LUNCH SHAMING

Lunch Shaming

In order to keep the body moving, a nutritious and healthy diet is needed. Unfortunately, children in school might not get enough nutritious food in their diets with the lunches they serve and they are getting shamed for not having enough money to pay for lunch. We are going to discuss United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) federal lunch program regulations, the national school lunch and breakfast programs, talk about a local school program and policy to collect unpaid lunch debt, factors or barriers affecting whether or not a family will apply for free breakfast and lunch, describe lunch shaming policies and local school districts or states restricting lunch shaming, importance of nutrition for growth and development, and the importance of nutrition for being a successful learner.

Lunch Regulations

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) sets regulations for lunch programs so children are able to eat instead of starve, while also trying to have the food be nutritious rather than containing excess amounts of calories. As the lunch ladies are handing out food for kids to eat, “The U.S. Department of Agriculture has made permanent its rules that eased restrictions on the amount of grain and lean protein,” (Bald, 2014. paragraph 1). Now that the USDA has eased up on some of the restrictions, they, “...drafted the now-amended rules on maximum weekly servings of meat, meat substitutes, and grains as part of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.” (Bald, 2014. paragraph 3). Having this in place, “Advocates for the federal standards created after the passage of Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act have said school cafeterias can help students from healthy eating habits that will last in adulthood.” (Bald, 2014. paragraph 15). Starting these healthy eating habits will lead to a healthy, long-lived life.
LUNCH SHAMING

The lunch programs started in the 1900’s because, “Private charities and local school boards provide funding for school lunches in some locations in response to concern over learning abilities of malnourished students.” (Guthrie, Newman, & Ralston, 2009, pg 6). In 1946, The National School Lunch Act (NSLA) includes requirements such as meals needing to meet minimum nutritional standards, lunches must be available to low-income students for free or a reduced price, and the school lunches must use surplus commodities. As this program helps low-income children in the schools, another regulation was passed in 1966. The Child Nutrition Act (CNA) funds a two-year program for school breakfasts, and finally became a permanent law in 1975. While this program was underway, another program by the name of Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, came about in 1968, making it possible for children to get food during the summer (Guthrie, Newman, & Ralston, 2009, pg 7). The Farm Bill of 2002 provided $6 million for fruits and vegetables, whether they are fresh or dried, they would be served in designated schools in four states (Guthrie, Newman, & Ralston, 2009, pg 8). The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 adds on to the Farm Bill of 2002. This Act expanded the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to all States, with participating elementary schools to have the children with low-income families get free or reduced lunch (Guthrie, Newman, & Ralston, 2009, pg 9-10). Finally, in 2009, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided $100 million in the equipment grants to improve the quality and safety of school meals, expand participation, and increase the energy efficiency (Guthrie, Newman, & Ralston, 2009, pg 10). As these regulations made by the USDA are listed, the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program will be talked about next.
LUNCH SHAMING

National School Lunch and Breakfast Program

"The present and future health and well-being of schoolchildren are profoundly affected by their food and nutrient intakes and the maintenance of healthy body weight." (Institution of Medicine, 2008, pg 5). The national breakfast and lunch program has been a huge revision process over the years. The Nutrition Standards and Meal Requirements for National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs by The Institution of Medicine has laid out revisions and what the national lunch and breakfast program consists of. Making it possible for all kids to eat breakfast and lunch at school, they have served more than 30 million children per day. They base this off of the family's income, lowering the price for their meal or making it free. The school breakfast and lunch for kids may be 50% of a child's calorie intake for the day. The school breakfast and lunch should meet the recommendations for a healthy eating style according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The challenges schools face to meeting those requirements are food safety standards, food supply, keeping foods appetizing to all preferences, and money.

In The Nutrition Standards and Meal Requirements for National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs: Phase 1 by the Institution of Medicine, it lays out the guidelines for the breakfast and lunch program and the standards they must meet, including:

Criterion 1. The Nutrition Standards and Meal Requirements are consistent with current dietary guidance and nutrition recommendations to promote health—as exemplified by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Dietary Reference Intakes—with the ultimate goal of improving children's diets by reducing the apparent prevalence of inadequate and excessive intakes of food, nutrients, and calories.
LUNCH SHAMING

Criterion 2. The Nutrition Standards and Meal Requirements will be considered on the basis of age-grade groups that are consistent with the current age-gender categories used for specifying reference values and with widely used school grade configurations.

Criterion 3. The Nutrition Standards and Meal Requirements will result in the simplification of the menu planning and monitoring processes, and they will be compatible with the development of menus that are practical to prepare and serve and that offer nutritious foods and beverages that appeal to students.

Criterion 4. The Nutrition Standards and Meal Requirements will be sensitive to program costs. (Institution of Medicine, 2008, pg 6). Even with schools trying to meet these recommendations the committee did a study and compared their results to the MyPyramid (which is now MyPlate), and most of the children between the ages 5-18 did not meet the recommendations for fruit, vegetables, whole grains, total meat and beans, and dairy. The data in 2008 showed that children were consuming more calories, solid fats, and added sugar than the recommendation. Overall, the children in 2008 were not consuming the recommended amounts for a healthy nutrition balance. Since this study, it has been revised and children now have the availability to eat the recommended amounts during school breakfast and lunch. With every meal, they are now provided with milk, fruit, and a portion of vegetables to help them meet their recommendations. With these recommendations now in place, local school districts will show their lunch shaming practices.

Local Lunch Shaming Practices

Denver Public Schools just recently announced that they will be abolishing all student lunch debt for the upcoming school year due to donations from nonprofits and the local
LUNCH SHAMING

community. Unfortunately, other districts still utilize the practice of identifying students who cannot pay and offering different, less nutritious meals. LiveWell Colorado continues to work towards ensuring that all students, at all schools, are able to obtain healthy meals that will allow them to succeed in and out of the classroom away from any stigma ("A Primer on 'Lunch Shaming' in Colorado Schools," 2017).

Barriers for Free or Reduced Lunch Applications

People paying full price for their child’s lunch in the school cafeteria are in the minority.

As the school year starts, about twenty-two million children will qualify for the free and reduced price lunches in cafeteria around the country. That is nearly seventy-two percent of all the lunches served in schools that participate in the lunch program. What began as a $70 million program in 1947 has exploded into an $11.6 billion program as of 2012, according to the Department of Agriculture, which oversees the program. It has nearly doubled since 2000, when the program cost $6.1 billion. Last year, more than 30 million children of federally approved lunches in 100,000 public and private schools. To be eligible for a free meal, families must say they have low income at or below 130% of the poverty level ($44,863 for a family of four this school year). Those with incomes up to 185% of the poverty level ($44,863 for a family of four) are eligible for reduced-price meals that can’t be priced higher than 40 cents. Even if you know you don’t qualify, the schools demand that you sign-off and get counted. The more money a district collects on behalf of its students from the federal government, the more money the state gives to the district (Sullivan, 2015). According to FAQ’s About Free and Reduced Price School Meals,” 2016, when many non-U.S. citizens fill out an application for free and reduced lunch they have a few questions including, “May I apply if someone in my household is not a U.S.
LUNCH SHAMING

citizen?” and “Will you tell anyone else about the information on my form?” Non U.S. citizens are afraid to fill out any paper documents in the United States in fear that it can somehow be traced back to them. Limited English proficiency, limited transportation, apprehension or confusion about application requirements, and other barriers likely prevent many eligible children and families from accessing nutrition programs, including school-based nutrition programs ("A Closer Look at Latino Child Nutrition," 2015).

Identifying Lunch Shaming Practices

Lunch shaming is a fairly unpopular topic, although it is eye-opening and currently happening to students of different ages across the nation. Lunch shaming is a practice that consists of taking away hot lunch from a student, putting stamps or stickers on students to tell their parents and classmates that they don’t have lunch money, requiring the students to work in the cafeteria to repay their debt, and giving the student a meal that is inferior to other meals (Tomar, 2017 Paragraph 6). Because the Department of Agriculture left it to the states to create policies concerning how to deal with the unpaid lunch debts, some districts have developed these very policies that humiliate students in front of their peers and often times send them home crying. The School Nutrition Association states that more than three-quarters of school districts are drowning with uncollected debt. For some school districts it is not much of a big deal, but according to the New York Times, other districts have more than $4 million unpaid bills. For most people it is clear the lunch shaming is an unethical concept but for those who imposed such policies see it as a way of just simply collecting debt.
LUNCH SHAMING

States that prohibit lunch shaming practices and their policies.

For the United States, the problem of meal debt is not new, but the issue of lunch shaming has been receiving more attention since the Department of Agriculture executed a deadline for states to develop policies on what to do with students that cannot pay for lunch food (Siegel, 2017 Paragraph 15). The department was considering establishing national standards for dealing with meal debt in 2010, but they decided that it was better to leave this matter to the states. With this decision by the department, states like New Mexico outlawed shaming students whose parents are behind on lunch payments. The governor, Susana Martinez, signed the Hunger-Free Students’ Bill of Rights in April of 2017, “which directs schools to work with parents to pay their debts or sign up for federal meal assistance and puts an end to practices meant to embarrass children. It applies to public, private, and religious schools that receive federal subsidies for students’ breakfasts and lunches.” (Siegel, 2017 Paragraph 4). The alternatives of lunch shaming are to collect outstanding balances through automated calls, texts or emails, hiring an outside collection agency. The New Mexico law will still allow schools to penalize students with revoking transcripts or car permits, but nothing as humiliating as getting a sticker on their hand telling everyone that they need lunch money. With this new law, the family that is behind on paying lunch money will be only between that family and the school, so no one else will know and the student will not feel embarrassed by their classmates. Virginia is another state that chose to take action against lunch shaming. A lunch shaming ban passed through the state Senate Education Committee and The House of Delegates passed the bill. The bill said that on any matter related to meal debt, school employees would need to handle the situation through a letter to parents that would be sent home with the student. It is not fair for the child to be
LUNCH SHAMING

humiliated for an amount that they cannot pay themselves. By putting a ban on the lunch
shaming policies, school districts are. “Separating the child from a debt they have no power to
pay.” (Ms. Ramo, 2017).

Importance of Nutrition for Growth and Development (Performance in school)

Many kids all over the world do not receive the proper nutrients because of the cost of
food. There are many parents who don’t have the funds to but food for home and pay for school
lunches. This reason can very well lead to kids having many cognitive functions growing up.
This very interesting article states, “Food insecurity has been linked to nutrient deficiencies that
lead to learning and development problems.” (Liberman, 2003, 245-254). This is an example of
how nutrients can really affect a child who is growing and learning. Not to mention, the child
could very well be embarrassed because of their learning deficiencies. Being that kids have
absolutely no control over what nutrients they receive, which could also be another factor in how
they perform and their attention span in school. “Several studies show that nutritional status can
directly affect mental capacity among school-aged children. Because improvements in nutrition
make students healthier, students are likely to have fewer absences and attend class more
frequently.” (Liberman, 2003, 250). This clearly states that students have a better attitude about
going to class and being ready to learn. Getting the right amount of nutrition will also ensure that
they won’t have any developmental or learning issues.

Conclusion

Lunch shaming considers to be a terrible practice because of the child being embarrassed
for not having the money to get a school lunch or the lunch ladies give them something to
identify them, letting the other kids know that they are under the free or reduced lunch program.
LUNCH SHAMING

Now that we have explained what lunch shaming is and the events that children across the United States have to deal with, the USDA has made regulations to make the meals more nutritious, looking at a local school program for their unpaid debt, barriers affecting a family to apply for free or reduced breakfast or lunch or not, the lunch shaming policies and the school districts or states that restrict them, the importance of nutrition for growth and development in these kids, and the importance of having a good amount of nutrition for being a successful learner.
LUNCH SHAMING

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LUNCH SHAMING


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School Lunch and Breakfast Programs : Phase I. Proposed Approach for Recommending
Comment 1

Good start to introduction. Needs to expand the introduction in an essay of this gravity and length.

Verb

Choose strong verb that describes the action. Use active voice - the subject does the action.

Additional Comment

Who is doing the action of shaming? How could you rewrite this sentence using an action verb? Also, consider other verbs in place of get or getting.

Comment 2

"discuss"

Good - Thesis Statement

Good thesis statement. The thesis statement appears at the end of the introductory paragraph and offers a concise summary of the main point or claim of the essay.

Comment 3

Wow! Provides a detailed history of lunch regulations!
Comment 4

"received"

Comment 5

"report"

Comment 6

Nice job providing the data. This additional information provides context for the reader.

Comment 7

AHH! Makes me so angry!

Comment 8

No period included in the heading.

Comment 9

Start a new paragraph.

Comment 10

Avoid contractions in a formal paper.

Example: Many parents lack the funds to buy healthy foods for the home and pay for school lunches.

Comment 11
Find another verb!

Comment 12
Avoid contractions.