

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
From: Dennis J. Heiman, Principal, Muscatine High School
Date: March 4, 2003
Re: Fruit and Vegetable Program

As you establish priorities and funding, I understand this committee has a very difficult job. As a High School Principal, I respect and understand the differences between offering suggestions and making decisions. With that said,

“Feed the Children”

You may bring in nutritional specialists to tell you the advantages of healthy food in regard to energy, life span, etc., I can tell you of our experience and growth while participating in this pilot project. At first, we too, looked at the base nutritional advantages of fruits and vegetables, but we have gained so much more. We looked at the best time to feed the students to maximize the natural sugar high, identified what our most challenging academic classes were, when the most students were in an academic setting (not a study hall) and lastly, so it would not affect their lunch appetite.

We felt this presented the opportunity to increase our Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITED's) results, as we strive to reach the goals established by No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

With all the adult generated data, we realized – ask the customer – our students. Their response was “mid-morning, that’s when we are hungry.” Which makes greater sense.

Some of the unintended consequences of this program are:

Teacher- student camaraderie ie: Teachers discuss their individual food preferences. This reduces the wall that sometimes is present between adults and students. Once this is done the teacher is seen as a human with likes/dislikes and feelings. I have heard more “friendly” conversation between adults and students than at any other time in my 30 plus years of education.

Peer acceptance ie: Some of the students who assist in delivery of the food have special needs. The delivery group is more recognized and accepted by others. In a population of nearly 2000, too many are simply unrecognized faces in the crowd. Our delivery group is publicly thanked and talked to in public, this may be the first time this has happened in their school career.

Team building - how to deliver, how to hand out, how to pick up ie: The logistics of delivering 2000 pieces of food to over 100 locations caused a building wide involvement: Cafeteria workers, teachers, custodians, administration - everyone. Our first attempt was not totally successful. The first week we attempted this, we had three time schedules. What a learning experience.

Once the food was delivered, each classroom established a process to dispense, gather remains, and clean up. The increase in garbage bags, cleaning supplies, custodian time, and related costs was not anticipated. Once again our students solved the problem. Plastic grocery sacks were brought from home and a used spray bottle and a towel are used by each student to wash his/her desk. Teachers wash the towels and bring them back. Problem solved – low expense.

Peer pressure ie: Occasionally a new food was not well received. We found the evidence in waste cans, hallways, etc. One announcement was made “If you don’t want to eat it, don’t take it. If messes continued we will stop the program.” There has been no problem since. Students offer their serving to another student. Informal observations indicate more student interaction than before. In larger schools students may not know each other at any level. This program has removed social/economic, ethnic, and academic barriers.

I think I just described what is now being pushed as Character Education. Understanding, caring for, and working with others to solve common problems.

In another light, this program is better than the proposed tax cut. This program places money in local control, stimulates local economy, and eliminates the wide social/economic disparity. Everyone here receives the same benefit at the same time in the same manner.

My wife is a kindergarten teacher and her building also received a grant. While her building is nearly 50% free and reduced, the nutritional food is a tremendous value. They too experienced the same unintended consequences of this program.

I read in a recent article over 25% of the free/reduced recipients may be falsifying their income level. If there are people in American hungry enough to lie for food – feed them.

As we grew, our parents and grandparents taught us we were never really accepted in a house until food or beverage was offered. You have made each classroom a warmer, more welcoming, environment. Thank you.

Other unintended consequences include:

- * Removal of a candy machine because of an overall drop in sales of 48%.
- * Removal of a pop machine/replaced by a milk/juice machine.

And to think I came here to speak of food and told you this program crosses all aspects of character education and will make our schools a better place.