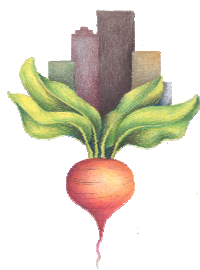


Farmers' Market Salad Bars and Nutrition Policy Advocacy in LAUSD

A Los Angeles Fresh Food Access and
Nutrition Education Project
1998-2002

A Report to the California Nutrition Network
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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BACKGROUND	2
3. PROJECT SUMMARY	4
<i>a. UCLA Survey of Diet and Overweight/Obesity</i>	4
<i>b. Pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bar Program</i>	5
<i>c. Expansion of District Salad Bar Program</i>	6
<i>d. Healthy School Food Coalition and Policy Advocacy</i>	6
<i>a. Need for Community Involvement and Leadership Development</i>	8
<i>b. Challenge of Geographic Dispersal</i>	10
<i>c. Challenge of Language Differences</i>	11
<i>d. Need for District-wide Policy</i>	11
<i>e. Third Party Role</i>	12
5. OUTCOMES	13
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	14

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1. Introduction

Obesity is a growing epidemic that is influenced by environmental factors leading to sedentary lifestyles and increased consumption of fast food, high fat, high sugar, and or salty snacks, and other unhealthful foods.¹ Risk factors for obesity are amplified for children and youth living in low-income communities where access to fresh fruits and vegetables at reasonable prices is limited and where fast food restaurants and snack-filled liquor stores abound.²

As obesity rates have increased in both children and adult populations over the past few decades, funding for education has become more limited. Between 1970 and 1995, State and local spending per pupil in California declined in real terms.³ During the same period, school districts became more constrained regarding budgetary allocations since a larger portion of their revenues had become tied to state constitutional requirements created through voter approved initiatives.⁴ In this budget context, many districts expected or even required that their food service departments be revenue neutral or even generate additional revenue for other district operating costs.

These school food programs had to compete in an environment filled with fast food, soft drink, and snack food advertising and availability. While the percentage of children who were overweight or obese was increasing, many school districts competed for student participation in meal programs by providing foods that mimicked the fast foods being marketed to children. In some cases, this resulted in contracts with fast food companies while, in others, it meant regularly featuring foods such as pizza, hamburgers, and french fries as part of the school lunch menu.

During the same period, farms have seen their small share of the retail food dollar decline, especially in the fresh fruit and vegetable sectors.⁵ Mergers, buyouts, and consolidations in the processing and retail sectors have further intensified these trends.⁶

While many food service programs have taken the fast food approach to maintain or increase participation, the Center for Food and Justice has been working with school

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention research published in the October 27, 1999, issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

² Shaeffer, Amanda and Robert Gottlieb. *The Urban Grocery Gap*. UEPI: Los Angeles, California, 2002.

³ Rothstein, Richard. "When States Spend More" in *The American Prospect* (Volume 9, Issue 36).

⁴ Specifically, Propositions 13 and 98. See "California's School Finance System: A Guide". Ed-Data Partnership. www.data.k12.ca.us/Finance/SF_Prime2.asp

⁵ USDA Economic Research Service. *Agricultural Outlook Yearbook 1962-1991* (Table 7c). Washington, D.C., 1998.

⁶ Heffernan, William D., Mary Hendrickson, and Robert Gronski. "Consolidation in the Food and Agriculture System." Columbia, MI, 1999. Hendrickson, Mary, William Heffernan, Philip Howard, and Judith Heffernan. "Consolidation in Food Retailing and Dairy: Implications for Farmers and Consumers in a Global Food System." Columbia, MI, 2001.

districts and other non-profit organizations to advocate for an alternative path. This path is informed by the hypothesis that children will choose fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods if they are prepared and offered in an appealing way. In California, regional family farms can source school districts with freshly harvested fruits and vegetables throughout the year. By utilizing such locally grown produce and using it to offer students the opportunity to make healthy choices, school meal programs can be turned into nutrition education programs that instill lifelong healthful dietary habits.

2. Background

Between 1997 and 2002, new initiatives were developed by community groups, small farm advocacy organizations, researchers, and school districts to both increase the viability of small and medium-sized family farms and improve the quality of school meals. Conceived as a way to extend the concept of direct marketing, school districts and other institutions would purchase fresh produce and other farm products directly from local farms. Through such farm to school projects, students and staff could enjoy farm fresh food, pursue recycling and composting programs, and develop nutrition education and other tools.

Both children and local family farmers can benefit from participation in farm to school initiatives. Students get fresh, nutritious produce in their school lunches, while family farmers acquire new markets. Whether a farmer visits the school or a class goes on a farm tour, students learn about how the produce is grown and the role fruits and vegetables play in a healthful diet, thereby experiencing first-hand -- in the cafeteria, classroom, garden, or farm -- the value of fresh fruits and vegetables. In California, farm-to-school programs have also helped to foster the development of standards-based curricula that can link classrooms, instructional gardens, school cafeterias and local sustainable farms.

The Occidental College Center for Food and Justice has been a leader in the development of farm to school programs since piloting the first Farmers' Market Salad Bar (FMSB) in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District in 1997.

In the spring of 1997, the Center for Food and Justice approached the school district's Food Service Department, the principal of a local elementary school, and the District Superintendent to develop a pilot program for an alternative school lunch meal – the farmers' market fruit and salad bar. The stage had been set for such a program by a Sustainable Schools Policy, which the District had adopted after successful advocacy by the UEPI Director and other community members. CFJ then proposed a motion that the Board of Education adopted to allow CFJ to work with the district to pilot a Farmers' Market Salad Bar Program at McKinley Elementary School.

The Food Service Director, Rodney Taylor, was initially skeptical about whether students would select the farmers' market salad bar option, but was willing to cooperate in the implementation of the pilot for several reasons. First, the Center for Food and Justice offered to oversee the development of the program during the first year through funding from The California Endowment. Second, both the Superintendent and the principal of

the elementary school, McKinley Elementary, where slightly fewer than half the students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, were supportive of the effort. Third, participation in previously established conventional salad bars (where the produce was not purchased directly from farmers or through farmers' markets) had declined significantly and the Food Service Director had been contemplating eliminating the option. Fourth, the City of Santa Monica, which operates the four farmers' markets in the City, offered to partner in the program, providing key logistical, storage, and related operational support. With all these elements in place, CFJ staff helped to get a resolution passed by the school board to authorize a one-year pilot program.

A pre-pilot was conducted in the summer of 1997 in the child-care program and a full farmers' market salad bar was offered beginning in the fall of 1997. The program became an immediate hit with the students, teachers, and parents and caught the attention of other parents, teachers, and administrators in the other schools in the District.

The success of the McKinley program had a transformative effect on key District officials and also caught the attention of other school districts, USDA officials, and a number of nutrition, community food security, and healthy food advocates across the country. The Santa Monica Food Service Director, Rodney Taylor, soon became an advocate for use of the Farmers' Market Salad Bar to improve the operating budget of the department by providing healthful meals. As the district had increasingly been led down the path of increased contracts with fast food companies, the Food Service Director saw the program as a positive alternative path and began expanding and institutionalizing the program.

Today, a farmer's market salad bar is located at every school within the Santa Monica district, including its middle schools and high schools. In recognition of this groundbreaking and innovative program, in December 2001 SMMUSD was awarded a Best School Menu in America Award. This award-winning menu utilizes locally grown produce and has increased participation to the degree that the Food and Nutrition Services department has been operating at a profit.⁷

In 2000, CFJ initiated the National Farm to School Program with several collaborators through a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The National Farm to School Program is managed through CFJ at Occidental College and is made up of representatives from Penn State, Rutgers, Cornell, the University of California at Davis, the Community Alliance for Family Farmers, the Community Food Security Coalition, The California Department of Education, and the Davis Joint Unified School District.

Through this program, a network of local groups across the country that are interested in developing farm to school programs has been established. As pilot projects develop, and their progress is evaluated, the lessons learned are shared throughout the network. Armed with this information and experience, the National Farm to School Program has provided technical assistance and training to emerging farm-to-school projects throughout the

⁷ Mascarenhas, Michelle and Robert Gottlieb. The Farmers' Market Salad Bar: Assessing the First Three Years of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Program. UEPI, October 2000.

nation. Partners in this program are designing training sessions for school food service staff, standards-based nutrition and food education curriculum, and recipes that can help school food services incorporate fresh, locally grown foods into their menus. The National Farm to School Program has also conducted program evaluation and policy analysis to identify the opportunities and barriers for establishing farm to school programs. That research and policy analysis provided the basis for educating USDA, the Department of Defense, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, school districts, state and Congressional elected officials and other policymakers on important administrative and legislative tools to further facilitate the farm to school/healthy foods approach.⁸

Also beginning in the 2000-2001 academic year, the California Department of Education began funding school districts to participate in “Linking the Garden/Local Agriculture with School Food Service and Classroom Nutrition Education” as part of “Improving Student Performance through Nutrition Education.” Building on the Superintendent of Public Instruction’s commitment to having gardens in every school, this program demonstrated the importance of developing integrated food and nutrition approaches that link to gardens and local farms.

This climate of widespread interest in and support for farm to school approaches contributed to community support for the Farmers’ Market Salad Bar and the approval of the pilot program in LAUSD.

3. Project Summary

In the beginning of CFJ’s project to work on food and nutrition issues in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in 1998, CFJ’s goals had been two-fold:

- 1) To get the school district to purchase direct from local farmers to help ensure the viability of those local farms and connect students to the source of their food and;
- 2) To introduce a “learning-by-doing” approach to good nutrition by providing meals based on tasty seasonal fruit and vegetable options prepared in ways that were appealing to the students.

The approach was to establish pilot farmers’ market salad bars in a few schools to demonstrate the viability of the model to the Food Services Director in the hopes that the administration would expand the program after seeing the success of the pilots.

These goals later expanded into seeking to involve parents, students, and teachers in the decisions affecting food served on their campuses, including vended and a la carte sales such as soda and snack foods. This in turn translated into policy goals, not only in terms of specific changes that these constituents voiced as necessary, but also changes to ensure the long-term involvement of these groups in setting policy.

a. UCLA Survey of Diet and Overweight/Obesity

⁸ An example of a policy analysis document that described policy mechanisms that could foster farm to school programs is “Healthy Farms, Healthy Communities” by the Community Food Security Coalition.

In the spring of 1999, the UCLA School of Public Health conducted a study of diet and body mass index of children in low-income schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The researchers found that nearly half of the students at such schools were obese or overweight and the problem was particularly acute for African-American and Latino children.

Many of the schools that participated in the study asked the researchers what solutions they could offer to help reduce obesity and the diet related diseases their students were facing. UCLA partnered with the Center for Food and Justice to introduce the Farmers' Market Salad Bar as one "intervention" to improve student nutrition. At first, the district deputy food service director was resistant because a small handful of salad bars had been unsuccessful in the district when implemented in the past. When UCLA and the SMMUSD hosted the director on a tour of the Farmers' Market Salad Bar and she observed that a significant portion of students were selecting the salad bar over the hot meal and that they were well behaved when participating.

b. Pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bar Program

In the fall of 1999, CFJ worked with LAUSD to launch the first Farmers' Market Salad Bar pilot at Castelar Elementary School in Chinatown. In the spring, the second FMSB was launched at 59th Street Elementary School and the third, a salad bar sourced with produce purchased through conventional district channels, was opened at 42nd Street Elementary.

Center for Food and Justice staff organized student assemblies featuring skits developed by a fifth-grade class and farmers' market produce tastings at parent-teacher events as well as at school during the lunch hour. CFJ staff also worked with cafeteria staff at the pilot schools and coordinated the ordering and pick up of the fruits and vegetables at the farmers' market. Farm tours were organized to connect students at the pilot schools with the source of their salad bar food.

The salad bars proved to be successful with students and teachers. A UCLA School of Public Health study found that the students at the schools that participated in the pilot salad bar programs increased their overall daily intake of fruits and vegetables by 50%, an increase attributed directly to the salad bar program.⁹

However, the district food services staff continued to voice concerns about the difficulty of purchasing produce direct from several small farmers. Though the district staff never released a complete memo or report on their assessment of the barriers to purchasing direct from farmers, some of the problems expressed during meetings and phone conversations included inconsistency of quality and availability, price, school site staff who had been trained to utilize fruit packed for shipping rather than tree-ripened fruit, special order delivery problems, and a desire to maintain streamlined purchasing for all schools through its central purchasing system. (Unlike most other school districts,

⁹ Slusser, Wendy, M.D., and Charlotte Neuman, M.D. Report on Findings presented to the Society for Nutrition Education, July 2001.

LAUSD employs its own food broker rather than going through a contractor to do the purchasing).

In 2002, CFJ has begun to work in collaboration with other organizations to identify new models of connecting small and sustainable farms to schools in ways that are mutually beneficial. Through a grant led by Occidental College and funded by the Kellogg Foundation, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers will be exploring models of farmer distribution networks in three California regions. And organizations in the National Farm to School Program have established a dialogue with the Department of Defense to bring their fresh food program to California. This program is likely to begin in 2002-2003 and since LAUSD hosts a USDA warehouse, participation would be logistically convenient.

c. Expansion of District Salad Bar Program

In 2001, the pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bars evolved into the district's salad bar program that operated in coordination with the LAUSD Nutrition Network program run through the Monlux Science Center. While the District expanded the salad bar program, it did not continue the farmers' market purchasing component.

By the end of 2001, the District had established salad bars in 25 schools. While this was a step forward, CFJ recognized that putting salad bars into 25 schools amounted to improving food at about four percent of schools. The Center for Food and Justice then shifted its strategy. We began to work with parents, students, and teachers to identify their concerns about food in the schools in order to advocate for policy that would lead to long-term systemic change.

d. Healthy School Food Coalition and Policy Advocacy

In 2000 and 2001, CFJ staff met with several LAUSD Board of Education members or their staff to facilitate their understanding of the Farmers' Market Salad Bar and to obtain their support for the expansion of a healthy school food program. CFJ and UEPI staff also co-authored three LA Times op-ed pieces about the connections between food access and healthy students.

In March of 2001, school board member Valerie Fields introduced a motion to investigate the food served in LAUSD schools and to develop a Healthy Food Policy. This motion was later revised to incorporate community participation into the process.

In April of 2001, CFJ organized a meeting of concerned parents, teachers, food service staff, students, and staff of allied organizations to discuss the possible formation of a group to advocate for a strong food and nutrition policy in LAUSD. The group began brainstorming for a preliminary wish list of what they would want out of a policy on school food and how they would want the process to work. They discussed how to ensure that parents, teachers, students, cafeteria workers, and other community members had a voice in the school district process called for by the board resolution. The group decided to form the Healthy School Food Committee (later renamed the Healthy School Food

Coalition) to advocate for a strong district policy on food and nutrition. The group drafted an alternate resolution to request that community members be involved in the process of identifying issues and policy solutions. The group then circulated a petition at their schools and gathered over 500 signatures in support of this revised resolution.

HSFC members then met with Valerie Fields to present her with the recommended language changes and to discuss the process they encouraged her to adopt. At a hearing on the board's proposed motion a few weeks later, teachers, parents, and students from the HSFC and CFJ staff spoke in favor of a resolution the group had drafted to expand community participation in the process. The board passed a motion asking the superintendent to draft a process that would involve community members.

The revised motion also called for the district to recommend policies that would improve the health value of the food served. The Center for Food and Justice saw the adoption of this motion as an important opportunity to have the concerns of parents, teachers, and students addressed and to promote solutions such as salad bars for all schools.

Though the process itself has been delayed by more than six months, parents, advocates, and a few students have participated in the process to identify policy needs. This group, called the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee (CNAC) met approximately once every 4-6 weeks to discuss and formulate recommendations regarding school food and nutrition issues. Two outside consultants were also hired to assess the quality, location and times of foods sold to on a sample of LAUSD school campuses. The CNAC recommendations will be included with the consultants' report to the School Board in August of 2002.

Parents, teachers, and staff who might be interested in joining the Healthy School Food Coalition were identified through presentations at schools and other non-profit community groups, health fairs and District Nutrition Network events and through word of mouth.

At Healthy School Food Coalition meetings, members of the group discussed the issues they viewed as important at their schools. From the issues identified, the group developed a set of policy recommendations. Understanding that the district was not going to overhaul its entire food program at once, the group also set priorities and strategized on how to influence changes in phases.

From these meetings and from speaking with community members across the district, it became clear that to ensure parent and student participation in decision-making processes around food policy, parents and students need information to feel confident speaking on the issues. Since policy is often seen as something distant from every day concerns, it was also important to work with the group to illustrate how district policy could have an impact at each individual school. In 2002, the CFJ staff coordinator developed a series of workshops for the parents, teachers, and students involved in the Healthy School Food Coalition to increase understanding of nutrition guidelines as well as increase member confidence in their ability to advocate on their own behalf. Speakers presented on topics such as current school nutrition standards, SB19 and SB 1520, and advocacy techniques.

From January to May of 2002, the Healthy School Food Coalition organized around Senate Bill 1520 (Soda Tax Bill). When SB 1520 went before the California Assembly members, HSFC members wrote letters of support, phoned their representatives, and lobbied with other hunger and food advocates in Sacramento.

In the summer of 2002, the HSFC began working on an LAUSD Board of Education resolution to ban unhealthy beverages. In June of 2002, several HSFC members met with school board member Genethia Hayes regarding a proposed resolution to eliminate vended sodas from school campuses in LAUSD. This interaction led to multiple meetings with other school board members and to collaborative work between Healthy School Food Coalition members and board member Marlene Cantor (co-sponsor of the resolution) to strengthen the language of the resolution. Members of the HSFC have met with five of the seven School Board members and/or Chief's of Staff to urge their support of the motion, which is currently slated to come before the board for a vote in late August. CFJ and HSFC are organizing around this motion to develop a coalition of food related organizations which include LAUSD's LEAF grant recipient schools, the California Food Policy Advocates, and the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

Also in 2002, the HSFC began to organize against the incorporation of foods from 3 major fast food companies into the National School Lunch Program in LAUSD. Through LAUSD's "Triple Header Program," students in 40+ pilot schools can purchase Domino's, Pizza Hut, or LA Pizza Loco pizza as part of the National School Lunch Program. The organizing around LAUSD's "Triple Header Program" has included research into the pilot program, educational outreach to student groups and parent associations, and HSFC members leading a petition drive.

4. Strategies and Lessons Learned

As the Center for Food and Justice expanded its strategy from pilot program to include grassroots organizing and policy advocacy, the key lessons learned in working on school food issues in the LAUSD have been:

- The need to identify and mobilize a parents, teachers, and students to speak out about issues that they have identified in their school communities. In mobilizing such a base, strategies need to take into account geographic dispersal and language differences to ensure that constituents from different communities are united rather than divided.
- The need district-wide policy on food and nutrition to ensure participation, equity, and long-term change. Need to ensure structures for community participation in the development and execution of those policies.
- The need to establish coalitions and partnerships both inside and outside the school district.

a. Need for Community Involvement and Leadership Development

One important lesson learned after the first year was that a base of support from the school community was needed to ensure the continuity, expansion, and institutionalization of progressive changes. In Santa Monica, the school principal, several staff members, and parents at the school site we planned to pilot the Farmers' Market Salad Bar program all voiced their support for the program. The superintendent and school board also agreed to the pilot and the food service director, while initially skeptical, was not opposed to the pilot program.

In LAUSD, CFJ staff began trying to get FMSBs into the district using an “insider” approach. We worked with a group of public health researchers from UCLA through schools they had identified as a) having principals who were conscious of the need to improve nutrition and wanted to host an innovative program at their school and b) having a kitchen and cafeteria set up conducive to a FMSB.¹⁰ The Deputy Food Service Director at LAUSD was skeptical but agreed to tour the FMSB program at Muir-SMASH Elementary School in the Santa Monica district. This tour led to her agreement to allow CFJ to pilot the Farmers' Market Salad Bars in two schools while also working with the district to pilot a non-farmers' market salad bar in a third school. CFJ did not have a requirement of parent, teacher, or student support for the program. This later arose as a major impediment to the sustainability of the program.

After a year of piloting the program in three schools, the district decided to stop purchasing produce through the farmers' market channels. The district did utilize the outreach strategies that we had developed and applied them to the creation of a salad bar model using produce procured through traditional wholesale channels. Though these salad bars did not directly benefit local family farms or connect students directly with their food source, nevertheless, the salad bars did provide an important source of fruits and vegetables that students were likely to eat.

Meanwhile, CFJ staff began receiving calls from parents and teachers from schools around the district asking for help in getting salad bars (often, specifically farmers' market salad bars) at their schools. CFJ staff began to go out and meet with these parent and staff groups to give them information about the school district process, make presentations, and work with them to get salad bars at their schools.

By the fall of 2001, LAUSD had instituted the salad bar program in approximately 30 elementary schools. These salad bars—which allow a child to create a meal that is based on fruits and vegetables--whether farm-direct or not, were a positive step towards healthy alternatives in the lunchroom.

While groups from some schools were asking the district to provide a Farmers' Market Salad Bar at their school, the district administrators would not agree to this request. One

¹⁰ CFJ looked for kitchens with enough space to wash, prepare, and store fresh fruits and vegetables. The school also needed to have a cafeteria with a large enough space to house a salad bar with enough space for students to walk by on both sides under the supervision of adult monitors. Many schools in the district do not have one or both of these features since many kitchens and cafeterias have been replaced by classrooms due to increased enrollment and class size reduction.

group of parents from a middle-income school met with district representatives who told them that they could have a salad bar but it would not be stocked with farmers' market produce. The parents agreed to have the salad bar, but requested a follow up meeting in 3-6 months to evaluate the possibility of getting farm-direct produce, as this was an important factor to them. The district administrators would not commit to taking any steps to assist in making this a real possibility and after the initial two pilot schools during the first year, no other school was able to get farmers' market produce into their salad bar.

Meanwhile, we realized that we had not been able to sustain the two pilot Farmers' Market Salad Bars in part because we had not built a base of support at the community level in those schools. In fact, many parents did not know there was a salad bar at their children's school and did not know that it was stocked with farm-direct fruits and vegetables.

Thus, while our goals were much broader than simply improving the food (i.e., we wanted to develop institutional support of local family farms and show youth where their food came from), many people in the low-income communities we were working on had not been exposed to information about the need to support local farms. We recognized that parents, teachers, and students had varying levels of information about nutrition, family farms, farmers' markets, and sustainable agriculture. And we saw that parents, teachers, students, and cafeteria workers had other issues with the school feeding programs that they wanted to see addressed. These issues could provide a first step in building a base of people who would act to improve school food quality and address equity issues. We could then work with people to broaden their analysis to include food justice issues such as access, support of local farms, environmental and workplace issues related to food and agriculture, and teaching students how to grow their own food.

In 2002, the Healthy School Food Coalition has been developing campaigns that will provide immediate results as well as discrete tasks for members to take on to develop their leadership skills. Examples include phone trees where members call other parents, teachers, and students to explain what is going on and how they can get involved. Writing letters, participating in visits to school board members, participating in the district's advisory committee, and testifying at board meetings provide other opportunities for participants to experience their own potential to influence change.

b. Challenge of Geographic Dispersal

One challenge that arose throughout the project was balancing a desire to work with all parents, teachers, and students concerned about the LAUSD food program with limited time and staff resources to drive all around the region and help these geographically disbursed constituents stay connected. The pilot programs provided distinct school communities to work in but the work of the Healthy School Food Coalition on district policy was less geographically tied.

As of the summer of 2002, the group is currently grappling with the issue of whether to choose other pilot school sites to establish policy and program and whether to work to maintain the citywide structure of the HSFC.

c. Challenge of Language Differences

The issue of Spanish translation is an important one for any group working in low-income communities in Los Angeles. The Center for Food and Justice worked to provide translation at Healthy School Food Coalition meetings whenever the staff knew that monolingual Spanish-speaking people would be participating. Simultaneous translation equipment was borrowed from City Council members and other community organizations whenever it was available.

However, translated meetings tend to run at a different pace than meetings conducted solely in one language but many English-speaking participants are not used to changing their speaking pace or otherwise modifying their behavior for a dual-language audience. This is slowly changing over time as the Coalition continues to meet on a more regular basis and are learning how to interact and solidify relationships with one another.

Another challenge is that our monolingual, Spanish-speaking members are often intimidated to speak or participate in front of their English-speaking counterparts. To address this the CFJ staff coordinator is organizing more one-on-one visits with the Spanish-speaking members before each meeting to familiarize them with the topics that will be discussed so that they feel more prepared to participate. The CFJ staff coordinator is also developing workshops for and facilitated by monolingual Spanish-speaking members. These organizing activities are not meant to be exclusive or divisive but will instead give Spanish-speaking members the space to ask questions, to voice their opinions, and to grow more confident in their abilities to participate in the Coalition.

d. Need for District-wide Policy

In 2000, the LAUSD was awarded a large matching grant to develop a Nutrition Network program to provide nutrition education in low-income schools. The Nutrition Network program was housed in what had been the district's school garden program and a similar approach to implementation was used. This voluntary team approach was meant to encourage schools to participate but there were no official policies requiring schools to provide the same opportunities to all students across the district.

In working with parents and teachers at schools that were participating in the LAUSD Nutrition Network program as well as those that weren't, CFJ staff identified some problems with this lack of policy. At some schools, teachers encountered barriers (such as a principal who was unwilling to let the school form a nutrition team, have a salad bar, or start a garden) that they could not overcome because they did not have the institutional support of the district. A school board policy in support of gardens, nutrition education, and salad bars would help ensure that this barrier does not create an inequity.

Another issue that came up was when the teachers at a school were not willing to take on the additional responsibility of putting together a Nutrition Network team. As teachers in the district are under extreme pressure to implement standardized curriculum and to improve standardized test scores, many teachers do not feel willing or able to take on such an endeavor. Yet the students at their school should still be able to access a salad bar, school garden or other nutrition programs.

Thus, while the activities being implemented at the schools selected to participate in the Nutrition Network program may have been improving access to nutrition education and nutritious choices, a policy was needed to ensure the district's commitment to ensuring these improvements for every student.

While the Center for Food and Justice and the Healthy School Food Coalition support the LAUSD Nutrition Network program, district program staff have expressed feeling threatened by parents, teachers, and students organizing for district-wide policy change.

e. Third Party Role

Throughout CFJ's work with school districts, we have contemplated the role of an outside advocacy organization in pushing for changes in school food services. CFJ has played different roles with different districts. In the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, Center staff initially encountered some mistrust, but were allowed to pilot the Farmers' Market Salad Bar program and have full access to school staff and community members. Because Bob Gottlieb, UEPI's Director, was also a former parent at the school chosen for the pilot, CFJ staff could identify leaders in the school and work more effectively to gain community support for the program.

In the LAUSD, however, the district food service administration was more skeptical and staff did not have any relationships with the school community. Therefore, initial outreach and efforts to build community support for the program were not as effective as they had been in Santa Monica.

Though CFJ did not have extensive relationships in LAUSD, over time, the staff developed a reputation amongst parents and teachers in the district for assisting school community members in bringing about positive change. CFJ staff promoted the LAUSD Nutrition Network program and encouraged schools to develop Nutrition Teams and participate in the mini grant program. In some cases, staff worked with the school teams to develop their proposals. Staff also helped parents and teachers understand how the salad bar program worked and identify district officials to contact to request such a program in their schools.

After developing contacts throughout the district, CFJ helped to organize the Healthy School Food Coalition to enable parents, teachers, and students to identify their common concerns and advocate on their own behalf for changes that would address their needs. Thus, CFJ moved from playing a role of program facilitator to playing the role of community organizer. In this role, CFJ organized forums where community members could come together to voice their concerns, identify ways to work together to let the

district know what their concerns were, learn more about the issues, become better advocates, and develop their own leadership.

Thus, CFJ moved from working as an insider setting up pilot programs in the district to working with community members to advocate for changes from the bottom up. Both roles were important but could not be played simultaneously. Though in the long term, community participation will help the district become more responsive to community concerns and thus, will foster a base of people who want to ensure the success of the district's food service program, in the short term, the district often saw such community participation as threatening.

CFJ learned that it is critical for any group working for change in a school feeding program to identify the best approach for it to use to make that change. It is also critical for organizations to note that there are other organizations, such as the California Food Policy Advocates, who can play the insider or advocate role even as other organizations are helping to push for policy change from other directions.

5. Outcomes

The outcomes of CFJ's work with the LAUSD and the school communities have so far included:

- As of June 2002, salad bars now operate in 47 schools in the LAUSD
- The school board required parent and community representation in the development of food policy through the creation of the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee. Now parents and teachers from the Healthy School Food Coalition and staff members of the Center for Food and Justice and the California Food Policy Advocates serve on the committee.
- The superintendent's process lays out a timeline and reporting structure that the group can hold the district accountable to.
- The Healthy School Food Coalition now has 35 active members (parents, teachers, students, and other community members) from eleven schools who are identifying their top concerns and formulating strategy for how to work with the district to see those concerns addressed.
- High school students, parents, and teachers recruited by CFJ have testified at school board meetings on behalf of a strong nutrition policy.
- The Healthy School Food Coalition members are currently conducting meetings with individual school board members and staff in support of banning unhealthy beverage sales in LAUSD.
- In 2002, members of the Healthy School Food Coalition organized and lobbied for SB 1520 (Soda Tax Bill) and have begun to organize against the incorporation of foods from 3 major fast food companies into the National School Lunch Program in LAUSD ("Triple Header Program").
- Through participation in the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee, CFJ staff and Healthy School Food Coalition members have contributed substantially to the formulation of recommendations to be made to the school board regarding improvements in LAUSD school food policy.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the Center for Food and Justice's work on food issues in the Los Angeles Unified School District has been multi-faceted. This work has included collaborating with public health researchers, working with school district staff to pilot farmers' market salad bar programs, coordinating the purchase and delivery of farm-direct produce, identifying leaders from school communities, and creating a forum for these community members to organize in support of strong food and nutrition policies. Within a climate of other factors such as SB19 and California Nutrition Network funding of the district, CFJ's work also influenced change in the district through its pilot program, policy advocacy, and constituent organizing strategies.

Future steps CFJ is taking to improve access to nutritious food in the LAUSD include:

- Identifying student leaders and helping to foster self-confidence so that those students can more fully participate in the district's process to set policy.
- Working with the National Farm to School Program to facilitate farm to school purchasing through the Department of Defense fresh produce program.
- Strengthening activities to provide education and skills building for Healthy School Food Committee members, with additional activities targeting monolingual Spanish speaking members and youth.
- Continuing to bring in speakers and provide educational workshops.
- Working with the Healthy School Food Coalition to respond to the LAUSD's draft policy document to be released in August.

The Center for Food and Justice has identified several recommendations for organizations working to improve nutrition in large school districts.

- Identify your strategy and your organizational identity (are you a think tank, advocacy group, community organizer, or some combination, etc).
- Work to link education and program strategies to policy, organizing, and advocacy strategies.
- Recognize that your strategy might change and be ready to shift gears and change strategy if needed
- Especially when working with a large district, coordinate efforts with organizations working with District staff in an "insider" approach as well as with other groups mobilizing community members in an "outsider" approach.
- Build grassroots participation by asking community members to define the most important issues and ensuring that the district has a process for hearing the voices of concerned parents, students, and teachers.
- If you choose to take a community organizing approach, make sure to organize educational forums as well as having fun activities and tasks for people to take on to build their leadership.

While there have been numerous challenges in the four years that the Center for Food and Justice has been working with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the complex of

strategies has led to important progress in increasing access to healthy food and increasing community participation in setting food policy in the district.