). These goals emphasized the relationship between agriculture policy and school lunches.

Public Law 396 set a multitude of guidelines for how school lunch programs must be run in order to receive aid from the Federal Government. The amount of aid provided according to Section 4 of PL396 was calculated based on the number of school age children coupled with the relative amount of poverty in the area. Furthermore the law required lunches to meet the established NRC nutritional guidelines and provide free or reduced lunch for eligible students without discrimination. This left some Southern Congress members unsettled as they feared that the USDA would pressure schools to desegregate (Poppendieck 51). Financially, programs were also bound to operating on a nonprofit basis. The Secretary of Agriculture had control over what foods were deemed abundant and thereby must be used by schools. Money was also allocated to schools for the purchase of equipment used in school kitchens and lunchrooms. Thus schools faced more guidelines and regulations when it came to their programs than ever before.

Although PL396 gave schools the resources necessary to operate lunch programs, it also required a great deal of input on the part of schools. This made the days of charity-sourced lunches seem worlds away. It was mandatory that all records and receipts of purchases were reported to the state (Cooper & Holmes 36). Budgets became tighter as the baby boom doubled the amount of participants in school lunch programs. Federal funding fell from 8.7 cents a student in 1944 to 4.4 cents in 1962 (Poppendieck 53). It was evident that the government would

need to dedicate a larger portion of its budget to the program in order to maintain any standard of quality in school lunches.

### **The 1960's and 1970's**

While the NSLP made it possible for more schools to operate lunch programs, nutrition slowly came into question spurring a variety of changes. A household consumption survey of 1965-66 reported that the nutritional intake of Americans was declining. Earlier concern surrounding nutrition and low-income students led to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-642). This provided funding for programs focused on early childhood nutrition. The act prompted the two-year pilot of a school breakfast program in 1966 (Cooper & Holmes 36). These programs were largely a result of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration's mission to expand the range of aid provided for poor kids (Poppendieck 57). Johnson's initiatives to improve nutrition for all children regardless of background were well intentioned but fell flat due to shortcomings in budget.

The Child Nutrition Act of 1966 provided some protection against the residual poverty of the 1950's however, there was more to be done. Unfortunately, the NSLP's method of calculating eligibility for free or reduced lunch was inadequate since it lacked uniformity across districts (Poppendieck 59). As funding fell to an all time low meals would "rotate" among needy students on a weekly basis. In some areas kids would have to work in lunchrooms to earn their lunch (Poppendieck 60). Low-income kids often had to stand in separate lunch lines. These practices helped give school lunch the reputation of "welfare food" in many areas, a reputation that has been difficult to shake for many years to come.

As the sixties came to a close, the Federal Government stepped in once again to improve the NSLP. Congress created new and more inclusive standards for eligibility for free or reduced lunch. However, this came at a cost. From 1967-1970 the number of kids who got free lunch

nearly doubled. This was unfortunate timing given that food prices soared following the oil embargo in the 1970's (Poppendieck 61). This left schools and the government looking for ways to cut cost.

As the 1970's began, so did the toxic relationship between school lunch and competitive food. The groundwork was laid in 1969 during a White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health, where it was recommended, "private sector food service management companies be contracted to provide food and management for school food programs in hard to serve areas" (Poppendieck 62). This ultimately led to the 1970 USDA regulations allowing school food directors to hire private companies to operate their school meal programs. This was interpreted in a variety of ways.

Some districts saw this as a positive opportunity for local companies to get involved with lunch programs, while others saw "corporate involvement as a last resort". Thus schools were encouraged for the first time to merge their interests with profit-driven rather than nutrition-focused companies. From 1995 to 2005 the amount of schools contracting with outside companies increased from 6 percent to 13 percent, mostly in areas with a lot of poverty (Poppendieck 62). Currently 25 percent of school food is outsourced to private companies. These companies often insist that kids won't eat vegetables or they are too expensive (Two Angry Moms). Thereby low-income students who were not getting balanced meals at home became even more likely to be eating processed foods while at school.

Participating schools and students skyrocketed in the first half of the 1970's. This was not to say the food being served had gotten any healthier. Concern about the quality of food had been raised in the 1960's, but was not fully addressed. The "Type A Meal" was done away with in 1979 and replaced with "school lunch meal patterns," in response to many schools falling short of offering one third of the recommended daily calorie allowance. School meal patterns allowed

students to take smaller portions and provided for a larger variety of starches, proteins, and grains in the program (Poppendieck 67). The shift from using fresh food prepared on site to the frozen “meal packs” being sent to schools to heat brought about additional criticism (Poppendieck 65-66). Compromises in quality can be attributed to the number of free or reduced meals being served increasing and the amount of paying customers decreasing (Poppendieck 65). Thus schools facing budget restraints looked for ways to increase their revenue. Their answer was offering junk food by way of fast food and vending machines.

Cheap, processed, and unhealthy food soon became the go to method for schools looking to raise revenue and participation without regard to their student’s health. Susan Poppendieck asserts that “it was in the 1970’s that school food began the long march to its current heavy reliance on pizza, tacos, and chicken nuggets” (Poppendieck 68). It seems there is little evidence to refute this. Following budget cuts, schools began to think of lunch as a revenue stream in which the more unhealthy food they sell, the more money they can make (Two Angry Moms). The Fast Food Model was born in 1972 in Las Vegas and has yet to be put to rest (Levine 168, Poppendieck 68). The model consists of offering fast food and junk food in a la cart lines and vending machines in competition with the reimbursable school meal. A la cart and vending machine items typically have more fat and lower nutritional value than school food since they are not regulated by the USDA lunch standards (Bevans 424, Poppendieck 69). Las Vegas not only increased their revenue but also made a million dollars in profit, encouraging other school districts to follow suit (Poppendieck 68). Thus vending machines began popping up in school districts around the country (Cooper & Holmes 37). The introduction of competitive food to schools was ironic, considering that lunchrooms were originally started to provide kids with healthy food.

Despite the ability of competitive food to increase revenue, it became evident that some sort of regulation was necessary. The availability of competitive foods at school often counteracts the benefits of a school lunch program (Bevans et. al 425). Problems arose for many schools when kids would not end up eating lunch after filling up on soda and candy. In 1970, Amendments were made to the Child Nutrition Act, which allowed the USDA to ban the sale of competitive foods during lunchtime or even on school premises (Poppendieck 69). Unfortunately, the USDA and school food service operators were not the only ones interested in what was being served at schools. Both school and soft drink revenue decreased following the amendment, prompting them to team up and put pressure on Congress to allow competitive food to be sold freely. This prompted a large decline in healthful regulations beginning with a revision of the competitive food amendment in 1977, followed by the drafting of rules that set no maximum level for sugar (Poppendieck 70). While the final law said that food of minimal nutritional value could not be sold until after lunch, 1984's *Soft Drink Association vs. Block* maintained that foods that were not explicitly classified as being of minimal nutrition value could be sold whenever (721 F.2d 1348, Poppendieck 70, Cooper & Holmes 37). The judge ruled that the Secretary of Agriculture could only regulate sales within the physical cafeteria, allowing candy and chip-filled vending machines and student stores to flourish (Cooper & Holmes 37). School children were more likely than ever to be bombarded with unhealthy foods while at school. Offerings did not improve as lunch programs budgets got continually tighter.

A wave of environmental consciousness following the 1970's oil embargo led to concern about food waste. Nutritionists began to question the lunch program for not factoring in age or body type when formulating meal portions (Cooper & Holmes 36). This was problematic in terms of nutrition and food waste. This scrutiny resulted in different portion sizes being served to different age groups, a logical and budget friendly decision (Cooper & Holmes 37). Offer versus

serve or “OVS” was the solution. “OVS” allowed high school students to refrain from taking two of the five “Type A Meal” items (Poppendieck 66). This was adopted for middle schoolers in 1977 and for elementary schoolers in 1981 (Poppendieck 66). By 2005 the “OVS” method was being used in 78 percent of elementary and 93 percent of middle schools for both breakfast and lunch (Poppendieck 66).

### **Reaganomics**

School Lunch in the 1980’s was characterized by further decline in quality prompted by financial constraints and budget cuts. A poor economy during the Carter era created a larger amount of students qualifying for free lunch juxtaposed with budget cuts for school lunch programs in many districts. The Reagan administration made its mark on school lunches with its “assault on social spending” (Poppendieck 72). The administration even went as far as proposing getting rid of subsidies for school lunch. Funding for school lunch programs was reduced as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (Poppendieck 72). This further cemented the program’s image as a welfare program rather than an educational one. In addition to funding, Reagan reduced the nutritional quality of school lunch. Reagan’s agenda included placing certain foods on the permissible lists in order to save money but still meet the USDA’s nutritional guidelines (Cooper & Holmes 37). This practice became infamous when ketchup narrowly escaped becoming a “vegetable” (Cooper & Holmes 37, Poppendieck 74).

Despite taking hard hits for most of the 1980’s, school lunch programs saw some relief at the end of the decade. Congress ultimately declared the NSLP exempt from some impending budget cuts. However, this did not come without compromise. A la carte fast food offerings further increased to make up the revenue difference (Poppendieck 75). Furthermore the Commodity Distribution Act of 1987 made it easier for schools to receive surplus agricultural commodities (Poppendieck 76). From 1981-1987 dairy surpluses were so abundant that schools

enjoyed unlimited orders (Poppendieck 77). This further contributed to the large amount of fat available on the school menu due to the prominence of whole milk in school lunches.

### **The Clinton Era**

Public concern about nutritional content resurfaced during the Clinton era. The “war on fat” ultimately shaped lunch policy decisions under his administration. Concern about health and nutrition stemmed from a large amount of public concern about the rising prevalence of heart disease, diabetes, vitamin deficiency and obesity (Poppendieck 77). Malnutrition among school age students was largely due to the discrepancy between USDA nutrition standards and what was actually being served. Schools were supposed to be serving no more than 30 percent of the daily allowance for fat and 10 percent for saturated fat (Johnson et. al, Poppendieck 78). However, in 1990 it was found that schools were typically serving 38 percent of the recommended fat and 14 percent for saturated (Poppendieck 78). At this point the Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Epsy, asserted, “we can not continue to deep fry our kids health” (Poppendieck 79). The attack on fat did not please the meat and dairy industries (Cooper & Holmes 38). Advocates were also concerned as the amount of sodium, sugar, and fat appearing in school meals could be especially harmful for young, low income students, going through crucial periods of development and growth (Poppendieck 78). Something had to be done to dig the lunch program out of its dark hole.

The widespread panic surrounding nutrition prompted Epsy to start the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children in order to mitigate some of the failing NSLP mechanisms. The Initiative marked the largest revision to the NSLP in 50 years. The initiative, born in summer 1994, required all schools to meet the USDA Federally Recommended Dietary Guidelines by 1998 (Cooper & Holmes 38). This included a new regulation allowing schools to trade commodities for finished products or packaged food (Poppendieck 79). The Healthy Meals for

Healthy Americans Act of 1994 requires NSLP schools to serve “balanced and nutritious meals that comply with USDA guidelines for Americans” (Bevans 424).

The School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children also changed the menu planning process. The initiative also incorporated new technology to help schools plan their meals. Schools were encouraged to use a computerized Nutrient Standard Meal Planning program to make sure they were meeting the recommended daily allowance guidelines (Poppendieck 80). This was by no means a panacea for fixing nutrition in schools. While the computerized NSLP had the potential to increase the fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, there was also concern that fortified or enriched products would merely serve as substitutes in the new system (Poppendieck 80). The technology transformed the meal preparation process into a game of numbers, void of whole ingredients and cooking.

### **Current Lunch programs**

The National School Lunch Program remains a prominent fixture in America. The NSLP is the second largest “food and nutrition assistance program in the U.S.” (USDA 39). Despite the improvements made by the School Meals Initiative, school meals still fall short in many regards. Currently, fat content still remains around 34 percent (Cooper & Holmes 38). Only 70 percent of all elementary schools meet the federally mandated nutrition guidelines while only 20 percent of secondary schools do. This is coupled with the ever-increasing abundance of fast food and snacks in school (Cooper & Holmes 38). Despite the unhealthy nature of a lot of school food, “for some, what they eat at school remains the most nutritious meal of their day” (Cooper & Holmes 38). Furthermore, providing free or reduced lunch remains one of the main objectives of the NSLP (USDA 38).

“The school-lunch program began at a time when the public-health problem of America’s children was undernourishment, so feeding surplus agricultural commodities to kids seemed like a win-win strategy. Today the problem is overnutrition, but a school lunch

lady trying to prepare healthful fresh food is apt to get dinged by U.S.D.A. inspectors for failing to serve enough calories; if she dishes up a lunch that includes chicken nuggets and Tater Tots, however, the inspector smiles and the reimbursements flow” (Pollan).

Kids in the school lunch program are often overfed but malnourished (Two Angry Moms). The lack of nutritious options can lead to excessive weight gain as well as other health issues. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that obesity for 6-11 year olds has tripled since the 1970’s (Poppendieck 10). Overweight children are more likely to have sleep apnea, type 2 diabetes, depression, anxiety, and joint problems (Poppendieck 10). While other research groups and committees have proposed more nutritious health standards, the NSLP remains under the USDA nutrition regulations (Bevans et. al 425). School lunches must provide a minimum of one third of a child’s daily food or nutrient intake, provide certain macro and micronutrients, have both meat and meat alternatives, as well as whole grains, fruits, and low-fat dairy (Bevans et. al 424). These regulations are in need of an update. “Improving nutrition standards for foods offered in compliance with federally reimbursable school meals” may improve children’s eating habits (Bevans et al. 2011). While these standards control for calories, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron, there are no guidelines for sodium or dietary fiber (Johnson et. al 2009). Furthermore 58 percent of states and 61 percent of districts allow the sale of competitive, and often unhealthy, food (Bevans et. al 425). Thus many districts find it difficult to control what kids are actually eating.

The Obama administration has made a significant effort to improve school lunches for American children by targeting nutrition. This sentiment dramatically contrasts with the farm-focused Bush administration that attempted to reverse a USDA standard that required school lunch ground beef to be inspected for salmonella (*Washington Post*). The Obama administration has targeted the improvement of children’s health in response to the prevalence of heart disease, asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cancer among Americans (Stolberg A16). In

December 2010 Obama signed the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (Jackson, White House). The 4.5 billion dollar measure expanded the federal government's power over who receives lunch and the food that goes in it. Thus the measure allows more free lunches to be served. According to the White House, "The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 will improve the quality of school breakfasts, lunches, and other foods sold in schools while also strengthening nutrition programs that serve young children, including WIC and the Child and Adult Care Food Program" (Jackson). The policy seeks to improve nutrition, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of school lunch.

However, improving school lunch has come at a cost. Obama's Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act measure aimed to increase the amount of fresh produce going into school lunch and reduce the amount of whole milk served (Santos A12). In particular, Obama has aimed to reduce the amount of potatoes served, in favor of other more nutritious vegetables like broccoli (Nixon). Unfortunately, this is more expensive for school districts and upsetting to certain vendors and potato farmers who have long depended on school lunches for crop purchases (Nixon). School districts are also required to gradually raise the price of school meals to more accurately reflect the price of preparing it. This requirement marks the "first time the federal government has gotten into the business of cafeteria prices since its school lunch program was established in 1946" (Santos A12). This innovative policy in turn allows the lunch program to expand the scope of aid for free and reduced lunch.

First Lady Michelle Obama has captured the attention of many Americans and the popular media, becoming an icon for healthy nutrition. She started the Let's Move Campaign in 2010, a program to change the way children "eat and play" with the goal to end obesity within one generation (Stolberg A16). The program has enlisted the help of government, medical, science, business, education, and athletic figures "who are pledging to work together to get

children off their couches and consuming fresher, healthier food” (Stolberg A16). The program intends to evaluate and improve school lunch, playgrounds, and medical checkups to better the nutritional environment for American children. Sodexo, Chartwells Schools Dining Services and Aramark, The three largest suppliers of school lunches have agreed to cut the amount of salt, sugar, and fat they serve in schools over the course of five years (Stolberg A16). This suggests that school lunch in America is likely on the verge of major change. Michelle Obama stated “it doesn’t take a stroke of genius or a feat of technology. We have everything we need right now to help our kids lead healthy lives” (Stolberg A16). Barack and Michelle Obama’s interest in school lunch has ultimately propelled those inside and outside the school system to aid in the improvement of lunch for school children.

### *III. Methods of Improvement*

A handful of volunteers, culinary legends, school administrators, and parents have set out to fix problematic school lunch programs. They are using a variety of tactics to improve the quality, freshness, and nutrition of ingredients in school meals. Many of these efforts have transpired from the presence of school gardens. Sometimes overlooked, gardens are undergoing a revolution in many school districts, as they prove useful for food and nutrition curriculum. In some schools, gardens serve as a gateway, leading districts away from processed food, towards “Farm to Table” lunch programs.

#### **School Gardens**

Schools around the country have had gardens for decades. Most gardens are put to use for educational purposes, however, a good portion are left unattended to (Two Angry Moms). While educational school gardens have proved their merits in biology lessons, they have recently earned their keep as culinary resources. They can provide hands on nutrition, health, and cooking experiences and in some cases provide ingredients for school lunch programs.

## **Alice Waters**

Restaurateur and famed local food advocate Alice Waters has paved the way for other programs by demonstrating that it is possible to incorporate locally grown food into a once decaying public school lunch program. The Edible Schoolyard Initiative started in 1995 at Berkeley's Martin Luther King Elementary. Alice Waters passed by the school on several occasions and noticed how run down it had become. Waters took charge and approached the principal about revitalizing the garden into what was to become, the Edible Schoolyard. Despite some initial resistance from school administrators, Waters transformed the lunch programs in the entire district to incorporate local and fresh ingredients, prepared in a healthy manner (Waters 13, *Two Angry Moms*). The Edible Schoolyard "began as a way to bring that school into the local food network, so that nearby farmers might help support local farmers" (Waters 6). It has since paved the way for many other "Farm to Table" programs.

Alice Waters argues that food is an academic subject and that a school garden, kitchen, and cafeteria are all key parts to the academics (Waters 43). "Edible Education" rests upon the belief that school should provide lunch for every child. This should be done by buying local and seasonal ingredients to support farmers. This is optimal for the health of students and the local business economy (Waters 43). Furthermore, students should learn by having hands-on, sensory experiences with food as it grows and in the kitchen. Thus gardens can be used for culinary education in addition to teaching ecology and biology. Chef and activist Ann Cooper finds it pointless to have health or nutrition education in schools if the meals being served to students do not embody the curriculum.

The benefits of using local and fresh ingredients to prepare school food do not end with students and farmers. School food workers and kitchen staff can find new meaning in their jobs. They are more likely to see culinary merit in their careers and feel good about what they are

serving students. Furthermore school administrators and food directors can become advocates by “recognizing that school food, which has had among the worst reputations for the quality of food served, can also achieve the highest reputation when it comes directly from the farmer” (Gottlieb 175). Involving teachers with the food experience can serve to improve their relationship with students (Cooper & Holmes 67). Overall, a good school lunch program can create a more cohesive school community.

The Edible Schoolyard serves as an example for schools around the country that are embarking on their own “Farm to Table” style programs. Salad bars in Santa Monica and Riverside are now stocked with ingredients from the, once failing, local farmer’s market (Gottlieb 172). Similar programs are underway in Florida and North Carolina to aid African American farmers (Gottlieb 172, 174). Ann Cooper points out that under the NSLP schools don’t necessarily have to buy large scale agricultural commodities, however it is more work to coordinate with local farmers and growers (Two Angry Moms, Gottlieb 172).

Seasonality and budget hinder “Farm to Table” programs and school garden possibilities for some districts. Schools in the Northeast and other cold areas may not be able to grow their own produce like schools on the warmer West Coast. Levine acknowledges that the Edible Schoolyard was made possible by way of a private grant from Alice Water’s Chez Panisse Foundation. However, changes have occurred at the policy level. In 2002 the first National Farm to Cafeteria program was held in 2002 leading to the establishment of the of National Farm to School Network in 2007. The 2002 Farm Bill even had a provision to provide funding for Farm to cafeteria programs (Gottlieb 174). Thus school lunch is receiving attention in the national agricultural arena.

## **Other Methods**

A portion of schools have attempted to improve their lunch programs in order to remedy ill-fated nutrition, agricultural, and welfare legislation. For some schools this is a matter of maximizing resources already in place while for others this may mean reaching out or accepting help from outside the school community. Schools may look to contract with food providers that prepare healthier or more environmentally friendly options. However this can be expensive. Instead, schools may supplement their regular lunch program with healthier options if they cannot afford to rework the entire program. Several public school districts have benefited from concerned parents organizing salad bars using ingredients from local farmer's markets (*Two Angry Moms*). Other schools are making a greater effort to cook meals from scratch as a substitute for heated meal packs.

## **Part Two**

### *IV. Methodology*

I chose to focus my thesis on the Claremont Unified School District (CUSD) on account of its program's recent success as well as its proximity to the Claremont Colleges. As a San Francisco Bay Area native, I was well aware of the Edible Schoolyard concept, at least in Northern California. Thus, I was pleased to learn that the CUSD was working to improve their lunch program using local ingredients. I found Claremont, CA of particular interest because of its complex demographic. Claremont is host to the Claremont College Consortium, giving it a large population of well-educated, upper middleclass families. However, it is also in close proximity to lower-income areas in Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties plagued with food security issues.

The CUSD's close proximity to Claremont McKenna College made it possible for me to visit and observe meals served to students of a range of ages. Over the course of September, October, and November 2011 I was able to witness the CUSD's meal program first hand. I

interacted with staff and students while conducting formal and informal interviews. Ultimately, this allowed me to see the meal program from the perspective of those in charge, the employees making and serving the food, as well as the students actually eating it.

#### *Meeting with Nutrition Services Director*

I first met with the Director of Nutrition Services, Rick Cota, in late September to discuss the meal program as well as my goals for my thesis. We met in his office, located in the district's central kitchen at El Roble Intermediate School. While I waited for Cota to get back from a meeting, I was able to interact with kitchen staff, observe food preparation, and ingredient and packaging deliveries. Cota and the rest of the employees were extremely welcoming. Their willingness to let me, an outsider, into their kitchen is reflective of their meal program's overall emphasis on transparency. They are eager to share what they are doing. Although the meeting was short, it gave me a feel for the program's character as a whole.

#### *Meeting with Community Coordinator*

My next meeting was with the newly hired Community Coordinator, Dessa D'Aquila. We met for thirty minutes to discuss some of my objectives for the semester and what my needs were from the district. From this meeting, I was able to learn more details about the program and its recent changes. It also gave me the opportunity to observe the staff and deliveries once more since D'Aquila's temporary office was located in the kitchen. Following this meeting, I was able to schedule additional visits through D'Aquila via text message and email.

#### *Formal Interview with Director*

On October 16th I conducted a formal interview with Rick Cota for an hour. I asked him questions based on the background information I gathered on the district's website and observed from my previous visits. The interview was recorded and then transcribed for my own use while writing Part Two.

*Lunch and Kitchen Observation- El Roble Intermediate School*

I had the opportunity to observe two one-hour lunch periods at El Roble Intermediate School, which serves all seventh and eighth grade students enrolled in the district. This gave me insight into how the program is set up and helped fill any gaps in the information gathered from my research and the interview with Cota.

I observed with D'Aquila during the first lunch period and was able to informally interview her about her experience with the district. Between lunch periods, I talked with some of the kitchen staff and had the opportunity to take some pictures of the lunch carts and menu. For the second period, I stood next to one of the employees serving the Asian chicken entrée for the day. I was able to talk with him and observe the payment system in action. For the second part of this period, I stood by myself and was approached by several groups of students. I casually spoke with them about what they were eating and get a more candid perspective on the lunch program.

*Lunch and Kitchen Observation- Claremont High School*

I traveled with D'Aquila to observe lunch at Claremont High School (CHS). All students in the district enrolled in grades 9-12 attend CHS. As D'Aquila was recently hired by CUSD, this was her first time observing the site as well. It was a chance for us to compare El Roble, as well as what she had seen at the elementary school sites, to the setup at CHS. We arrived prior to the start of the lunch period. This gave us time to talk to those serving lunch before students purchased food. During lunch, D'Aquila and I were able to wander through the campus and observe all of the food carts, scattered throughout. This gave us an opportunity to see how lines fluctuate during the one hour lunch period. We were also able to discuss any questions we wanted to ask the Gina Mattson, the head of the lunch department at CHS, following the lunch period.

## *Synthesis*

The observations and analysis that follow are ultimately a synthesis of my research, interviews, and observations at the district. A large portion of the content was inspired by the literature review in Part One.

### *V. CUSD Meal Program*

#### **Program Background**

The Claremont Unified School District (CUSD) of Claremont, California is an example of a district using both existing and community resources to incorporate local and fresh ingredients to improve their lunch program. The district serves a diverse community, 30 miles east of Los Angeles. CUSD itself is comprised of seven elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, as well as several alternative schools. There are almost 7,000 students enrolled in the district (Education Data Partnership). While slightly less than half of students are white, over a quarter are Hispanic, 10 percent are Asian, and 7.6 percent are Black or African American (Education Data Partnership). Of these students, 31.2 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch, slightly less than the 53 percent average for L.A. County (County Health Rankings). Nonetheless this makes for a substantial amount of students to serve, in addition to those who purchase lunch out of pocket.

The need for a healthier and more environmentally friendly lunch program was long overdue. Claremont is considered a fairly educated college town within Los Angeles County. However, it is adjacent to San Bernardino County, known for food security issues as well as well as having some of the poorest health and nutrition in the state (County Health Rankings). Thus concern about the health and nutrition of young people looms in Claremont as well. CUSD's meal program has always followed the USDA guidelines according to the NSLP. However, it was heavily reliant on processed and unhealthy foods until recently.

## **Rick Cota Joins**

CUSD began its transformation with a change in staff. In 2009 Rick Cota was hired as CUSD's Director of Nutrition Services with the purpose of improving the program. Prior to his position as director, Cota was a consultant for CUSD and other school districts on food and efficiency related issues. Additionally, Cota has 15 years of restaurant experience on top of an accounting degree. Thus he is more than qualified to address CUSD's meal program from both a culinary and business standpoint. Despite his qualifications, implementing change in CUSD's lunch program was not an easy task. "It's fair to say that the program was struggling. 100 percent processed foods, no real emphasis on better nutrition, no emphasis on service, or servicing the menu to the kids," reflects Cota.

Cota has since eliminated a large portion of processed food, improving both the nutrition and quality of meals. Program participation in the district has since risen as a result of the new program's popularity. The lunch program has become a symbol of pride for the staff members as well as the larger school community, as it is has received national recognition. CUSD uses both existing and community resources to facilitate a program more representative of the Claremont community. Cota cites "using organic or healthy foods, eliminating processed foods and food from the outside that wasn't compliant [with USDA standards]" as among the most important innovations in improving the program. However, there are some issues that still need to be addressed. Thus the district is constantly working towards running the best program possible.

*VI. CUSD- What was wrong with their program?*

### **Percent Processed Food**

Like many districts, poor nutrition was a large obstacle for Claremont to surmount. When Rick Cota was hired by CUSD, the lunch program consisted entirely of processed food. The district's central kitchen, located at El Roble Intermediate School, did not even have the

appliances necessary to cook a meal. Thus nothing was prepared on site at any of the schools. This took a toll on the nutritional content of food served in the district. “It was open up a brown box that says whatever it is and heat it... so chicken nuggets,” said a laughing Cota. The program was completely starved of any fresh fruit or vegetables. In the case that vegetables showed up in a meal they were likely canned or frozen. Most meals served at Claremont High were from fast food vendors, not under NSLP regulations. The lack of healthy and fresh options made school meals a last resort for many students in the district. However, school lunch or breakfast was likely the only choice for students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. In many cases, health-conscious parents preferred to pack their own. Even if students brought nutritious home-packed lunches, they were still sold processed snacks from student stores. CUSD students and parents who desired nutritious options were at a disadvantage.

### **Staff Disconnect**

While CUSD’s Nutrition staff has always served meals effectively, they previously lacked a sense of pride or culinary prowess. Prior to Cota joining the district, many CUSD Nutrition Service employees felt no real connection to their work in the kitchen. Staff members were not actually preparing food. Instead they were merely reheating shipped items. There was no chance to engage with what was being served. Furthermore, “Lunch Ladies” typically have a poor reputation, similar to that of school lunch as welfare food. This has changed following the implementation of freshly prepared food. “Initially the staff was resistant to the change. Why work twice as hard for the same pay? “Now most of our staff is on the same page and feels good about what they are doing,” comments Cota. There is even displayable enthusiasm in the kitchen. Every Monday employees at El Roble Intermediate School try out a new recipe for fun in the district’s central kitchen. This is a far cry from merely unwrapping plastic. Employees can now feel good about what they are serving students and provide better options for themselves.

*VII. CUSD-What mechanisms have been used to improve their program?*

### **Meals From Scratch and Processed Food**

CUSD has improved the healthfulness of meals by way of meticulous planning. Currently only 30 percent of food served is processed. The reduction of processed food required CUSD to restructure their facilities. In the 2010-2011 school year, Cota reached out to the larger community and was able to get stoves, ovens, and other necessary appliances as donations. It seems almost unfathomable that somewhere called a kitchen would not even have these basic appliances. However, it is a reality that many cash-strapped districts face. Cota then showed some employees a few recipes and provided basic cooking instructions. Although some of the employees have worked at CUSD for multiple decades, this was the first time preparing lunch required any culinary prowess. “Now they cook on average about three times a week... It’s the right direction we want to go in,” says Cota. Cooking from scratch allows CUSD to have more control of what is going into the school from a food standpoint. The use of better ingredients has led to more community support. “Right off the bat parents responded, kids liked the food better,” reflects Cota.

However, serving meals made with whole, fresh ingredients requires a higher level of planning and organization than merely ordering shipped processed food. The bulk of most meals for all schools is prepared in the district’s central kitchen at El Roble. Food is then transported out to each school. On average, the elementary schools in the district receive about three lunches from scratch each week. Since the process is labor and time intensive, meal preparation is started around 5:30am each school day and finishes around 10am. Food is then stored and distributed to each school site. Food must be transported either warm or cool for safety reasons. This mandates that employees have access to the correct equipment and measurements as to escape any errors. Thus planning can be crucial in order to prevent any food-sourced illnesses, according to Cota.

Menus must also be planned well in advance in order to meet government standards and make certain that the most cost effective and nutritious ingredients are on hand when necessary. “I have to be about two months in advance so right now I am in the middle of preparing December[’s menu] so I can post it at least a month ahead so parents have the opportunity to look at it. We also have to commit to certain food purchases ahead of time. So I already know that I have turkey that I need for December. I am securing it now, looking at prices. It’s regulated. NSLP you have to give 15 day notice to parents for every month so every school district is supposed to do that” says Cota. By planning in advance, Cota can shop around to get the ingredients he wants at the best price possible.

Nutrition and variety take precedent when planning what items are featured at lunch. While some districts work hard to meet the needs of specific ethnic groups, Claremont relies on having a good variety of familiar dishes in order to hold the appetite of students. Cota comments, “The menu itself is basically from a health standpoint so really I don’t consider the demographic makeup. I feel that if we can make a healthy product, that appeals to most school kids. Our district has good representation of a lot of ethnicities. At this point there has not really been the need to target one group to meet their needs. We just serve a lot of variety.” Thus far Cota’s strategy has been a success. At many of the schools in Claremont, students from all demographics are purchasing lunch.

CUSD’s menus now feature weekly staples centered around freshness, nutrition, and environmental consciousness All schools in the district have adopted “Meatless Monday,” a component of Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! Campaign. Each Monday the featured entrée is completely vegetarian. It is often lower in fat content and has a lower carbon footprint than items with meat. CUSD also features “Fresh Food Friday’s” each week, another opportunity for students to eat an entrée made from scratch. Having weekly fixtures in the school lunch menus

makes it easier for parents to plan when they want their child to buy lunch by limiting guesswork. Even if they do not have a menu on hand, they will have a pretty good idea about what their child is eating for lunch.

By far, the most popular feature on the CUSD's menus is "Fresh Taco Days." Students I spoke to expressed that even if they bring their lunch other days of the week they will make sure to purchase lunch when the taco grill is offered. Taco days are also one of the most fresh and healthiest options, suggesting nutrition to be of value to CUSD's constituents. "Fresh Taco Days" involve a local man coming to each school to grill and prepare fresh tacos for students right in front of them. "Kids love it, they can get vegetarian, chicken, or carne asada," notes Cota. Cota's enthusiasm for the tacos was shared with the students I spoke to. Taco Days tend to be when participation peaks. Employees jokingly mentioned how they have to brace themselves on Tuesdays since it is their busiest day. On one occasion, the staff at El Roble recalled having a "low Tuesday" in which they only sold 170 taco meals when they usually hit around 190. On most occasions the schools will sell out.

In addition to the fresh tacos, the BBQ Grill at Claremont High is another popular option. The line is often so long that breaks must be set up as not to block off walkways. This was the longest wait I observed at either of the schools. However, students seemed patient and used the time to socialize with one another in line. Fellow students were grilling the burgers to fundraise for their club, as described on page 47. This institution seems to instill respect and appreciation for those preparing food, whether staff or peers. The grill allows students to purchase hamburgers grilled to order. Students can then dress their meal with fresh toppings. While burgers might not be the healthiest choice, this particular model is a much better substitute for prepackaged buns and patties with processed cheese, wrapped in plastic. Furthermore the burgers are served on buns from a local bakery, thereby using better ingredients.

CUSD's emphasis on fresh ingredients and nutrition seems to be well received by the students. With the purchase of each meal kids have the option to take locally sourced low-fat milk or a piece of fruit. Students are more likely to take advantage of milk in lower grades. By giving students the option to take items, rather than making them mandatory, ultimately leads to less waste. Some students at El Roble even feel comfortable enough with lunchtime staff to ask for an extra milk carton. While some may argue this is not good for revenue, the willingness of staff to oblige shows a friendly commitment to students as well as promoting good nutrition and fostering social relationships. Students at El Roble knew servers by name and vice versa. I observed students and employees greeting one another, indicating a degree of comfort, instead of as purely authoritative relationship.

Furthermore, students at all sites who purchase lunch are invited to take advantage of a serve-your-self salad bar. While the institution of school salad bars predates Rick Cota's arrival, there have been recent improvements in quality and nutrition. Until Cota arrived in 2009, all school's salad bars featured only nutrient-deprived iceberg lettuce. However, Cota developed a strategy to gradually incorporate healthier mixed greens into the bar, until iceberg became obsolete at the elementary schools and El Roble. However, this has been more difficult to implement at the High School level since students tastes are more accustomed to iceberg lettuce. Thus mixed greens and iceberg are served side by side at the high school. Ultimately, Cota intends to change the high school's salad bar as the younger students get older.

#### Incorporation of local food

Integrating locally sourced produce and local vendors into the lunch program has increased the nutrition as well as variety offerings within the CUSD. Currently CUSD offers apples from Yucaipa and Oak Glenn, Claremont-grown strawberries, as well as kiwi and oranges come from Redlands. However, this requires more management than using canned or frozen

items. CUSD must order produce more frequently since there is more concern about spoilage. Orders must also be carefully calculated out of concern of receiving too much or too little at once. CUSD receives shipments “everyday, anywhere from six in the morning to 2 in the afternoon. In order to get [many fruits and vegetables] fresh you have to get them with more frequency. Since we don’t have a large facility I can’t store a lot,” comments Cota. Lack of storage facilities and adequate freezers prevents CUSD from canning or freezing any leftover items. Thus planning is once again a crucial aspect to their program’s success. Otherwise they run the risk of losing money.

Additionally Claremont out-sources some of their cooking to local vendors who must comply with CUSD’s nutrition standards in order to gain a contract. This allows the district to serve more food and facilitates good relationships with local vendors. Contracting with local vendors can also provide a boost for the local economy by creating jobs. Some of the vendors have to hire more workers in order to spend the time necessary to make their food in compliance with CUSD’s standards. This can be time intensive but fruitful nonetheless. This allows CUSD to still serve favorites like pizza without comprising their standards for nutrition. Thus there is less risk of participation falling.

Currently CUSD works with Round Table Pizza, Chick-fil-A, and Subway as well as locally based restaurants like Dr. Grubbs. The Chick-fil-A chicken sandwiches are baked instead of the usual fried preparation. Their chicken sandwiches are often the first vendor item to run out at El Roble and the High School. Subway offers turkey, vegetable, or meatball sandwiches on whole-wheat rolls. Cota says that local vendors are mostly used “for food that we can’t really do for ourselves effectively. One of those is pizza. Round Table is the only [local pizza restaurant] that could provide pizza with fresh dough made fresh that day with real ingredients. Others use a lot of processed items so it was no different from the frozen pizza [CUSD] used to order.” Cota

notes that the vendors they use ultimately prepare food the way CUSD would if they had the capacity. Ideally, CUSD would prepare all food on site. Cota has chosen working with local vendors in order to maintain the quality of his program's food.

### **Government Resources**

CUSD's most innovative skill is the ability to maximize USDA resources while still providing a healthy product. They use the recipes provided for schools on the USDA website. However, CUSD makes an effort to substitute healthier or fresh ingredients to improve the overall quality of what is served. This allows CUSD to save money by not having to hire someone from the outside to develop recipes. Cota comments that, "I have to abide by the [federal nutrition] standards, but rather than choosing [pre-selected] processed foods to abide by them, we [choose ingredients] ourselves, actually following recipes put together by the government. The USDA has resources, many schools just choose not to use them. So whether it's a recipe for spaghetti or chicken we use the USDA recipes." Adapting recipes to fit the needs of CUSD does require some creativity since they prefer to avoid using USDA surpluses. "We don't use many [government surpluses], mainly because of the poor quality... There are a few things we'll bring in like commodity turkey ham. If I want to use [a recipe] that maybe called for ham we'll use turkey ham for the health reasons but rarely. Most anything commodity wise is either canned or frozen." CUSD uses the USDA resources to the healthiest extent possible. At El Roble, I observed a USDA-inspired penne pasta dish modified with low-fat cheese and a fresh tomato sauce, showing some ingenuity. Furthermore CUSD provide nutritional analyses for prepared food on their website, using the NUTRIKIDS® Menu Planning and Nutritional Analysis software, developed during the Clinton administration. This provides valuable information for parents and students, while simultaneously using government software.

### **Physical Set Up of Lunch**

The physical set up of CUSD's lunch maximizes efficiency, providing students with a chance to both eat their food and play. Schools in the district have mobile food carts, each featuring a local vendor. The lunch carts are loaded with food in the kitchen or school prep rooms and wheeled outside to sell to students. Carts are more spread out at the high school since lines tend to be longer. Claremont High also has multiple carts serving the same items, making lines shorter and more convenient. Additionally school sites have a window for students to purchase the freshly prepared items as well as get trays to use at the salad bar. At El Roble Intermediate the salad bar is located adjacent to the fresh food window and just yards away from the lunch stations. This makes it easy for students to take advantage of it regardless of what they chose as their main entrée. I noticed several students making salads as their main entrée while others only approached the salad bar to get cut fruit. A surprising number of students created salads using a variety of vegetables as well as toppings like sunflower seeds. However, the salad bar at Claremont High is located away from most of the vendors. It requires students to go to walk a multipurpose room to access it. This makes it less likely that students will seek it out after waiting in line to purchase another item.

Each school has come up with unique strategies to make sure students are served as quickly as possible. El Roble is the district's only intermediate school, giving it a much larger student body. Thus they hold two different lunch periods so students can get their lunch as quickly as possible rather than waiting in lines twice the length. This also cuts down on the amount of staff that needs to be present for lunch. All students in the district pay using money loaded on to their id card. Cards can also store information as to whether or not students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, preventing them from having to stay in a separate line. Claremont High has a large student body on a very spread out campus, making efficiency crucial. Thus students are only allowed to put money on their id cards before 10am as to not slow

down the lines during the lunch period. CUSD has also implemented a system in which students can owe up to twenty dollars on their card, making it less likely that any student will go without eating lunch.

The physical set up of lunch in Claremont also allows students who bought their lunch to socialize and eat with students purchasing lunch. In other districts students may get held up waiting in lines to purchase food, and not get this opportunity. It is also beneficial that students tend to actually eat their lunch in the areas near the food stations in CUSD. Quick lines also make kids more likely to choose the meal that most appeals to them since there is little concern about being separated for long from friends eating from different stations. Most importantly, students actually eat their food once purchased, proving the set up to be a success. CUSD minimizes the obstacles and distractions that might lead them to do otherwise.

#### Education components

CUSD has also made an effort to integrate educational components into their meal program. This provides students with a positive way to interact with and learn more about food. Food-focused curriculum also serves to reconnect students with food and where it comes from. Beginning in the sixth grade, students are provided with chances to help prepare food in the central kitchen. This is usually done as part of a class. Elementary school students are not provided with kitchen opportunities for safety reasons. “ We are hoping to start an academy up at the high school, since right now there’s not really a cooking class. There’s just some small opportunities,” notes Cota. If the program sustains popularity, culinary opportunities are likely to increase.

In addition to the kitchen, the district’s gardens provide another good setting for students to learn about food. “The garden program is a big opportunity involving all kids in all grade levels to participate in the garden and see how that relates to the food that they eat,” comments

Cota. El Roble features one of the most successful district gardens. There are even a few chickens on site. The CUSD has hired a part-time community coordinator, Dessa D'Aquila, for the 2011-2012 school year. Similar to Cota, D'Aquila has restaurant experience and is passionate about sustainability. She has been put in charge of managing events like garden cleanups as well as serving as a liaison between all the schools in the district. Furthermore D'Aquila helps teach an elective course in the school garden at El Roble during their tutoring period. Each school day afternoon students at El Roble have an opportunity to receive any necessary tutoring or attending an elective course of their choice. While students do not have to attend any specific course, she has noticed her class slowly grow with many of the same students attending daily. D'Aquila engages them with activities like drawing their own ideal garden or picking lettuce. The class provides students with a different way to relate what they are eating back to the environment while providing a nice break from traditional curriculum.

### **Volunteer Involvement**

Cota's program has captured both the interest and appetites of both students and community members. There is now a considerable volunteer effort to improve the district's gardens and other aspects of the program. A local nonprofit group, Sustainable Claremont, has hosted a few school garden tours. This provides community members with a chance to learn about the programs in Claremont schools and often inspires them to get involved. The 2011 school year has had garden cleanup days at both Oakmont Elementary and Vista Elementary. There has also been composting at El Roble. These events are typically held on weekends so the general public will be available to help out. Students and parents often attend together. This provides maintenance for the gardens, without the district having to spend additional money. Furthermore members of the community are volunteering to help with the educational components "We have grad students from Cal Poly [Pomona] coming in that are nutritionists to

do some educational presentations,” says Cota. Thus CUSD is taking full advantage of the larger community’s skills and interests.

### **Food Waste**

CUSD has also begun to implement more waste management mechanisms making the program more environmentally friendly as well as cost-effective for the district. Portion control is one of the most effective methods of controlling for food waste. CUSD abides by the federally mandated portion sizes for different age groups. Thus elementary school students receive smaller portions than high schoolers. Students at all schools are served fresh entrees by employees in order to receive an appropriate portion size. Vendor items like Subway and Chick-fil-A have already packaged meals to a specific size. There is an observable difference in size between the pizza slices served at Claremont High and El Roble Intermediate students. However, students of all ages get to serve themselves at the salad bar under the supervision of an employee. “We basically are making sure that they are taking a variety of items and not just cheese and ranch dressing, “ comments Cota. Thus employees are controlling for both waste and nutrition. As an alternative to the trashcan, each school has an area for students to place food items like apples or milk that they have taken but chose not to eat. This is beneficial to other students and cuts down on waste.

In addition to food waste, the district has begun to show concern about the materials used for preparing, storing, and serving food. According to website they use 100 percent post consumer recyclable paper products. They do not use any Styrofoam products. Labeled recycling containers are available on all campuses. They are conveniently located prompting students to actually use them. Among most school sites there is not a lot of visible litter following the lunch period. However, there have recently been some issues with litter at the high school. CHS Director Gina Mattson attributes this to the newest class of students. Thus more cleanup

enforcement may be instituted if there is not improvement. The district has also begun to compost as means of discarding food waste and fertilizing their gardens. Composting ultimately cuts down on the amount of waste from the lunch program and helps save money on things like fertilizer.

### **Community Outreach and Response**

For the past six years, the CUSD has held an annual food fair as a way of interacting with parents and students as well as gaining financial support and participation for the lunch program. The food fair is held every August prior to school starting. Community members are invited to come and try the food that will be featured on the school lunch menu for the coming academic year. This gives parents a chance to meet the people who are making their child's food and provide feedback. It also provides a chance for the district to sell the program to parents who may be unsure they want their child to buy lunch at school due to the program's prior reputation. School districts receive funding by way of reimbursement from the State at the end of each month. Thereby the more lunches CUSD serves, the more funding they will get ("School Lunch"). The Food Fair also presents an opportunity to advertise volunteer opportunities to parents. While the food fair is a financial investment, it is also a great opportunity to get more support from parents and the community.

### **Technology**

The Claremont Unified School District is using technology to involve the school community in their lunch program. The CUSD Nutrition Services website provides a multitude of resources for parents looking for information on their child's meals. The CUSD website is both user friendly as well as visually inviting. The front page features photos of children in the garden and kitchen, as well as a picture of Rick Cota. This serves to reinforce the idea that real people are making the food and children are both engaging with and eating it. Parents can

download the lunch application in both English and Spanish. There are also documents provided to see if your child is eligible for free or reduced lunch. Furthermore, there are instructions provided on different prepayment methods so parents can ensure that their child does not owe money. This likely saves time for parents who need clarification on policies. Thus parents are not in the dark about what they are buying into. Menus for the current and following month are available for all schools for both lunch and breakfast. There are also nutrition facts for those who are interested. Although the USDA requires that all school districts provide nutritional analysis for meals, not everyone does so according to Cota. Thus Claremont makes sure to do what is required in addition to their innovations.

The CUSD website also provides a good deal of nutrition related resources for families and students. The revamped food pyramid, ChooseMyPlate.gov, part of Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign, is featured as a link on the site. There are also tips for healthy breakfasts, for students not participating in the breakfast program. Students can even follow links to nutritional games. Although these resources may seem frivolous, their presence indicates a certain degree of care and thought going into the lunch program and the community it is serving.

CUSD began using social media this school year as another way to involve the larger school community in their nutrition program. The use of Twitter and Facebook facilitate opportunities for parents to keep tabs on and receive updates on their child's meal program even if they do not have the time to physically visit the school or attend a meeting. The social media sites also serve to inform and invite community members to participate in events like composting and school garden cleanups. After events are held, pictures are posted to Facebook. This serves as a good way to publicize events as well as facilitate a larger community on the Internet.

### **Jamie Oliver Food Revolution**

Claremont's ability to transform a failing lunch program in Los Angeles County has even captured national media attention. Jamie Oliver, a celebrity chef from the United Kingdom, started a television series called "Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution" in 2010. The show follows Oliver's team around America as they work on improving sub par public school lunch programs operating in unhealthy areas around the country (Food Revolution). The Claremont Unified School District was offered the chance to be on the show as a way of both displaying and improving their program with Oliver's help. However, Cota ultimately decided against it. "We decided that it was not in our best interest since they would not release any ability to promote or discuss being involved in the show... We kind of figured what is the point if we can't even talk about it," comments Cota. Regardless of being on the show the attention has been beneficial to CUSD. Oliver's team still wanted to recognize Cota and the district for "doing things the right way." Thus Cota was featured on the website. This attention has prompted members of other school districts to visit Claremont to learn more about helping their own programs. "We've utilized some of [Food Revolution's] recipes [and] looked at some of their techniques so it was win-win for the district," says Cota.

#### *VIII. CUSD-What still needs to be addressed?*

##### **More Meals From Scratch**

Integrating fresh food is still an ongoing process at CUSD. Although 70 percent of processed food has been eliminated, a quarter of all meals still come from processed ingredients. Increased participation is crucial to raising funds and decreasing the percent of processed food used in the lunch program. If CUSD can get a larger portion of students to purchase lunch at full price, they will be able to increase their budget for ingredients. Thus selling kids on the meals is crucial when it is a matter of preference as to whether or not they purchase lunch at school or bring from home. "We have to make sure we are all in this together. Getting the kids trying new

things has been an obstacle. Most of the time if you make a dish and they are like ‘that look’s nasty’ but ... all you need is for them to try one bite and they will say ‘ this is great’ ”, reflects Cota. Encouraging healthy eating habits may always be a struggle. However, this may get easier as the current meal program continues.

The Breakfast menu at all sites is in dire need of improvement as well. The majority of options are not prepared fresh. Although, most kids do not eat breakfast at school, the portion of kids who do are more likely to be receiving free or reduced meals. Thus they are less likely to be receiving a healthier option or anything at home. Furthermore many students do not arrive at school early enough to purchase breakfast. Although, I did not have the opportunity to observe breakfast being served, I did have a chance to read the menu at Claremont High School. Most options were cold and processed. This included cereal and milk as well as Little Debbie “Honey Bun” breakfast cake. Eating breakfast is crucial to academic performance, especially for young children (Basch 635). Thus offering sugar-loaded items like “Honey Buns” can be both detrimental to student’s health and academic achievements. Ideally, the breakfast program would be able to make use of fresh, nutritious ingredients like the eggs laid by the chickens at El Roble’s garden. However, this would require more labor and funding, both of which are already limited.

### **Local Produce Within Twenty Miles**

Cota hopes to increase the amount of local produce used in meals and the salad bars over the course of the next year. Currently the program still uses some produce grown out of state or in other countries. Ultimately he hopes to have all produce come from growers within twenty miles of Claremont. However, it may be difficult to adjust recipes to only incorporate seasonal ingredients. It would also require all orders to be extremely accurate as not to lose any money. “The problem is if we over order, [there is] spoilage so we have to really keep it tight. So

hopefully if we take good enough numbers, we'll know how many apples we go through a week so we know what to order", says Cota. Buying from local growers can also be difficult since they are more likely to have inconsistent crops. Thus CUSD would need to remain flexible in instances where orders fall through. This would likely require consistent communication with growers.

### **Junk Food and Overall Nutrition**

While CUSD does offer many healthy meal options, I was surprised by the large amount of unhealthy food and processed snacks available to students. The students I spoke to at El Roble regard Subway sandwiches as one of the healthier options. However, some noted that there is the option for a meatball sandwich, which is likely high in fat and sodium content. Nonetheless students can opt for the vegetable or turkey sandwiches instead. Thus it is crucial that students receive nutrition education so they know what choice is right for them.

I was disappointed by the pizza offerings at the schools. Firstly, pizza is offered daily. I found this surprising given the limited frequency with which pizza was offered in my own school lunch experience. Secondly, the information I had gathered on the program, apart from my observations, stressed the prevalence of vegetable pizza. However, it is not even an option at El Roble. Claremont High School does offer students the choice of cheese, pepperoni, and vegetable pizza. This is somewhat problematic as the vegetable pizza is not offered to the younger students at El Roble. It appears that in some cases item popularity may take precedence over health.

Furthermore, Claremont High students can buy Taco Bell tacos and nachos as a la carte options. The nachos appear to be drenched in processed cheese. Fortunately these are not offered as a main entrée, making them more expensive than opting for a normal meal. However, not all meal entrees are optimal either. Processed chimichangas wrapped in plastic are still served at the

schools. Employees at El Roble informed me that they often see the same students at their cart, suggesting that many students regularly choose to eat the same entrees. While some students may opt for a salad or a low fat sandwich, others may be regularly gravitating towards these less nutritious options. Further studies might be done to examine the variety of foods students are actually consuming.

I also observed a significant amount of processed candy and snacks offered at the middle school and high school level in Claremont. El Roble has a snack stand featuring baked chips, muffins, and artificially flavored slushies. Claremont High Students can buy similar items as well as candy. While some districts use snack stores as a way for students to fundraise for clubs and teams, this is not necessarily the case in Claremont. Claremont High allows various clubs to cycle through and help serve lunch. Portions of lunch sales then go to the club's budget. This eliminates the need for snack stores. However, the district likely benefits from the extra revenue at the snack stores.

### **Gardens**

While all schools in the district have gardens, some are certainly better than others. El Roble has the most vivacious garden, with its abundance of leafy greens and slew of poultry. I could observe kale and lettuce growing abundantly. Plants are labeled with student-painted signs, indicating a degree of interest and involvement in its contents. In contrast, the garden at Claremont High School is not even recognizable as a garden. D'Aquila and I had attempted to locate it on our own, when walking through the campus. It had to be pointed out to us, as we had overlooked it on our first try. It is located on a sloped patch of land in between two buildings. Currently, the garden consists of dried overgrown weeds on rocky soil. It was left unattended over the summer and has not recovered.

However, the High School's garden does have potential. There is already an irrigation system set up. Furthermore Claremont High has an environmental club that may be interested in restoring and maintaining the garden. This will also require efforts on the part of D'Aquila to make sure that there is someone on the district level who can manage the utilities and landscaping. Ultimately, the Claremont High garden could become a valuable part of the Young Chef's Academy as well as the regular high school curriculum. It is also crucial that the younger students continue their gardening experience at the high school level. Currently, D'Aquila is working on getting all the school's gardens to an adequate level of productivity.

### **Waste**

Although the district is waste conscious there is still a significant amount of food waste when too much food is prepared or served. Because of the large student body size of Claremont High and El Roble CUSD faces some difficulty when planning how much food to prepare for each meal. "We ask kids to take what they are going to eat. They are always welcome to come back for more when it comes to that kind of thing. Generally, there's always going to be some waste since some kids may be finicky they might not want it or maybe they just wanted to go play", comments Cota. Careful tabs are taken as to how many meals are sold during each lunch period. This is used to help gage how much food to prepare. Even so, participation can be unpredictable.

Even the most popular items can be inconsistent. Unfortunately, extra food cannot be served again, according to regulation, making planning crucial. At Claremont High, excess food is offered to food service members to take home or brought to staff or classrooms after lunch. Gina Mattson, head of Claremont High's lunch program commented that some days extra food just gets thrown out because workers are so tired of the same menu items. However, some staff

members at El Roble found items like the Subway sandwich appealing to take home.

Nonetheless the sandwiches are often quick to sell out.

### **Funding and Participation**

Many of the challenges CUSD faces come from a limited budget and facilities. Although they do their best to maximize resources and efficiency, there are still constraints. “[The central kitchen] is a small facility but we use every inch wisely. In some ways sometimes we will prepare three quarters of a meal and have the sites finish off the meal by adding one last ingredient or putting it back in the oven. ...Our constraints are usually with budget, I only have so [much money] to buy food,” comments Cota. He states that in his ideal program there would be “no processed foods would be ideal and kids would be happy to eat it. It’s simple.” While these may seem like tangible goals, it will likely take additional funding to achieve a program using only fresh ingredients. Unless the state passes legislation for additional funding for school lunch programs, this will likely have to come from sources outside the school.

Participation is one way that funding can increase. If more students pay the full price for lunch, CUSD will be given more money by the State (“School Lunch”). Cota notes that participation has risen during the past three years, consistent with the national trend (“National School Lunch Annual Summary”). While much of this is from enthusiasm about the district’s new program, a portion is likely from increased free or reduced lunches. Thus effort must continue to increase full price buy-in, by selling the program to parents.

### **Discussion**

Federally sponsored school meal programs are not a lost cause. However, it is unlikely they will be remedied solely by the government. Fortunately, many school districts currently benefit from volunteerism and donations coming from sources outside the state or federal

government. Nonetheless schools that lack these resources and funding can still implement positive change using only government resources.

*IX. Worst Case Scenario- Existing Resources*

Schools do not necessarily need a large grant or a celebrity chef to serve healthy meals. At minimum all school districts in America have access to USDA's Healthy Meal Resource System (HMRS). However, many schools do not use this to their full advantage. By accessing the HMRS online, schools can find recipes that meet federal nutrition requirements. They can also search recipes by ingredient, making it easy to make an acceptable meal using what is at hand. Furthermore the HMRS provides recipes tailored to specific dietary needs. HMRS also provides nutritional analysis for recipes. This saves cash strapped districts from having to pay money in order to provide this information to students and parents.

Districts should attempt to limit the amount of processed or competitive foods sold at school. Although snacks can provide schools with extra revenue, they can also reduce overall school lunch participation. Students who are paying for lunch out of pocket may choose to buy a processed snack rather than a full meal. This can decrease the amount of funding the district receives for free or reduced lunches. Furthermore, competitive foods and vending machines can lead to food waste when kids opt to purchase and fill up on unhealthful snacks in place of the main meal. Thus, by limiting the amount of processed foods on school campuses lunch programs are more likely to be used and students are more likely to seek healthy options.

School districts should do their best to encourage school lunch participation among all students and even staff. By creating a more cohesive community around school food, there is more likely to be improvement and concern over what is being served. Teachers can help by relating any health or science curriculum to nutrition in a way that students can understand and relate to the food they are eating. In many cases there has been a disconnect between the two.

Prepackaged items that are heated rarely resemble the ingredients found in traditional food pyramids. By providing students with adequate nutritional curriculum they will be more likely to make conscious decisions about what they are eating in the cafeteria. This could also lead to activism on the part of students if they deem their lunch options inadequate.

*X. Best Case Scenario- Community Resources*

Under the best circumstances, a school's lunch program would use only locally sourced ingredients. This is not as easy to do as ordering large-scale government commodities. However, local ingredients are likely to be more fresh and nutritious than frozen or canned ingredients traveling long distances. Furthermore local ingredients can help struggling farmers markets and strengthen local economies. Ingredients would be delivered fresh daily and all food would be prepared on site. However, this requires schools to have adequate kitchen space.

Many schools are fortunate enough to benefit from community efforts and donations. It is crucial that schools take advantage of these resources if they are offered. In some cases outside individuals may need to be persistent with school administrators. There is often the perception that it will require extra work on the part of principles or staff to partner with outside groups. This can cause schools to be reluctant or not take advantage of these opportunities. Parents may prove to be the most effective advocates since they also have the ability to vote with their dollars by paying for their child to participate. However, many districts in need of improvement may not have parents who are available or informed enough to help. Thus nonprofit groups and other advocacy groups can be crucial in getting private donations for additional funding, equipment, as well as staffing.

Ideally, access to school lunch should not be dependant upon socioeconomic status. Policies should be such that students feel comfortable enough to ask for lunch when needed, regardless of whether they have the money. No one should go hungry. Eating lunch is both

beneficial for one's health and academic performance. Students should not have to go without it in the case they do not have the money.

*XI. Best of Both- CUSD's Hybrid Model*

Ultimately it may be most practical for schools to take advantage of both community and existing resources to facilitate the best lunch program within their means. Rick Cota has done this effectively with the Claremont Unified School District. CUSD makes best use of the government-sponsored resources available in combination with those from the outside. Thus Claremont is using both community factors and existing factors to improve their lunch program. Rick Cota uses the recipes provided by the USDA in the healthiest way possible, by choosing to substitute local ingredients or healthier alternatives in place of USDA commodities. Thus he does not have to pay for outside meal planning resources while still serving healthy options to students.

Cota also receives outside help from community members and local businesses, allowing Claremont to maximize their existing resources. He reached out for donations in order to gain the basic appliances necessary to cook meals from scratch. Cota's program demonstrates that it is possible to reshape the presence of fast food in school lunch to incorporate better standards for nutrition. Cota's program makes use of fast food vendor's cooking capacities. However, in order to contract with the Claremont School district, businesses must be willing to restructure their recipes. There is still incentive for businesses to contract with the district since they are provided with a regular and consistent contact for nine months of the year. This is especially valuable since business can fluctuate greatly during times of economic downturn.

CUSD has effectively eliminated any stigma associated with participating in a school lunch program. Students pay using preloaded ID cards. The use of a digital system makes it impossible to tell whether a student is receiving reduced or free lunch. Furthermore the district's

payment system encourages students to get lunch regardless of whether they have money loaded on their card since they are allowed to owe money. Thus satisfying student hunger takes precedent over finances.

Overall, Cota is most concerned about providing students with a healthy product they are happy to eat. This is apparent in his willingness to take student suggestions into account. Cota uses the USDA resources provided to the school in tandem with resources from wider community as to maximize his budget, resources, and the overall nutrition and efficiency of the district's meal program. It is possible to feed students without harming their health.

Encouragingly, Claremont's meal program is replicable for many schools in California. All districts receive the same amount of funding for their lunch programs. Thereby they are working with the same financial resources. It can be argued that Claremont is better endowed because of community donations. However, CUSD serves less competitive foods in vending machines than many schools. Therefore, they have cut themselves off from one source of funding. While certainly not ideal, it is possible for schools to raise money to use better ingredients, improve appliances, or maintain gardens by way of competitive food. In this case, it would be best if districts put effort into placing more healthful items like granola bars or baked chips in vending machines as an alternative or replacement to candy bars or fried chips.

While it is true that what is served to kids at school may be the best and only food they get during the week, it is a sorry excuse not to serve nutritious food. Therefore having health-conscious federal policymakers is also key, but not an end all solution. Despite efforts from some politicians, serving healthy lunch in America continues to be a battle against a budget-focused congress. Economic downturn has augmented this, as there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

The fate of school lunch in America is dependent upon individual efforts. It is quite possible for a public school to improve its lunch program with the resources at hand. However, it is just as easy to serve unhealthy meals using the same recipe database and poorly chosen ingredients. Change ultimately relies on the willingness of school authorities to make good choices. It is often necessary that districts hold themselves to a higher standard if they wish to run a beneficial lunch program. Improving school lunch will certainly be a fight, but nonetheless a battle worth winning.

*Works Cited*

1. Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., Tahan, K. (2011). The Condition of Education 2011 ( CES 2011-033). U.S. Department Education, National Center for Education Statistics Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
2. "About Claremont Unified School District." Claremont Unified School District. CUSD, 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 11 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.cusd.claremont.edu/about.php>>.
3. Basch, Charles E. (2011). "Breakfast and the Achievement Gap Among Urban Minority Youth". *The Journal of school health (0022-4391)*, 81 (10), p. 635.
4. Bevans, Kathryn B., Betty Sanchez, Rachel Teneralli, and Christopher B. Forrest. "Children's Eating Behavior: The Importance of Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools." *Journal of School Health* 81.7 (2011): 424-29. Print.
5. "Bush Team Proposes Reversal of School Lunch Meat Standards." Washington Post. Los Angeles Times, 5 Apr. 2001. Web. 8 Nov. 2011. <<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/apr/05/news/mn-47184>>.
6. "California County Healthy Rankings." County Health Rankings. 2011. Web. 17 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/california/overall-rankings>>.
7. Cashman, Linda, Madhuri Tripurana, Tim Englund, and Ethan A. Bergman. "Food Group Preferences of Elementary School Children Participating in the National School Lunch Program." *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management* 34.1 (2010). Print.
8. Cooper, Ann, and Lisa M. Holmes. *Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children*. New York, NY: Collins, 2006. Print.
9. Cota, Rick. "General Program Overview." Personal interview. 20 Oct. 2011.

10. Dedias, Antonia, Dana Kindermann, and David Pimentel. "School Meals: A Nutritional and Environmental Perspective." *Perspectives in biology and medicine* 53.2 (2010): 249,249-256. PAIS. PROQUESTMS. 3 Nov. 2011
11. Education Data Partnership. "District Reports-Claremont Unified School District." Ed-Data. Education Data Partnership, 2011. Web. 11 Nov. 2011. <[http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/\\_layouts/EdDataClassic/profile.asp?fyr=1011](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/_layouts/EdDataClassic/profile.asp?fyr=1011)>.
12. "The Evolution of BMI Values of US Adults: 1882-1986." *100 Years of Obesity*. Vox, 31 Aug. 2010. Web. 21 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.voxeu.org/index.php?q=node/5448>>.
13. "Healthy Meals Resource System." Healthy Meals Resource System. USDA, 9 Nov. 2011. Web. 21 Nov. 2011. <[http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=14](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14)>.
14. Food Revolution Team. "Rick Cota: Claremont, CA Food Revolutionary | Jamie Oliver (US)." Jamie Oliver | Official Site for Recipes, Books, Tv, Restaurants and Food Revolution. Jamie Oliver Foundation, 31 May 2011. Web. 8 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.jamieoliver.com/us/foundation/jamies-food-revolution/news-content/rick-cota-nutrition-services-director-cu>>.
15. Gottlieb, Richard. "Cafeteria Food Fight." *Los Angeles Times* 2 Oct. 2011: A31. Print. "Child Nutrition Combating Hunger and Obesity in America." *Congressional Digest* 89.10 (2010): 289. Print.
16. Gottlieb, Robert, and Anupama Joshi. *Food Justice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2010. Print.
17. History of Agricultural Price-Support and Adjustment Program 1933-84 15
18. Jackson, David. "Obama Signs School Lunch Law -- and Maintains Marital Bliss." *USA Today*. Garnett Co. Inc., 13 Dec. 2010. Web. 8 Nov. 2011.

<<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/theoval/post/2010/12/obama-signs-law-requiring-healthier-school-meals/1>>.

19. Johnson, Cara M., Carolyn Bednar, Junehee Kwon, and Alissa Gustof. "Comparison of Nutrient Content and Cost of Home-Packed Lunches to Reimbursable School Lunch Nutrient Standards and Prices." *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management* 33.2 (2009). Print.
20. Kalafa, Amy. *Lunch Wars: How to Start a School Food Revolution and Win the Battle for Our Children's Health*. New York: Jeremy P. Tacher/Penguin, 2011. Print.
21. Kohan, Eddie G. Web log post. Obama Foodorama. Web. 8 Nov. 2011.  
<<http://obamafoodorama.com>>
22. Levine, Susan. *School Lunch Politics: the Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008. Print.
23. MacVean, Mary. "Celebrity Chef Jamie Oliver, of 'Food Revolution' Fame, Speaks to California School Nutritionists." *Los Angeles Times*. 17 Jan. 2011. Web. 11 Sept. 2011. <<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jan/17/local/la-me-oliver-20110117>>.
24. "National School Lunch Annual Summary." *Food & Nutrition Service Home Page*. United States Department of Agriculture, 1 Dec. 2011. Web. 07 Dec. 2011.  
<<http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/slsummar.htm>>.
25. Newman, Constance, Katherine Ralston, and Annette Clauson. "Balancing Nutrition, Participation, and Cost in the National School Lunch Program." *Amber Waves* 6.4 (2008): 32,32-39.
26. Nutrition Services Department, RUSD Center for Food and Justice, Occidental College. *Riverside Unified School District Farmers' Market Salad Bar Program. Salad Bars 2 Schools*. UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Page

- 10 of 10 Center of Excellence for Training and Research Translation, Sept. 2009.  
Web. 20 Nov. 2011. <<http://saladbars2schools.org/pdf/Riverside-SBP.pdf>>.
27. "Nutrition Services." CUSD Nutrition Services. Claremont Unified School District. Web.  
11 Nov. 2011. <<http://cusdnutrition.creativetouchschoolmedia.com/>>.
28. Perry, Cheryl L (02/01/2004). "A Randomized School Trial of Environmental Strategies  
to Encourage Fruit and Vegetable Consumption among Children". *Health  
education & behavior* (1090-1981), 31 (1), p. 65.
29. Pollan, Michael. "You Are What You Grow." *New York Times Magazine*. 22 Apr. 2007.  
Web. 30 Oct. 2011. <<http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/you-are-what-you-grow/>>.
30. Poppendieck, Janet. *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*. Berkeley: University  
of California, 2010. Print.
31. Santos, Fernanda. "Public Schools Face the Rising Costs of Serving Lunch." *New York  
Times*. *New York Times*, 19 Sept. 2011. Web. 1 Nov. 2011. A12.  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/20/education/20lunch.html>>.
32. "School Lunch." *California Department of Education*. California Department of  
Education, 3 Mar. 2011. Web. 7 Dec. 2011.  
<<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/nslp.asp#paid>>.
33. "School Lunch Proposals Set Off a Dispute." *New York Times*. 1 Nov. 2011. Web. 3 Nov.  
2011. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/02/us/school-lunch-proposals-set-off-a-dispute.html>>.
34. "School meal programs: competitive foods are widely available and generate substantial  
revenues for schools". United States Government Accountability Office, August  
2005. iii 58 pp., 1, p. iii.

35. Stolberg, Sheryl G. "Childhood Obesity Battle Is Taken Up by First Lady." New York Times 9 Feb. 2010, New York ed., Health sec.: A16. NYTimes.com. New York Times. Web.  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/10/health/nutrition/10obesity.html?scp=2&sq=let's%20move%20campaign&st=cse>>.
36. *Two Angry Moms*. Dir. Amy Kalafa. Perf. Amy Kalafa, Susan Rubin and Alice Waters. Snag Films, 2010. DVD.
37. United States. The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. Child Nutrition Reauthorization Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act Of 2010 Fact Sheet. 13 Dec. 2010. Web.  
<[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf)>.
38. Vivigal, Lisa. *Meals Served in Public Schools*. Rep. no. ED 406 721. Physicians Committee For Responsible Medicine, Aug. 1996. Web.
39. Waters, Alice, Daniel Duane, and David Liittschwager. *Edible Schoolyard: a Universal Idea*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2008. Print.