

Introduction

Since 1994, InnerCity Struggle (ICS) has promoted safe, healthy and non-violent communities by organizing youth and families to build power and influence in Boyle Heights, unincorporated East Los Angeles, El Sereno and Lincoln Heights to work toward economic, social and educational justice. ICS has consistently worked to transform one of California's most disenfranchised communities by developing the leadership of youth and adult residents to mobilize for social change. ICS has also educated and empowered thousands of Eastside voters to be heard at the ballot box in regards to relevant, critical issues.



By working with and garnering support from students, parents and local district officials, InnerCity Struggle has accomplished a number of significant achievements in the Eastside. In 2004, ICS won a momentous victory by securing the construction of Esteban E. Torres High School, the first new high school in East Los Angeles in over 85 years. In 2005, after a successful campaign led by ICS and other ally organizations, the Board of Education passed the *A-G Resolution*, which requires student access to college preparatory courses. Since then, ICS has continually monitored its implementation. ICS has also built student and parent support for a vision of school discipline in which schools support the correction of all students' problems without suspension or monetary penalties. The same student and parent leaders are now demanding that school and district officials increase the variety and quantity of nutritious and healthy food in Eastside schools. Finally, ICS has trained and developed a base of 140 precinct walker volunteers who have contacted over 24,000 Eastside voters regarding issues of educational justice.



The Urgency

National studies have shown that students who regularly had school lunch were 29 percent more likely to be overweight or obese than those who brought lunch from home. Additionally, those students were more likely to eat two or more servings of fatty meats like fried chicken or hot dogs daily, and had higher levels of LDL "bad" cholesterol.

Latino children and adolescents are at a greater risk of being overweight and obese than their white or African-American peers. Latino adolescents born in the United States are more likely to carry excess weight than Latino



adolescents born elsewhere. Limited availability of healthy foods (at home and at school) and safe recreational facilities contribute to higher rates of being overweight and obesity among Latino children and families.

Good health is a key to academic success and students spend most of their waking time in school. When students are properly nourished, their grades go up and they have lower levels of anxiety, hyperactivity, depression, and psychological and social dysfunction. An implemented healthy school food policy, from purchase to dissemination and consumption, is important for students to have access to healthy food.

The Problem

The number of overweight children and adolescents is on the rise in the United States. One in four California adolescents is now considered "at risk" of becoming overweight. The issue has significant local impact as nearly 1 in 3 East Los Angeles children is considered obese. Overweight and obese children are more likely to suffer from serious, lifelong illnesses than their healthy-weight peers. Some of those problems include increased risk of asthma, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, sleep apnea, and social issues.



Foods offered and eaten in schools are one way to address these issues impacting our youth. In the case of Los Angeles, The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) prepares and distributes 650,000 meals a day, 80% of them to students who qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch. What is being done? Recent research conducted by InnerCity Struggle lifts up the voices of students and parents and their collective experience with school food consumption.

The Survey

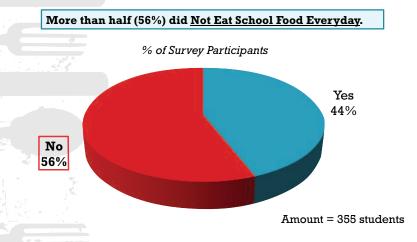
InnerCity Struggle's youth organizing component (United Students) designed and conducted a survey of their peers for the Food Justice Campaign. The "Food Justice Surveys" were collected over a week and half period in early May 2011. Students collected surveys from their peers by conducting presentations on the campaign in their classes and also collecting them outside of class time during lunch. A total of 350 students were surveyed. All grades from five Eastside high schools (Roosevelt, Garfield, Torres, Wilson, and Lincoln) were surveyed. The analysis focused on three major areas: Access to Food, Food Quality and Time.



Access to Food

- When asked if they eat at the school lunchroom everyday, most students (56%) stated that they did not eat at school everyday.
- Out of the students that do not eat at school everyday, the overwhelming majority of them (76%) cited the food as being unappetizing/inedible. Many students explained that the food "tastes bad" or "looks strange" as the main reasons for not participating in the school lunch program.
- Necessity (being hungry or there being nothing else to eat) was the number one reason for students eating at the schools (76%). Only a small amount of survey participants (4%) stated food taste as the reason for them to eat school food everyday.
- When asked if they were allowed to eat school meals without a ticket, 18% of the respondents answered no.

Frequency of Eating School Food: Eastside Students Weigh In



Quality

- Close to two thirds of school foods (62%) consumed were high fat main dishes (33%) or high fat/high sugar snacks (29%), while only about 35% responded that they consumed healthy snacks (19%) or fruits and vegetables (16%).
- More than half (59%) of the survey participants graded the quality of the school food as Very Poor (24%) or Poor (35%) while the rest of the students (41%) found the food to be just "Ok" (36%) or Good/Great (5%)



Time

- Nearly two-thirds (62%) indicated that they lacked the necessary time to complete their meals during breakfast, nutrition, or lunch. Out of those unable to complete their meals in the allotted time, more than half (55%) gave "time too short" as the main reason while over a third (38%) felt that the lines were too long or the lunchroom was crowded.
- More than half (59%) stated that they were not allowed to take their food and finish eating it in their classroom after lunch.

Additionally, a total of 210 parents were surveyed by InnerCity Struggle's parent organizing component (Familias Unidas) and asked about their children's experience with school food. Key highlights of the findings include:

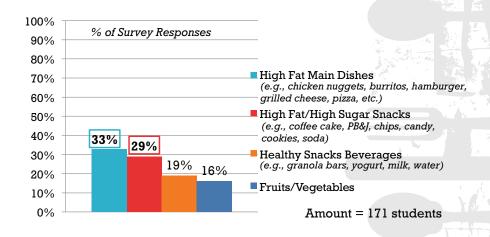
More than two-thirds (69%) of parents surveyed reported that their child does not like the school food

More than half (55%) of parents surveyed reported that their child does not have enough time to eat their lunch

A majority (83%) of parents surveyed supported staggered lunches for their child's school

Main Type of School Food Consumed: Eastside Students Weigh In

Close to two thirds of school foods (62%) consumed were High Fat Main Dishes or High Fat/High Sugar Snacks.



The Proposed Recommendations

In August 2011, the LAUSD's Food Services staff hosted a food tasting for 50 InnerCity Struggle (ICS) youth and parent leaders (35 youth; 15 parents) of the new 2011-2012 school menu at the Newman Center. ICS received overwhelming positive feedback from participants about the quality of the food provided through a questionnaire ICS staff created. ICS will monitor implementation of the new menu. The biggest concern raised was students expressing that they have no outlet at the schools for voicing concerns about the food. This is an issue ICS will also address through the campaign.



InnerCity Struggle's members are proposing recommendations to address the challenges of school food distribution and lack of time issues by recommending that 1) Lunch carts be provided to minimize lines, 2) Staggered or extended lunches be implemented to increase student access to school food, 3) A second-chance breakfast be implemented to increase the number of students obtaining school meals. ICS is also proposing that tickets and student identification cards are not required in schools where 75% or more of the student body is eligible for free or reduced lunches. Additionally, InnerCity Struggle's youth and parent members are currently researching the federal *Hunger Free Schools Act* to identify opportunities to advance the local campaign.

Taking Action

Parents, community members, and school professionals together have the power to achieve changes and enact reform in local school policies. There is so much work to do to support our schools, families and students. It is important that we collaborate with all stakeholders in order to make the changes needed to improve school lunch menus, access to food, and increase the consumption of healthier public school food. With your help we will achieve a healthier future for our children. Join the growing movement!



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