

Please Vote to Support Farm Fresh School Meals for Every Student, Every Meal, Every School! I would like to share a bit of my own experience with you, to highlight the MANY reasons I support this legislation. I received free school meals as a kiddo and my own children receive them now! When I was growing up in the central VT area, often times the meals provided at school were the only well-rounded meals I got. Prior to high school I really looked forward to meals at school for that reason, but as I entered high school I quickly realized that I needed to choose between relentless bullying and shaming or getting the food I needed. Many times I would choose not to eat. At that time, kids receiving free/reduced school meals could only access certain foods at lunch. There were often times options that even if I wanted them, I couldn't have them, because they weren't on the free school meals' menu. Being singled out in this way was so embarrassing that when I did get lunch at school, I would hide in the bathroom to eat it!

I am happy to say that my children's experience has been different from my own. They get to choose from the full menu at school, just like all the other kids. But that stigma is still there and that shaming and bullying, it still happens. Putting a child, especially at that tender age, in the position to choose between a healthy meal or their reputation, is just absurd. Even my daughter, at seven years old, recognizes the ease with which she and all her classmates eat now. Her school was selling popcorn at snack time as a fundraiser and my 7 year old was appalled that some of her classmates didn't get popcorn because they couldn't afford it. She insisted on using her own allowance, money she had worked hard for and saved, to rectify that situation and she bought her whole class popcorn for two weeks! If a 7 year old can do this, if a 7 year old can see and witness and feel the value in equal access to nourishing food, how can we deny it! I know popcorn at snack time is not the same thing as a well-balanced meal, and doesn't that make it all the more important. Food is more than nutrition, it is love, it builds community, it crosses divides and brings people together. Every child, every student deserves the same educational opportunities, every child deserves the same nutritional and nourishing food access! I envision when my daughter enters high school that she will be able to focus on learning, on being the best human she can be, and not need to worry about being judged for what is found on her lunch tray. I pray that my own child never has to choose between a healthy meal or feeling secure and accepted in her school. I hope she never has to make the choice between thriving or surviving – universal meals is what makes this different when I envision her future!

Thank you for your time,

Faye Longo

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