

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

- - -

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, May 6, 2008
1:15 a.m.

- - -

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM GREENLEE
COUNCILMAN FRANK RIZZO

RESOLUTION 080214 - Resolution authorizing the
Philadelphia City Council Committee on
Education to hold hearings on the Pennsylvania
Department of Agriculture Alert that the
Philadelphia School District received
recalled-beef through the National School
Lunch program...

- - -

V A R A L L O Incorporated
Litigation Support Services
Eleven Penn Center
1835 Market Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103
215.561.2220 215.567.2670

1

2

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good

3

afternoon. Thank you all for your

4

patience. We will call to order the City

5

Council Committee on Education with

6

regard to Resolution No. 080214 dealing

7

with the School District policy regarding

8

food safety and nutrition.

9

We note that to my left,

10

Councilman Bill Greenlee is here. To his

11

left, Councilman Frank Rizzo is here, and

12

others will -- didn't I see Councilman

13

DiCicco?

14

Again, we say good afternoon

15

and thank you all for being here today

16

for this hearing regarding Resolution

17

080214 concerning food safety and

18

nutrition in Philadelphia public schools.

19

In early February of this year,

20

the U.S. Department of Agriculture

21

initiated a recall of 143 million pounds

22

of beef originating from the

23

Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company of

24

Chino, California. This represented the

25

largest beef recall in U.S. history.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 On or about February 19, 2008,
3 the School District of Philadelphia was
4 alerted by the Pennsylvania Department of
5 Agriculture that local schools had
6 received the recalled beef products
7 through the National School Lunch
8 Program, and the School District
9 announced it was withdrawing all dishes
10 made with beef from school menus.

11 The USDA ordered the
12 Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company to
13 suspend operations after the Humane
14 Society of the United States filmed
15 employees using forklifts and electric
16 prods to force cows too sick and injured
17 to walk into the slaughter lineup. The
18 USDA requires that sick and injured cows
19 be inspected for salmonella, mad cow and
20 E. Coli diseases before slaughter. And
21 while the USDA has informed the School
22 District that the risk of children being
23 ill from recalled beef is negligible and
24 the School District reported it had not
25 received any notification of a child

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 being ill because of beef recall, School
3 District parents have raised concerns
4 about the National School Lunch Program,
5 the recalled beef and the School
6 District's efforts to ensure food safety
7 and nutrition. Therefore, City Council
8 authorized this Committee to hold
9 hearings on the Pennsylvania Department
10 of Agriculture Alert that the
11 Philadelphia School District received
12 recalled beef through the National School
13 Lunch Program, including inquiry into
14 efforts by the School District to ensure
15 food safety and nutrition.

16 As such, I'll call our first
17 witnesses.

18 I forgot. We never did have
19 him read the title of the resolution. It
20 would be nice.

21 Thank you. Please do so.

22 THE CLERK: Resolution 080214,
23 authorizing the Philadelphia City Council
24 Committee on Education to hold hearings
25 on the Pennsylvania Department of

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 Agriculture Alert that the Philadelphia
3 School District received recalled-beef
4 through the National School Lunch Program
5 including inquiry into efforts by the
6 School District to insure food safety and
7 nutrition.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you very much.

10 Our first witness -- so we hope
11 we've kind of brought everybody up to
12 date since it's been a little time.

13 Our next will be Izzy or Izzat
14 Melhem, Acting Director of Environmental
15 Health Services, Department of Public
16 Health. Next will be Alfred Farlino,
17 Chief Operating Officer.

18 I saw that first name. I
19 thought it was Fred. I learned today
20 it's Alfred Farlino, Chief Operating
21 Officer, School District of Philadelphia.

22 (Witness approached witness
23 table.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you and welcome.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 MR. MELHEM: Good afternoon,
3 Chairwoman Blackwell and members of the
4 Committee on Education. I am Izzat
5 Melhem, Acting Director of Environmental
6 Health Services in the Department of
7 Public Health. Thank you for this
8 opportunity to speak today on the
9 Department's food inspection program and
10 the functions of our agency related to
11 the school inspection program and food
12 product recall notices.

13 Currently, the Environmental
14 Health Services Unit has 23 sanitarians
15 that conduct sanitation and safety
16 inspections of approximately 11,400
17 licensed food establishments in the City,
18 including our public schools. In Fiscal
19 Year 2007, we achieved our goal of
20 inspecting each of these food
21 establishments at least one time per
22 year, and we are on target to surpass
23 this level in Fiscal Year 2008. While
24 most food establishments are inspected
25 once annually, under Section 111 of the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization
3 Act of 2004, the United States Department
4 of Agriculture mandates a minimum of two
5 food safety inspections per fiscal year
6 for schools participating in the National
7 School Lunch Program or School Breakfast
8 Program. Through agreement with the
9 School District of Philadelphia, we have
10 been able to meet this mandate by
11 conducting two inspections annually in
12 each of our schools.

13 As the local regulatory agency,
14 the Department's Office of Food
15 Protection is the recipient of frequent
16 notices of food product recalls issued by
17 state or federal agencies. Food
18 distributors and retailers also receive
19 notices of state or federal agency
20 recalls. In Calendar Year 2007, the
21 Department received notices of 23
22 separate recalls, and to date in Calendar
23 Year 2008, we have received notices of 15
24 recalls.

25 Recall notices trigger a series

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 of responsive actions, most of which are
3 carried out on a voluntary basis by the
4 manufacturers, distributors and retailers
5 of the product at issue. In one recall
6 scenario, a manufacturer takes the
7 initiative to proceed with a recall when
8 they discover that one of their own
9 products may be defective. In other
10 cases, a federal or state agency will
11 inform a manufacturer of the agency's
12 findings on a defective item that they
13 have produced and suggest or request that
14 a recall be initiated. In most cases,
15 the burden is on the manufacturer to
16 notify its distributors and retailers of
17 the recall and on the appropriate federal
18 or state agencies to disseminate advisory
19 information to the entities handling the
20 product and also advise the public at
21 large through the media.

22 The Hallmark/Westland recall of
23 meat and meat products was the largest
24 recall in United States history,
25 involving more than 143 million pounds of

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 meat and meat products produced over a
3 two-year period. Two weeks prior to the
4 official recall, Hallmark/Westland
5 notified retailers that the United States
6 Department of Agriculture Administrative
7 Hold had been placed on its meat
8 products. This unusual step taken by the
9 USDA mandated retailers to detain and
10 quarantine the identified product until
11 future notice was received.

12 Approximately two weeks later,
13 Hallmark/Westland upgraded the USDA
14 Administrative Hold to a USDA Class II
15 recall, a voluntary recall that covers
16 products that might pose a slight health
17 risk or a slight threat of a more serious
18 nature. Shortly after the recall was
19 announced, Hallmark/Westland announced
20 that it was ceasing operations, which
21 would shift the burden of the recall to
22 regulatory agencies, as well as to
23 wholesalers, retailers and facilities
24 handling and receiving the products. For
25 more than two weeks, the Philadelphia

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 Department of Public Health worked with
3 the Pennsylvania Department of
4 Agriculture on the recall, notifying
5 business operators in the City and
6 Philadelphia School District officials to
7 ensure that all were informed of the PDA
8 recall of this product.

9 It appears that when the recall
10 was initially announced by
11 Hallmark/Westland, there was some
12 confusion that might have been due to the
13 unusual decision to place affected
14 product on Administrative Hold.
15 Retailers not familiar with the term
16 might have continued using the product
17 between the time of the initial
18 announcement and announcement of the
19 actual recall. Adding to the confusion
20 was the manner in which information was
21 released regarding products included in
22 the recall, with the list of products
23 identified by the company revised several
24 times during this period and at some
25 point on a daily basis. Sanitarians were

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 leaving retail establishments only to
3 have to return later to check on newly
4 identified products.

5 In spite of the challenges
6 related to this recall, we believe that
7 the cooperative efforts of the
8 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture,
9 the School District of Philadelphia and
10 the Department of Public Health ensured
11 that all contaminated product was removed
12 and destroyed in a timely and efficient
13 manner. We will continue to work with
14 these agencies to ensure the health and
15 safety of our children and the residents
16 of the City.

17 Thank you for the opportunity
18 to present this testimony on this issue.
19 I will now answer questions.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much for your testimony.

22 What products were there other
23 than meat?

24 MR. MELHEM: Any
25 meat-containing product. For example,

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 ravioli, if there was a meat sauce or it
3 was meat-containing ravioli.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So all
5 were related to products that had meat in
6 them?

7 MR. MELHEM: Meat or meat --
8 correct.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: When
10 you say that the U.S. Department of
11 Agriculture placed an Administrative Hold
12 on their products, does that mean they
13 are not able to operate within our School
14 District, or what does Administrative
15 Hold provide?

16 MR. MELHEM: An Administrative
17 Hold mandates that the product be
18 quarantined. Essentially, figuratively,
19 that yellow tape, or literally, be placed
20 around the quarantined product so that it
21 cannot be used, served, sold or even
22 destroyed until further notice.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
24 finally -- and then I'll call on
25 Councilman Rizzo -- my last question, you

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 state that this Hold was raised to a
3 Class II recall of products that, quote,
4 "might pose a slight health risk or
5 slight threat of a more serious nature."
6 Can you elaborate on that?

7 MR. MELHEM: Sure. There are
8 three classes of recalls. Class I is the
9 most serious, where something that might
10 pose an immediate health hazard and to a
11 wider spread or it might be a defective
12 medical device, for example, like a heart
13 valve that might be defective, something
14 that would pose an immediate health
15 hazard.

16 A Class II recall, there was no
17 evidence of anybody becoming ill, for
18 example, from this meat product or,
19 speaking generally, from the product
20 identified, but there is a slight health
21 risk or a risk of a serious nature, but
22 nothing has definitively been identified,
23 no reports have been identified.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So
25 it's just Class I and Class II?

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 MR. MELHEM: And Class III.

3 Class III would be the least serious
4 nature.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Which
6 means?

7 MR. MELHEM: A Class III recall
8 is for products that are unlikely to
9 cause any adverse health reactions. For
10 example, packaging, something that may
11 not be -- that might violate FDA labeling
12 or manufacturing regulations, off color,
13 off taste, that pose a very slight, if
14 any, health risk.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you.

17 Councilman Rizzo.

18 MR. MELHEM: You're welcome.

19 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you,
20 Madam Chair.

21 Could you be specific to the
22 region and then the School District
23 itself. The recall involved 143 million
24 pounds nationally. How significant was
25 that here in the School District? How

4 MR. MELHEM: Well, it was my
5 understanding in speaking with the
6 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
7 initially on this recall that this was a
8 two-year recall of product that had been
9 manufactured over a two-year period, at
10 least that they know of, meaning a lot of
11 it was consumed by the time it was known
12 to the appropriate authorities that there
13 was potential for contamination of this
14 product.

15 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Isn't that
16 kind of silly? Unless they're thinking
17 that people inventory this material for
18 two years, why would they alarm people or
19 concern people and tell them about
20 something that's already consumed maybe a
21 year and a half before?

22 MR. MELHEM: Considering how
23 this information came out to the public,
24 it was by somebody taking a hidden camera
25 into the factory. So they had to be very

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 forthright in whatever they knew
3 regarding this event.

4 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So do you
5 know how much of the 143 million pounds
6 over a two-year period we actually
7 consumed in the School District of
8 Philadelphia?

9 MR. MELHEM: I do not know
10 exactly.

11 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Does the
12 School District know?

13 MR. MELHEM: They would have to
14 speak on that.

15 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So we had,
16 in a nutshell here, we had 143 million
17 pounds of meat that was destroyed, I
18 assume.

19 MR. MELHEM: No.

20 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: And
21 consumed.

22 MR. MELHEM: One hundred
23 forty-three was identified potentially as
24 being contaminated that was manufactured
25 over a two-year period, and this was a

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 nationwide recall.

3 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Now, do we
4 have any -- and I'll ask the School
5 District when they come up. Did we have
6 any meat recalled that hit the
7 Philadelphia school system?

8 MR. MELHEM: There was meat
9 identified that was, when the recall was
10 announced, that was destroyed in any
11 facility, whether it be the School
12 District or a business in the City.

13 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: And did the
14 Health Department actually sample and
15 validate the fact that this material,
16 this meat, was defective, bad, spoiled,
17 shouldn't have been consumed? Did you
18 validate any of the information just to
19 see exactly what we were destroying? Did
20 you take samples?

21 MR. MELHEM: We did not, and we
22 generally do not. We just follow the
23 recall notices to assist in getting
24 product off the -- when our assistance is
25 requested, to get the product away from

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 consumers and out of the stream of
3 consumers and retailers.

4 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So I don't
5 want to use the word "assume." I hate to
6 be asking these questions the way I'm
7 asking them, but how much of this
8 material, the 143 million pounds that
9 were stockpiled and shipped out over a
10 two-year period, was consumed by School
11 District students?

12 MR. MELHEM: Councilman, I
13 honestly don't know what their daily use
14 of meat and meat products would be.

15 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Well, I'm
16 really not learning much here, and I'm
17 not blaming you for that. I think that
18 when the School District comes up, we
19 really need to understand.

20 We're here. We're talking
21 about a recall of 143 million pounds, I
22 think I understand, over a two-year
23 period that was identified. What impact
24 did that have on the City of Philadelphia
25 to the supermarkets or to the School

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 District or to the vending machine -- the
3 vendor that sells hot dogs? So I really
4 would like to know exactly what was the
5 result here in the City of Philadelphia.
6 Was it nothing? Was it something? Do we
7 know?

8 I mean, I can't imagine the
9 Health Department not wanting to take a
10 little sample to say, you know, we threw
11 all this material out. Whether we got
12 compensated from the manufacturer, I
13 don't know. I'll ask that question, too.
14 But, in fact, did we have bad meat? We
15 err on the side of caution, we just throw
16 it all away, but you would think health
17 officials would want to know the
18 significance of the meat that we had in
19 the freezer or refrigerator someplace,
20 was it bad or not bad. I can't imagine
21 us not wanting to confirm that.

22 MR. MELHEM: Yeah. I can
23 understand, and I can communicate -- I
24 can speak with the Department of
25 Agriculture to find out what the total

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 that was removed, because they worked
3 with us along -- they worked along with
4 us on this.

5 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Well, I
6 would think the School District would
7 know what impact it had.

8 MR. MELHEM: Well, for the
9 School District, but I was talking about
10 the City overall in other businesses
11 where product would have been identified.

12 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: All right.
13 We'll wait for the School District to see
14 if they can answer that.

15 Thank you, Madam Chair. I
16 appreciate that time.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you very much.

19 Thank you.

20 MR. MELHEM: You're welcome.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
22 Mr. Fred Farlino, Chief Operating Officer
23 for the School District of Philadelphia.
24 Thank you for coming.

25 (Witnesses approached witness

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 table.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
4 identify yourself for the record.

5 MR. FARLINO: Fred Farlino,
6 Interim Chief Operating Officer of the
7 School District of Philadelphia.

8 Madam Chair, Councilman
9 Greenlee and Councilman Rizzo, thank you
10 for allowing the District to come forward
11 with testimony today regarding the beef
12 recall in February. And in addition,
13 we'd like to give testimony regarding the
14 School District's Wellness Program, as
15 well as the manner in which the District
16 handles food safety in an ongoing way.

17 We also want to talk a little
18 bit about our partnership that we have
19 with several community organizations and
20 parent groups to, on a regular basis,
21 consider ways in which we can improve the
22 lunch program. So we are going to give
23 brief testimony.

24 With me today is Mr. Wayne
25 Grasela, who is the Senior Vice-President

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 for Food Services, and he'll provide
3 testimony, and we'll be prepared to
4 answer any questions the Council may
5 have.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you.

8 Mr. Grasela, welcome.

9 MR. GRASELA: Good afternoon,
10 Chairwoman Blackwell and members of the
11 Education Committee. My name is Wayne
12 Grasela and I am the Senior
13 Vice-President overseeing Food Services
14 for the School District of Philadelphia.
15 Thank you for allowing me to come before
16 you today to give testimony on this
17 resolution.

18 In my testimony I will give an
19 overview of the District's response to
20 the USDA beef recall and our standard
21 food safety practices. I will also give
22 you an overview of the types of services
23 we provide to students and what we do to
24 guarantee the quality and healthfulness
25 of our foods.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 vendors had product subject to the Hold
3 in their inventory.

4 On February 17, 2008, FSIS
5 expanded the Hold to a product recall
6 after determining that the
7 Hallmark/Westland facility was not in
8 compliance with FSIS regulations. The
9 USDA designated the product recall as a
10 Class II recall because there was a
11 remote probability of adverse health
12 consequences if the beef product was
13 consumed. The recall applied to the
14 products subject to the Hold, as well as
15 all ground beef products by
16 Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company
17 delivered directly to the federal food
18 and nutrition programs, including the
19 National School Lunch Program. This
20 applied to meat that had been delivered
21 at any time since February 1, 2006.

22 Based on the new USDA
23 directive, the School District determined
24 that we had beef products in inventory
25 that were subject to recall. These

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 products were identified, clearly
3 labeled, and the School District awaited
4 the USDA's instruction as to their
5 disposition.

6 On February 19, 2008, the
7 School District removed all beef
8 products, regardless of their source,
9 from its menus until further notice.
10 Thereafter, the Pennsylvania Department
11 of Agriculture, Bureau of Food
12 Distribution, contacted National School
13 Lunch Program sponsors, including the
14 School District, and authorized the
15 destruction of all Hallmark/Westland beef
16 products.

17 The School District fully
18 complied with the Pennsylvania Department
19 of Agriculture's instructions and adhered
20 to all applicable USDA guidelines in the
21 destruction of the recalled beef
22 products.

23 As a precaution, the School
24 District did not restore beef to its
25 menus until all vendors had been

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 contacted and asked to verify that the
3 beef they had supplied or were in the
4 process of supplying did not come from
5 Hallmark/Westland. On February 25, 2008,
6 after receiving the requested
7 verification, the School District
8 restored beef products to the school
9 lunch menu.

10 It is important to note that at
11 no time before the School District
12 removed beef products from its menus did
13 we receive reports of alleged illness due
14 to the use of beef products.

15 Food safety practices: Food
16 safety is of paramount importance to the
17 School District. We strictly adhere to
18 all applicable food safety laws,
19 regulations and guidelines. We handle
20 food in an environment free from
21 biological, chemical and physical hazards
22 that might compromise the safety and
23 quality of the foods served to our
24 students.

25 Laboratory analysis of food

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 products and meal components used in
3 school operations is conducted before
4 leaving the vendors. Food is quarantined
5 and random samples undergo pathogenic
6 analysis at an independent quality
7 control lab.

8 All School District Food
9 Service Managers are food safety
10 certified through a nationally recognized
11 and state-approved program. All levels
12 of Food Service employees are trained on
13 food safety and sanitation. Prerequisite
14 programs such as employee hygiene,
15 equipment management and sanitation are
16 the foundation of the District's food
17 safety management. These programs are
18 closely monitored for their effectiveness
19 in preventing food hazards and address
20 operational and sanitation conditions.
21 The programs incorporate all federal,
22 state and local food safety laws and
23 regulations. Documentation of food
24 temperature controls and proper food
25 preparation procedures verifies that we

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 are meeting food safety requirements.

3 The District's Wellness Policy:

4 The School District's Division of Food
5 Services plays a significant role in
6 ensuring compliance with the Wellness
7 Policy Implementation Plan and has been
8 pioneer in developing and implementing
9 national guidelines that exceed all
10 federal and state requirements.

11 It should be noted that these
12 groundbreaking initiatives were
13 implemented several years prior to the
14 federal and state mandates and are still
15 best practice nationwide. In addition to
16 these initiatives, breakfasts, lunches
17 and after-school meals offered in all
18 schools meet or exceed all USDA
19 requirements.

20 Studies have proven the role of
21 a nutritious breakfast on students'
22 academic performance. This year, all
23 students in K to 8 were offered breakfast
24 daily at no charge. The District fully
25 supports the School Breakfast Program and

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 aims to include breakfast in the school
3 day so breakfast is available to all
4 students.

5 Partnerships: Nutrition
6 education is part of the District's
7 Comprehensive Health Education standards.
8 Nutrition education is taught across the
9 School District curriculum and encourages
10 and supports healthy eating by students
11 through promotion of healthy foods,
12 healthy food preparation methods and
13 health-enhancing nutrition practices.
14 The School District joins forces with
15 many agencies around the City to bring
16 nutrition education into the classrooms.
17 Some of our community partners are Drexel
18 University Nutrition Center, Albert
19 Einstein Medical Center, The Food Trust,
20 Health Promotion Council and Urban
21 Nutrition Initiatives.

22 The School District recognizes
23 the importance of community involvement
24 to leverage resources for program
25 development and maximizing policy

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 development.

3 In a collaborative effort to
4 decrease risk factors for Type 2 diabetes
5 and childhood obesity, the School
6 District and Temple University have
7 partnered to participate in the national
8 research study, Healthy, which takes
9 place in several Philadelphia schools.

10 The School District has also
11 partnered with Philadelphia Urban Food
12 and Fitness Alliance, PUFFA, an
13 organization focused on creating vibrant
14 communities that supports access to
15 locally grown, healthy and affordable
16 food and safe places for physical
17 activity.

18 The District is exploring
19 cost-effective farm-to-school
20 opportunities. This includes local food
21 grower's provision of fresh fruits and
22 vegetables to Philadelphia schools.

23 We have met with parent
24 advocacy groups such as Parents United
25 for Public Education, a committee focused

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 on healthy food initiatives, to discuss
3 options for school menus.

4 I would like to conclude my
5 testimony with citing the School
6 District's Division of Food Services
7 Mission Statement.

8 It is our mission to make a
9 significant contribution to the general
10 well-being, mental and physical capacity,
11 and learning ability of each student and
12 afford them the opportunity to fully
13 participate in the education process.
14 This will be achieved by providing
15 students with wholesome, nutritious and
16 appetizing meals served in a courteous
17 manner in a sanitary and pleasant dining
18 environment.

19 This mission will be pursued in
20 the most efficient and cost-effective
21 means possible and according to the
22 regulatory and policy guidelines of the
23 National School Lunch Act, the
24 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
25 and Education, Philadelphia Department of

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 Health and the School District of
3 Philadelphia.

4 Thank you for the opportunity
5 to testify today, and I would be happy to
6 answer questions you may have.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you very much.

9 Could you tell us more about
10 your Wellness Policy Implementation Plan
11 or give us a little more information in
12 terms of what it is?

13 MR. GRASELA: I provided a copy
14 to the Council, so hopefully you have it
15 in front of you, but there's actually six
16 components to the Wellness Policy. It's
17 to be implemented over a three-year
18 period.

19 Number one is School Health
20 Councils, and that's to make sure that
21 there is a cadre of people on site at
22 each school to support the efforts that
23 we have or where they're trying to
24 implement nutrition standards for all
25 schools available on school campuses

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 during the school day, and that's school
3 meal guidelines, which are ensuring that
4 the District is meeting or exceeding all
5 the federal and state requirements for
6 the meals we serve; making sure that the
7 meal times that are established under the
8 USDA regulations are being met; making
9 sure that the snacks we provide meet the
10 snack guidelines that are identified in
11 the Wellness Policy; making sure that the
12 nutrition education component is met.
13 Currently, we have nutrition education
14 programs in 247 schools. Physical
15 education. That's to ensure that as part
16 of the Wellness Policy not only are we
17 teaching good eating habits, we are
18 enforcing that in the menus and what we
19 offer and serve over the counters, but
20 we're also incorporating physical
21 activity into the school day. And other
22 school-based activities.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you very much.

25 Councilman Rizzo.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you.

3 You heard my questions of the
4 Health Department, and you indicated that
5 there was no reports of illness during
6 that period of time. Did you identify
7 how much of that recalled material got to
8 the District and was consumed?

9 MR. GRASELA: Over a two-year
10 period? We have not identified that and
11 I'm not sure that we would be able to.
12 It would require a lot of research, not
13 on our part necessarily, but on the
14 processors and the federal government.

15 No beef from Hallmark/Westland
16 was ever slated for Philadelphia. There
17 was -- one of our processors received
18 beef for another state, but because of
19 the federal regulations for first
20 in/first out, the beef becomes
21 commingled. That's what made it so
22 challenging.

23 We know for a fact that nothing
24 on the original Hold ever made it into
25 our -- the contract numbers and lots ever

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 made it into Philadelphia. But we have
3 identified what we did have on site and
4 what was processed for us that was put on
5 quarantine and not served.

6 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Is that a
7 weakness? My goodness, if Fed Ex can
8 track a package, I can't imagine a major
9 distributor that distributes how many
10 million, 143 million pounds of beef,
11 can't tell you where it went.

12 MR. FARLINO: Councilman, we
13 were well aware of the vendors who
14 provided the District food that may have
15 come from this vendor. That's why we
16 were able to clearly identify and
17 quarantine and ultimately destroy the
18 beef that came from Hallmark/Westland
19 versus beef from other manufacturers.

20 To answer your question
21 specifically about what about the meat
22 prior to the Hold, prior to the recall,
23 we probably -- and we haven't had this
24 conversation with our larger providers,
25 and we can do that, but one of the things

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 that you might want to note in
3 Mr. Grasela's testimony, and, that is,
4 that for all products, including beef,
5 every -- and it's done through sampling.
6 All of our vendors who provide the School
7 District meat or any product have tests
8 that they conduct. They pull lots off
9 and they test them.

10 So the assumption is that
11 during this two-year period prior to this
12 recall, it would have seemed very likely
13 that should there have been a
14 contamination in any product but
15 specifically in this Hallmark/Westland
16 product, that it would have been
17 discerned through the extensive testing
18 that our vendors are required to do.

19 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Good. I
20 heard that point, and that's appreciated.

21 My final question is, who is
22 empowered at the School District? If
23 something that's bad hits the District
24 and it gets to the point where it's being
25 prepared and it doesn't smell good or

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 it's not good, at the final point, who
3 can say, We're not preparing this?

4 MR. GRASELA: We have managers
5 on site at each school who have been
6 trained in recognizing conditions like
7 this. We have policies and procedures in
8 place that are as simple as when in
9 doubt, don't serve it, pull it aside. We
10 have contracts with independent
11 laboratories to evaluate it to make sure
12 it is safe to consume.

13 Almost all protein that comes
14 into the District -- when I say
15 "protein," beef patties, chicken
16 nuggets -- all that goes through a
17 pathological evaluation prior to -- the
18 meals are actually produced several weeks
19 in advance so they can go through an
20 incubation period before they're released
21 to be served to the schools.

22 MR. FARLINO: I might add,
23 Councilman, that there are very strict
24 processes that our staff members are
25 trained to use whenever they do see a

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 problem, and there is a process in the
3 way that is quarantined and ultimately
4 discarded.

5 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Let's finish
6 up on the financial aspects of a recall.
7 When you guys have to throw away hundreds
8 and hundreds of pounds of anything, do
9 you recover it? Do you recover the
10 costs?

11 MR. GRASELA: We have
12 applied -- the USDA gave us specific
13 guidelines and instructions on how to
14 recover our funds. We have complied with
15 all that as we destroyed it. They've
16 laid out all the components of the cost
17 of production of that meal, to the
18 destruction of that meal, and they are
19 going to -- it is our understanding they
20 will reimburse us, but I understand
21 because of the scope of this, it could
22 take several months and it could be in
23 the millions, if not billions, of dollars
24 to recover the cost. But we have applied
25 for the reimbursement, yes.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Well, that's
3 good to hear. It sounds like you have
4 that act together over there. It's good.

5 I hear constantly during the
6 summer months about how important it is
7 when you cook beef out at a barbecue
8 especially, you cook it good, and even if
9 it is bad in some cases, the preparation
10 can correct that, even though that's not
11 a desirable situation, but I would assume
12 that even if we did get some of that and
13 it was prepared properly, that that's
14 probably the reason why we didn't see any
15 illness, and that's a good thing.

16 MR. FARLINO: Right.

17 COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thanks.
18 Thanks for filling us in on this. It's
19 interesting.

20 MR. FARLINO: Thank you.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you both.

23 MR. FARLINO: Thank you,
24 Councilwoman.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You're

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 welcome.

3 Jonathan Stein, Community Legal
4 Services, and Sydelle or Sydelle Zove.

5 MS. ZOVE: Sydelle.

6 (Witnesses approached witness
7 table.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

9 Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against
10 Hunger. You can pronounce it properly
11 for us. Thank you.

12 MR. STEIN: Thank you. Good
13 afternoon, Chairwoman Blackwell and
14 Councilmembers Greenlee and Rizzo.

15 Our focus this afternoon and
16 our testimony is solely going to be on
17 the critical and crucially important
18 School Breakfast Program. I am Jonathan
19 Stein, general counsel at Community Legal
20 Services, and with me is?

21 MS. ZOVE: Sydelle Zove from
22 the Greater Philadelphia Coalition
23 Against Hunger.

24 MR. STEIN: Thank you for
25 holding this hearing on one of the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 important school reform issues that's
3 hardly received the attention it rightly
4 deserves, school nutrition, and the
5 impacts on education when undernourished
6 and malnourished children try to learn in
7 today's schools, especially without a
8 nutritious breakfast to begin the school
9 day.

10 Community Legal Services, the
11 Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against
12 Hunger, Public Citizens for Children and
13 Youth, PCCY, and others have underway a
14 joint project to ensure that all
15 low-income children in the City
16 participate in the School Breakfast
17 Program. This is a longstanding federal
18 entitlement program that makes a
19 nutritious meal available to every
20 low-income child.

21 This hearing offers a unique
22 opportunity to offer some insights mid
23 stage as we believe that with 100,000
24 Philadelphia school children eligible but
25 not receiving free breakfasts and with

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 federal funding available to provide
3 these breakfasts, there should be no
4 delay to pushing aggressively forward
5 toward this goal.

6 I should add that we have some
7 extraordinary administrators, like Wayne
8 Grasela, in the School District right now
9 who share these goals, and I think
10 there's some wonderful leadership at that
11 level to help realize this goal. But I
12 think as our testimony will unfold, we'll
13 show what remains to be done.

14 Having a nutritious daily
15 breakfast is crucial to learning, and a
16 hungry child entering the school day
17 starts that day under a severe handicap.
18 Stomach cramps and headaches and the
19 apathy caused by hunger are real
20 obstacles to learning.

21 More broadly, let us not forget
22 that the school meals programs are a
23 crucial component of the anti-hunger
24 safety net, especially at the current
25 time of rapidly rising food prices and

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 with food cupboards currently turning
3 hungry people away.

4 The scientific evidence has
5 shown a clear and proven link between
6 hunger and the capacity to learn.

7 And welcome Councilman Clarke
8 to this hearing as well.

9 Children from families
10 experiencing hunger and food insecurity
11 are two to three times more likely to
12 have emotional, behavioral and academic
13 problems.

14 In contrast, school-age
15 children who do eat breakfast demonstrate
16 more creativity, higher test scores,
17 fewer absences, less time spent in school
18 nurse's offices, fewer conflicts with
19 classmates and greater cooperation.
20 School-age children and adolescents who
21 are iron deficient even by a small margin
22 have lower scores on standardized math
23 tests and those who skip breakfast are
24 less able to solve simple visual tasks
25 and they're easily distracted.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 I'm going to skip some of our
3 written testimony and go on to say school
4 administrators in Philadelphia have found
5 as a direct result of the School
6 Breakfast Program that, quote,
7 "absenteeism, lateness and incidents of
8 mischievousness have diminished. Children are
9 more attentive, and more harmonious
10 relations have been established between
11 children and faculty." The program,
12 quote, "has increased pupil efficiency in
13 school and classroom performance" and,
14 quote, "filled a great need, resulting in
15 improved attendance and behavior," end
16 quote.

17 What is striking is that these
18 quotes we've just provided you are 40
19 years old and were collected in a report
20 back in 1975 entitled, quote "Need
21 Hunger: A Report on the School Breakfast
22 Program in Philadelphia."

23 We go back 40 years to show how
24 the extraordinary educational value of
25 school breakfast is not a new revelation.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 Yet, today in our Philadelphia school
3 population of close to 200,000, where at
4 least three-quarters of those students
5 are low income and, therefore, eligible
6 for a free breakfast, only about 43,000
7 students currently eat a free or
8 reduced-price breakfast. This means that
9 approximately 100,000 students are low
10 income and eligible and not receiving a
11 free breakfast.

12 Participation in the School
13 Lunch Program at 98,000 students
14 demonstrates that school-based meals can
15 reach a much larger percentage of
16 low-income children. We, therefore, must
17 ask why fewer than half of those children
18 eating the free -- are eating a free or
19 reduced-price breakfast in comparison to
20 those who eat the free lunch.

21 The Washington-based Food
22 Research and Action Center, FRAC, in a
23 recent study of the National School
24 Breakfast Program looked at the 23
25 largest school districts and noted that

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 only 43.8 percent of Philadelphia
3 students eat the free or reduced-price
4 lunch -- who eat the free or
5 reduced-price lunch also eat the free
6 breakfast. That places our public school
7 system behind 15 others with higher
8 participation rates. Compare our 43.8 to
9 Newark's 93.7 percent of its school lunch
10 kids who have the breakfast program or
11 the Portland, Oregon school system where
12 97.9 percent of its kids who have free
13 lunches also get the free breakfast
14 program.

15 The FRAC Center estimated that
16 if Philadelphia boosted its enrollment in
17 the School Breakfast Program from 43
18 percent to 70 percent of the school lunch
19 population, we could add an additional
20 25,000 plus students to the free
21 breakfast program and the School District
22 would pull down almost \$6 million in
23 available federal funds to pay for those
24 school breakfasts.

25 To give you a concrete idea of

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 unmet need, we looked at three West
3 Philadelphia schools, Chairman Blackwell,
4 which I believe are in your district to
5 give you a concrete idea of what goes on
6 in James Dobson, Henry Lea and Samuel
7 Powel. Of the Dobson School with 215
8 low-income students, only 58 are in the
9 School Breakfast Program enrollment. At
10 Henry Lea with 383 low-income students,
11 only 131 are in the School Breakfast
12 Program. At Samuel Powel, there are
13 about 130 low-income kids, and only 51
14 are in the breakfast program right now,
15 even though all those children are, in
16 theory, eligible for the School Breakfast
17 Program.

18 Our school breakfast project is
19 documenting the best practices in high
20 breakfast participation schools in
21 Philadelphia and around the nation, and
22 what is emerging is a pattern that shows
23 a direct correlation between individual
24 school-based leadership and high
25 enrollment. Where administrators and

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 teachers understand the link between
3 hunger, poor academic performance,
4 student absenteeism and behavioral
5 issues, breakfast programs have been
6 implemented to enjoy a very high
7 participation, but having access to
8 school breakfasts should not be a matter
9 of chance of where you live or what
10 school you go to and subject to the
11 degree of commitment by particular
12 principals or teachers.

13 The Philadelphia School Reform
14 Commission and this District's new CEO,
15 Dr. Arlene Ackerman, can make school
16 breakfast expansion and participation a
17 high priority across all schools and can
18 model programs based on home-grown
19 successes at high participation schools
20 in Philadelphia, such as Fairhill, which
21 has 95 percent breakfast participation;
22 Henry A. Brown, Creighton Thomas and
23 Hackett with 89 percent; and others with
24 greater than 80 percent, which include
25 Cayuga, Finletter, Folk Arts Cultural

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 Treasures Charter School, Gillespie
3 Middle School, Hartranft, Pennypacker,
4 Stanton and Wister.

5 Just yesterday we learned the
6 School District has been selected as one
7 of the 11 large urban districts in the
8 nation to participate in a major
9 breakfast expansion program of USDA. We
10 hope that this will be a boost.

11 And, finally, one major reform
12 to school meals takeup and one that we
13 helped get started through Community
14 Legal Services and the Welfare Rights
15 Organization back in 1991 here was the
16 policy of universal service where all
17 children, without stigma or
18 discrimination, receive free school meals
19 without the need for each family to
20 complete a means test written application
21 to become eligible. Apparently,
22 unannounced to the greater public, the
23 School District, to its credit, in
24 February 2008 extended the universal
25 service policy beyond the current

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 200-plus schools and sites to an
3 additional 50 sites in K through 8
4 schools for the breakfast program. This
5 is an important step, which we look back
6 and think should have been much better
7 publicized and with information put
8 directly in the hands of students and
9 their parents, and this was a very
10 important step and hopefully a crucial
11 step toward the needed goal of making
12 universal service a policy at every
13 school and site in the City for both
14 breakfast and lunch.

15 In conclusion, we say that a
16 commitment to universal school breakfast
17 represents an investment in our children
18 and the future of our city. The
19 commitment now must be coupled with a
20 broadly supported plan to offer appealing
21 and nutritionally sound meals and to do
22 so in a manner that promotes maximum
23 parent, administrator and teacher
24 participation. We trust that this
25 Committee and Council as a whole will

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 support the effort to enroll all eligible
3 children in the School Breakfast Program.

4 And I ask Sydelle Zove, is
5 there anything further you'd like to add
6 to that.

7 MS. ZOVE: Yes. I would just
8 like to remind Council that Mayor Nutter
9 has made a commitment to improving the
10 school completion rate in Philadelphia,
11 where we have a dropout rate of 45
12 percent at this time, which is tragic,
13 and we're convinced that by providing
14 young students and high school students
15 with proper nutrition, we can help to
16 improve the graduation rate.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you very much. Very important testimony.
19 And obviously we support children having
20 this School Breakfast Program, and we
21 thank you again for your testimony.

22 Are there any questions?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you both very much.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 MS. ZOVE: Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

4 Charlie Baltimore, health and fitness
5 educator, High School of the Future.

6 (Witness approached witness
7 table.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you for coming.

10 MR. BALTIMORE: Thank you for
11 having me. My name is Charlie Baltimore.
12 I'm a health and fitness educator at the
13 High School of the Future, which we are
14 very proud resides in your district,
15 Councilwoman Blackwell.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you.

18 MR. BALTIMORE: I'm privileged
19 to teach at an institution that
20 understands the direct correlation
21 between diet, behavior and academics.
22 While I have been an educator for 11
23 years, this is my first in the School
24 District of Philadelphia. I was amazed
25 that this beautiful facility with a

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 full-service kitchen was serving
3 low-grade prepared food to our learners.
4 Since the High School of the Future is a
5 bold step into the arena of progressive
6 education, I was completely perplexed as
7 to how our learners were not being
8 offered food that was as carefully
9 planned as our curriculum and as directly
10 tied into the goals and objectives.

11 What was truly surprising was
12 the response I received from
13 administrators to my request to convert
14 our food services to the farm-to-school
15 model, which would bring fresh, locally
16 produced produce and fruit into our
17 school. A resounding yes was the
18 response. Our Acting Principal, Jose
19 Lebron, and District Superintendent Shirl
20 Gilbert were receptive and supportive and
21 continue to be so. The Division of Food
22 Services under the leadership of Wayne
23 Grasela has demonstrated the same support
24 throughout this process. This is a key
25 factor: the recognition of a problem and

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 the willingness to address it.

3 We immediately formed a
4 coalition of community partners, many of
5 whom I expect this body to hear from.
6 This partnership includes The Food Trust,
7 White Dog Foundation, Temple University,
8 University of Penn, Drexel University,
9 Millcreek Farm and the Urban Nutrition
10 Initiative. At this point of the
11 process, we have identified a distributor
12 that will represent a consortium of local
13 farmers, and we expect to have the new
14 menu in place by the beginning of the
15 2008-2009 school year. Not only will our
16 learners benefit from a healthy diet, the
17 School District will infuse a true
18 stimulus into our local economy and
19 support the struggling farmers. This is
20 a win-win venture.

21 I know a main focus of this
22 Committee is on the beef recall. It is
23 an academic discussion based on archaic
24 guidelines. The fact of the matter is,
25 even if the recalled beef was not tainted

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 by FDA standards, it would still be
3 unhealthy and dangerous by scientific
4 standards. Unless the procured beef is
5 certified organic, or at the very least
6 produced under clean and ethical
7 standards, we are bombarding our children
8 with a daily dose of antibiotics, growth
9 hormones and an array of bacterial
10 strains. It is important to remember
11 that the American-bred beef products are
12 not allowed to be sold in Europe because
13 our standards are far inferior to that of
14 the European Union. The recall has
15 elevated the discussion on nutrition in
16 our schools to the level it should always
17 have been: top priority.

18 The City of Philadelphia has a
19 window of opportunity to be a leader by
20 breaking with the paltry and
21 life-threatening policies of the USDA and
22 FDA and doing the right thing: offering
23 our students the freshest and most
24 nutritious food possible.

25 There is no need to develop a

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 grandiose operating plan to accomplish
3 our goals. I have found that educating
4 ourselves on the volumes of readily
5 available empirical data and logic-based
6 decision-making to be sufficient for
7 realizing impactful outcomes. We live in
8 an agriculture-rich region of the United
9 States. Our indigenous fruits and
10 vegetables are plentiful and highly
11 nutritious. Why then do we even consider
12 purchasing perishables from hundreds of
13 miles away that age, spoil and lose
14 nutrients during transport? Harrisburg
15 Dairies is one of the last remaining
16 independently owned dairies that produce
17 healthy additive-free milk products from
18 grass-fed cows. Why do we purchase
19 hormone-laced milk from unscrupulous
20 conglomerates, often at a great distance?
21 When we add the spiraling cost of
22 gasoline to the equation, the current
23 policy begs for fiscal sensibility.
24 During a recent nutrition
25 class, my students learned how to read

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 food labels. An inspection of our
3 cafeteria cheese uncovered an ingredient
4 classified by the FDA as toxic. What we
5 are doing with food procurement on the
6 local level is paramount to the
7 exportation of American jobs on the
8 national level. We must become activists
9 on behalf of our children in order to
10 force change in the lobbyist-influenced
11 policies that throw nails on the road to
12 sensible nutrition plans every day for
13 school administrators and procurement
14 officers across the nation.

15 The members of this legislative
16 body will undoubtedly be inundated with
17 stacks of research findings, reports,
18 scientific comparisons and the like. I
19 will spare you a boring recount on my
20 part. I will state it is most important
21 that you do not view the topic of
22 nutrition in our schools in isolation.
23 What we and our young people consume is
24 directly connected to academic
25 performance, behavior and social

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 interaction. Our bodies and minds need
3 food products rich in vitamins and free
4 of chemicals. We cannot seek ways to
5 elevate test scores without unilaterally
6 removing the tons of pesticides, growth
7 hormones, MSG, artificial coloring and
8 flavors, toxic enhancers and spoiled
9 mush, shrewdly disguised as food, from
10 our schools. At the School of the
11 Future, there is a noticeable increase in
12 negative behavior and nodding students
13 after lunch. What else can be expected
14 after an injection of all the pollutants
15 I just mentioned? The lack of a
16 nutritional diet even has a role in the
17 violence that has gripped our city and
18 schools. Just as cattle become ill and
19 often crazed when denied nature's
20 intended diet of grass, the human brain
21 and nervous system become erratic and
22 strained after a very short period when
23 we attempt to defy nature.

24 Any educator will tell you,
25 academics are only a part of what we do

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 every day. We must model proper
3 behavior, intervene in conflict, teach
4 life skills, and many times educate
5 families. An evening healthy cooking
6 class for families and the community will
7 be a part of the School of the Future
8 nutrition initiative. If we begin to
9 provide wholesome food to our students
10 during the school day and they continue
11 poor eating habits at home, we are only
12 having a minimal effect. It would be
13 beneficial to develop systematic
14 strategies for educating families.
15 Schools are perfectly positioned to have
16 a major impact on the surrounding
17 communities, and we need to accept this
18 as an obligation, not an option.

19 There is also much talk about
20 the obesity epidemic. AIDS is an
21 epidemic. Melanoma is an epidemic. With
22 the exception of a small percentage of
23 genetic-related weight issues, obesity is
24 not an epidemic. It is a choice. We
25 must, as a society, cease the common

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 practice of displacing blame and accept
3 responsibility for our actions and poor
4 choices. Schools have a profound
5 responsibility to implement and maintain
6 a fact-based conversation on an issue
7 which, at the very core, is about one's
8 ability to lead a happy and fruitful
9 life-style.

10 As an educator, I must present
11 assignments to my students to help
12 determine if they, A, understand the
13 lesson presented; and, B, fully accept
14 the material as legitimate and
15 meaningful. So here is your assignment:
16 Arrange to have the typical School
17 District-prepared lunch provided to
18 Councilmembers and staff and
19 Administration staff for one week, just
20 one week. See if there is a change in
21 your ability to function at optimum
22 levels and overall state of being. Then
23 imagine eating like this for ten months
24 out of every year for 14 years. We truly
25 are what we eat.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 I applaud this body for
3 elevating this topic. I hope you pursue
4 it in the upcoming years, and I would
5 love to come back next year with some of
6 our learners to also testify.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you. We thank you for your testimony and
9 would welcome them.

10 Are there questions for
11 Mr. Baltimore?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you very much.

15 MR. BALTIMORE: Thank you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Helen
17 Gym, Powel School.

18 Is Ms. Richardson here?

19 MS. RICHARDSON: Yes.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I know
21 you're at GAMP, Girard Academic Music
22 Program.

23 (Witnesses approached witness
24 table.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 you very much. Please identify yourself
3 for the record and begin your testimony.

4 We also have Alison McDowell,
5 if that is the issue, parent, Meredith
6 Elementary; Mary Jo Kannon, McCall
7 Elementary, with two students; Shaharazad
8 Ali, George Washington Elementary; and,
9 finally, Sandy Sherman, Food Trust.

10 If there's anyone else here who
11 would like to testify, please see
12 Mr. Christmas at the side of the room and
13 we will certainly recognize you.

14 (Witnesses approached witness
15 table.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Feel
17 free to identify yourself for the record.

18 MS. GYM: My name is Helen Gym.
19 I definitely want to thank the Council
20 Education Committee for holding this
21 hearing. It's very important to all of
22 us parents and the Philadelphia public
23 schools.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 MS. GYM: My name is Helen Gym
3 and I'm the mother of three children who
4 are in or entering the Philadelphia
5 public schools. I'm also a member of
6 Parents United for Public Education,
7 which has organized a collective of
8 parents and advocates who have been
9 working on seeing concrete changes in the
10 school food program since last fall after
11 we pushed the District to renegotiate its
12 contract back then with Aramark and a
13 contract that was eventually terminated.

14 Among our concerns that we've
15 been talking about have been the
16 expansion of greater food options,
17 vegetarian options, access to drinking
18 water, non-dairy milk alternatives.
19 We've also talked about changes in meal
20 times and schedules and a greater
21 transparency in the School District's
22 nutrition program and to open up a
23 discussion about having an annual report
24 on nutritional services.

25 I know that the horrors of the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 Westland/Hallmark recall can't be
3 underscored, but I also hope that the
4 Council Education Committee can also
5 consider the everyday misery of too many
6 of our children regarding their school
7 food programs, things like having a 9:00
8 a.m. lunch; things like in kindergarten
9 through the 8th grade, elementary school
10 conversions, how 8th graders often get
11 the same meals as the youngest kids in
12 the school; things like competition
13 between lunch programs and recess time,
14 that too often breakfast competes with
15 play time and lunch also competes with
16 play time on the schoolyard, one of their
17 few times to play; things like
18 full-service kitchens that go unused. At
19 Ziegler Elementary, which was a beautiful
20 elementary school that was remodeled with
21 a full-service kitchen, they have a
22 satellite meal program, which means that
23 the meals are brought in and that there
24 is nobody there to actually cook and use
25 the facilities that are there.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 I want to state that the School
3 Breakfast and Lunch Program is the most
4 important and reliable food source for
5 tens of thousands of our kids. It costs
6 over \$90 million a year. But too many of
7 our kids are hungry, hungry in our
8 schools. They opt out. They fill up on
9 junk food, and we wonder why they're
10 apathetic, tired or acting out in
11 classes. And the reasons are
12 complicated, as we said. They range
13 partially from the scheduling to
14 competition between food and nutrition,
15 to unappealing menus, to the lack of
16 appropriate options, including vegetarian
17 and non-dairy alternatives, but most of
18 all it boils down to an approach where
19 cost efficiency and the unwillingness to
20 break the standard contracts around food
21 procurement services have trumped the
22 practical reality of what's happening in
23 our school lunchroom.

24 So we ask Council to hear and
25 talk to the parents who are here today.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 We hope that you will talk to the
3 children and how they have -- how they
4 feel about food and the food choices that
5 have been presented for them, and we ask
6 you to join with us later as we go to
7 talk to the District to impress the
8 importance of discussing the school food
9 program.

10 We don't want the
11 Westland/Hallmark recall to be a one-time
12 issue. It's been an important
13 opportunity for school districts across
14 the nation to look at investing in school
15 food programs, not seeing them as a
16 break-even line item budget or as a
17 money-maker technically for the public
18 schools, but as a serious investment in
19 our children's future.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much.

22 Question, Councilman Greenlee.

23 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
24 you, Madam Chair.

25 Just a quick question. I

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 picked up one thing you said. 9:00 a.m.
3 lunch, is that what you said?

4 MS. GYM: Oh, yeah. High
5 schools sometimes they get scheduled
6 first period. It's been -- it's a
7 scheduling problem at the schools.

8 MS. RICHARDSON: Some of them
9 have 2:30 lunches. Some of the schools
10 schedule lunches at 2:30, which means
11 that children are totally opting out of
12 the lunch program, which is wasting the
13 District tens of thousands of dollars.

14 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: What do
15 you mean? Instead of, what, going to
16 lunch? That's their last period?

17 MS. RICHARDSON: That's their
18 last period, exactly.

19 MS. GYM: They sometimes have a
20 first period/last period. Lunches,
21 depending on how large the school is, can
22 range from 9:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m. up to
23 1:30 p.m. It's a big problem at a lot of
24 the schools, and I'm sure --

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: You say

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 that's mostly high schools where that's a
3 problem?

4 MS. RICHARDSON: No, it's not
5 just high schools. They do that with the
6 middle schools, too.

7 MS. GYM: Elementary,
8 especially as the K-to-8 conversions have
9 happened. You've got eight lunch
10 periods. You've got eight grades and
11 you've got a certain set number of lunch
12 periods in a day. You only have this
13 time period, so you are going to squeeze
14 in as many kids as you can into limited
15 hours during the day. It is one of the
16 reasons why when you talk to kids, they
17 are hungry in our schools.

18 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Well, no.
19 I understand. And I guess I should ask
20 the School District this, but I guess
21 given the restraints of the larger
22 schools, what would be your suggestion in
23 that?

24 MS. GYM: I think we need to
25 take -- one of the suggestions that we

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 have is, I mean, we -- it's going to be
3 hard to talk about it, but essentially
4 we've asked that in terms of meal times
5 and lunch schedules, we're asking for at
6 least ten minutes for the children to
7 actually sit down for breakfast and 20
8 minutes after sitting down for lunch,
9 that we want meal times scheduled at
10 appropriate periods between 11:00 and --

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: No. I
12 see that. I'm sorry to interrupt you,
13 but I guess given that they say they only
14 have so much time -- Madam Chair, if I
15 could, when these panelists are finished,
16 if I could just ask the School District
17 to come back up for a minute on this
18 subject.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
20 Certainly.

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: But I
22 just wondering, anticipating what they
23 might say, that since there's only so
24 much time, how would you arrange it? I
25 mean, ideally I know you want it between

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 11:00 and 1:30, which makes perfect
3 sense, I agree. I don't want to eat
4 lunch at 9 o'clock either, but I'm just
5 wondering given the size of some of these
6 schools, what would be your thoughts on
7 that?

8 MS. GYM: I think we have to
9 have that discussion. The most important
10 thing is to talk to figure out what the
11 options are. We know that some schools
12 can arrange it. It may be a size issue.
13 Whether we break it up into two
14 lunchrooms. Part of it is a facilities
15 problem, that you limit it to just one
16 lunchroom and there's only one place on
17 site where you can eat and then they just
18 cycle them through as fast as they can,
19 whether that needs to be broken up. But
20 somehow there needs to be a discussion of
21 the consequences first and then what some
22 other options could be.

23 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: No. I
24 certainly agree, 9:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.
25 lunches don't make a lot of sense.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 So, Madam Chair, if I could,
3 when the witnesses are through, if the
4 School District could come back up.

5 Thank you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you very much.

8 MS. McDOWELL: Hi. Thanks for
9 arranging this today. I'm going to skip
10 ahead of Aissia. My name is Alison
11 McDowell. I have a daughter in first
12 grade at Meredith Elementary. I have to
13 go pick her up shortly, and I'm parked at
14 South and Broad, so I'm going to hustle
15 out. But I prepared a statement today.

16 The food we choose to eat and
17 feed our children represents an
18 investment. The food our children
19 consume today will affect their health
20 for decades to come. The eating habits
21 our children learn today will ultimately
22 determine whether we, as a community,
23 stem the epidemic of obesity and diabetes
24 or embrace it with all of its burdensome
25 costs to our own health and social

3 In order to shape a healthy
4 future for our children, we need to reach
5 them when they're young to encourage them
6 to experience new foods, seek out fresh,
7 minimally processed fruits and vegetables
8 and ultimately get them interested in
9 preparing foods themselves so they will
10 have the skills they need to be
11 responsible for their own health as they
12 grow older.

24 I strongly feel that while the
25 resources we are spending today may meet

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 the short-term objectives in terms of
3 USDA, calories and prescribed units of
4 nutrition, we are doing a disservice to
5 them by feeding them highly processed,
6 commodity-based foods that are prepared
7 off site, trucked in and heated in a
8 microwave. And why is it that we do
9 this? Because the bottom line says that
10 we cannot afford to install and retrofit
11 or operate full-service kitchens in our
12 schools or pay people a good wage to
13 prepare our children's meals on site.
14 And that's what I had when I was my
15 daughter's age, and they don't have that
16 anymore. And at Meredith we had that up
17 until two years ago when they took out
18 the ovens. And the reality is is that
19 it's a financial choice, and I understand
20 the School District's and Mr. Grasela's
21 issue of working with a small amount of
22 money and making it stretch. But as I
23 say today, all of us in this room and the
24 City leaders, we need to look at this as
25 a society. This isn't an investment that

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 balances out at the end of the year.
3 That investment carries over in the
4 health of our children. And so even if
5 we come up with a budget that's in the
6 black on paper, what is it that they're
7 carrying around with them in their bodies
8 ten years from now, 20 years from now?
9 It has an impact. It's going to shape
10 what they eat and how they eat, and we
11 need to consider that investment. Even
12 if it may balance out on the books right
13 now, it's not necessarily going to do
14 that in the future.

15 And I don't know if you
16 received this. I passed this along.
17 This is actually a copy of the lunch menu
18 program, and it takes a while to actually
19 find the food, because there's a whole
20 lot of advertising around this, including
21 "watch and play 24 hours a day kids TV,"
22 which as a parent -- this is kind of the
23 first time I've seen this -- is rather
24 striking, that we're using our children
25 as vehicles for advertising in this way,

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 their food program. If you don't see
3 that, maybe you could take a look. I
4 only have two.

5 So there's a lot of money
6 wrapped in around this food program.
7 It's not all wrapped around getting the
8 best, freshest food to our children.

9 The School District has a
10 tremendous responsibility. There are
11 over 150,000 kids. They're getting
12 upwards of two-thirds of their nutrition
13 a day, and some of those kids don't have
14 a dinner, so this may be it, that's all
15 they get all day.

16 The satellite lunch program,
17 most of it is in disposable containers,
18 it's heated, it's in plastic. It's
19 probably not the most environmentally
20 sound procedure.

21 Our school was built at a time
22 when kids could go home for lunch, and
23 that's not the case. You can't go home
24 for lunch. And today many of these kids
25 even if they could go home, their parents

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 might not be in a situation to provide
3 them a nutritionally sound meal, and we
4 have to presume they're not getting much
5 outside of what they get from the School
6 District. It's a huge responsibility. I
7 don't relish Mr. Grasela's job. It's
8 very difficult, so we need to support him
9 and make sure that he gets the resources
10 he needs to give our children the
11 freshest, best foods possible.

12 As a whole American society, we
13 have become more and more disconnected
14 from our food. I think this is changing,
15 but we're overcoming something that's
16 been in place for several decades. This
17 situation is really only magnified in the
18 School Lunch Program. Our children, they
19 don't know where the food they're eating
20 comes from. It comes in a packet. They
21 used to have salads. Now in the
22 satellite lunch program, occasionally
23 there will be a salad. It's in a little
24 container about the size, you know, with
25 a peel-off lid, like that doesn't say

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 fresh salad. They don't know where it
3 comes from. They don't know who made it.

4 The concepts of really fresh,
5 fresh food and seasonality are foreign to
6 them. Primarily I didn't see any green
7 vegetables on that. My mom always said
8 when I was growing up -- maybe it was
9 frozen, but it was like, Find the green
10 vegetable, and corn doesn't count.

11 There's no green vegetables in
12 there. There's some apples. There's
13 some carrots. We should do more.

14 Moving forward, we as a city
15 and as an urban school district, we need
16 to find the resources that will enable
17 our children to get excited about healthy
18 food choices and that will enable them to
19 become active adults who contribute to
20 our civic life and ensure that they do
21 not become an unnecessary drain on our
22 healthcare system a few decades from now.
23 We need to move towards a model where
24 understanding healthy eating habits is as
25 fundamental a life skill as knowing how

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 to make change and read a newspaper.

3 We're teaching children. The
4 food we're giving them, it's teaching
5 them some lesson, and we need to visit is
6 that the lesson, in the satellite lunch
7 program at least, that we want them to
8 learn.

9 Until then, the children who
10 don't have the ability to brown-bag it
11 will continue to create towers of tuna.
12 We have those at our school. They're the
13 rejected tuna fish sandwiches that stack
14 up on big trays on the give-away table.
15 And the children whose parents have the
16 resources to send them in with a lunch
17 will continue to do that as well.

18 In closing, I ask that the
19 School District and our City's leaders --
20 because we all have to do it together.
21 Mr. Grasela can't do it on his own. He
22 doesn't have enough resources. We need
23 to figure out what food -- evaluate the
24 food we're giving our children. And
25 these children are some of the most

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 at-risk children in -- at-risk citizens.

3 They can't speak for themselves. That's

4 why we're here today.

5 Are we using local food service

6 to the fullest extent possible? We're an

7 incredible location. We're between

8 Lancaster County and southern New Jersey.

9 There's a lot of fresh options here. Are
10 we taking advantage?

11 Are they fresh and appealing?

12 Are there vegetarian or vegan options?

13 That's a growing life-style choice and

14 health choice for many children in the

15 District, and are those available?

16 And there are a lot of models

17 out there, and I agree, the School

18 District has taken some of those in and

19 they're piloted on a limited basis in

20 various schools. How can we grow that?

21 It's a national and international

22 movement. Jamie Oliver and Alice Waters,

23 people are doing it, and we can do it

24 here. It's a new day, and we can do it

25 here.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 So thank you for organizing
3 this hearing and allowing us to present
4 our concerns as parents. I don't know if
5 any of you have read Michael Pollan's
6 books. He's a pretty incredible writer
7 and he's written on this issue
8 extensively, but there was a New York
9 Times article this past January, and his
10 philosophy sort of distills it down: Eat
11 food, and that means food that your
12 great-grandmother would recognize as
13 food. So eat food, not too much, and
14 mostly plants. And I think that should
15 be a goal for us as we look at the lunch
16 program and the satellite program, is how
17 can we do this. We have the food out
18 there. We just need to find a way to
19 finance it to make it workable for the
20 School District and get it to our kids.

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you very much. Thank you.

24 Any questions?

25 (No response.)

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you.

4 MS. RICHARDSON: Good afternoon
5 and thank you, Councilwoman Blackwell,
6 for conducting this hearing today on the
7 food services at the Philadelphia School
8 District, and I also want to thank you,
9 Councilman Greenlee, for attending and
10 staying throughout the entire hearing.
11 My name is Aissia Richardson and my
12 daughter attends Girard Academic Music
13 Program at 22nd and Ritner in South
14 Philadelphia. And I do want to speak
15 today about an incident that occurred
16 shortly before the tainted beef from the
17 Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Company
18 was discovered in our District's food
19 supply.

20 While the Health Department and
21 the School District is not saying that
22 any children got sick from the School
23 District -- from the meat, I want to
24 dispute that. Because children come home
25 often times with headaches, with -- my

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 daughter in particular comes home with
3 headaches. This particular time she came
4 home with a stomach virus, and she had
5 eaten some meatballs from the School
6 District. That was the only thing she
7 had had. Usually we pack her lunch, but
8 on this particular day -- she's got a
9 6:56 a.m. school bus pick-up, and we were
10 running late and we had to forego the
11 lunch packing.

12 But she was really ill and she
13 had to stay home from school the next
14 day, and on Monday when I sent her back,
15 I sent a note home and I said, was her
16 sickness in any way connected to the
17 meatballs that she ate? And I heard back
18 from her school that, no, they didn't
19 serve that. And so my concern is that
20 the next day, it was discovered that in
21 fact the School District had been serving
22 the tainted meat.

23 So this issue goes to the fact
24 that a lot of the folks who are serving
25 the food don't necessarily know where the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 food is coming from or what's in the
3 food. So my daughter got sick as a
4 result and had to miss a day because of
5 that.

6 We sacrifice in order to pack
7 her lunch. We don't take trips to the
8 zoo. She doesn't have dance classes.
9 She doesn't do music lessons, because we
10 spend the extra money on car fare and on
11 food that we can send to school for her.
12 And I'm a struggling single mom, and I
13 wish that there was healthy food that
14 had -- that was fresh food at her school.

15 Her previous school is a
16 fabulous school, but they didn't have a
17 lot of drinking water. In fact, the
18 classroom in her kindergarten classroom
19 had that "no potable" sign. And when
20 kids are thirsty, it's very difficult to
21 keep them from drinking that water. And
22 I've seen, unfortunately before you can
23 get to them, I've seen them take a sip of
24 this before you have to tell them, You
25 can't drink that.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 So we do need healthy food. We
3 need fresh food. We need locally grown
4 food. We need fresh water in our
5 schools. And I'm really hoping that this
6 is just the beginning of taking a look at
7 the food services at the School District,
8 that Council -- that the full Council
9 will also participate in these hearings.

10 Council has a responsibility of
11 transferring a -- the City transfers a
12 billion dollars to the School District.
13 Council should be taking responsibility
14 for how that money is spent. And I
15 think, again, this is the first step and
16 hopefully we'll be hearing back from the
17 School District and back from concerned
18 parents about improvements to the School
19 District's food service program.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much.

22 Any questions?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you very much.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 Ms. Kannon, is it?

3 MS. KANNON: Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
5 identify yourself for the record and
6 begin your testimony.

7 MS. KANNON: Yes. My name is
8 Mary Jo Kannon. And this is Tamere Smith
9 and Zion Bunn. They would be here today.
10 I will also read their testimony, of
11 which they wrote with their classroom.

12 Good afternoon. Again, my name
13 is Mary Jo Kannon and I'm a parent of a
14 daughter at McCall Elementary. I also
15 have a daughter at Meredith. I am here
16 today to voice mine and other's concerns
17 about the quality of the food at McCall
18 School and, by association, all schools
19 with satellite lunch menus.

20 I am frequently at McCall
21 School at breakfast and at lunchtime and
22 can speak firsthand that I have
23 difficulty with the quality and quantity
24 of food that is served. At an earlier
25 meeting of parents regarding this issue,

22 Two young men in particular,
23 Tamere Smith and Zion Bunn, were very
24 vocal about this issue, and I had hoped
25 to bring them, these two young men, with

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 me today to personally share their views
3 and those of their class. Unfortunately,
4 given the time constraints, we were
5 unable to arrange the proper logistics
6 and paperwork to bring them here today,
7 and so much to their disappointment, I
8 will read their testimony.

9 I do have it here, but I would
10 like to -- and I would like to read it,
11 but I'd like to also have you consider
12 that these are the words of children who
13 likely have no control over the quality
14 of their food and depend on us to help
15 them eat healthfully.

16 I will now read Room 210's
17 testimony.

18 Although the lunchroom does
19 serve an occasional healthy snack like
20 apples, oranges or carrots, we, the
21 students of Room 210 of McCall Elementary
22 School, feel it is not enough or balanced
23 enough or with enough quality, quantity
24 or selection. We have three reasons we
25 feel this way.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 To start with, apples have a
3 lot of Vitamin A and are good for you,
4 but more is needed to help absorb these
5 vitamins. In addition to the occasional
6 apple, we should be offered a grain,
7 vegetables and protein. For example, we
8 could be given turkey with bread or rice,
9 salad with lettuce and tomatoes and real
10 cheese slices.

11 Secondly, many of the meals are
12 not healthy. For example, some are high
13 in cholesterol, such as the mozzarella
14 sticks, which are fried, and the grilled
15 cheese sandwiches, which are packed with
16 processed cheese and also fried. The
17 space meals are all processed foods and
18 especially the sausage, which are too
19 salty, too high in sodium, which is bad.

20 Thirdly, many children have
21 difficulty going to the bathroom, and
22 foods high in fiber would be very
23 helpful. Meals at breakfast could
24 include healthy cereals like Cheerios and
25 the other whole-grain choices and include

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 fresh fruit like bananas or raisins.
3 Lunchtime meals could also include
4 broccoli and chicken and other
5 non-processed foods, including natural
6 apple sauce or grapes. Other ideas could
7 include yogurt, cottage cheese and one
8 percent milk or even skim milk. Thus, we
9 believe the school lunches should be
10 transformed and improved to be more
11 nutritious and healthy. Thank you.

12 And I would just say if
13 9-year-olds can figure this out, I think
14 we should be able to, too.

15 Thank you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you very much.

18 Any questions?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you.

22 Shaharazad Ali, George
23 Washington Elementary School.

24 MS. ALI: Yes. I'm the parent
25 of a 7-year-old. He's actually my

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 grandson, but I'm raising him now and
3 he's adopted, so he's my child. And I've
4 had him in the school system for three
5 years.

6 The largest American health
7 organization in this country, the Center
8 for Disease Control, they say that over
9 50 million people in America are lactose
10 intolerant. Seventy-five percent of
11 African-Americans are lactose intolerant,
12 80 percent of Asians, 51 percent of
13 Hispanics and 21 percent of Caucasians.

14 Now, our parents should
15 certainly be educated about this, but how
16 is it that our schools, who we are
17 allegedly paying all of these people with
18 all of these different credentials, don't
19 understand that you can't, with a
20 community like that, you can't serve them
21 all dairy whole milk and dairy skim milk
22 every day? The doctors say that children
23 who are lactose intolerant who are forced
24 to ingest dairy whole milk from cows,
25 they have stomach pains, slow growth and

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 development, nausea, diarrhea and stomach
3 cramping. All of these symptoms, of
4 course, cause the disruption in them
5 receiving the educational process.

6 And who are the dieticians and
7 the nurses who are running these schools
8 who don't understand that if 75 percent
9 of your population is lactose intolerant,
10 then you shouldn't be serving dairy milk
11 every day? The children come home sick.
12 This interferes with them trying to learn
13 in the classroom.

14 Our children are obese already.
15 They're having high cholesterol at a
16 young age. We're setting them up to be
17 sick in the future. Many times my
18 grandson, he's had to have apple juice in
19 his cereal for a month or two because we
20 couldn't get the cafeteria staff to
21 understand that there's such a thing as
22 Lactaid milk. This is ridiculous. And
23 then when they finally did get the
24 Lactaid milk for him, they forced him to
25 drink every drop of it every day by

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 saying, No, you're going to drink all
3 your milk because your mother said she
4 wanted you to have Lactaid milk. That's
5 absurd.

6 So our staff needs to be
7 educated so that they'll know that this
8 is not an oddity. This should be the
9 routine for our children if 80 percent of
10 the Asians and 75 percent of the
11 African-Americans and 51 percent of
12 Hispanics and 21 percent of the
13 Caucasians are all lactose intolerant.
14 That's our entire school district. So
15 they shouldn't be forced to drink dairy
16 milk, and someone should have caught this
17 before I have to come down here, one
18 parent, to testify. Parents should be
19 notified of this. If the CDC knows it,
20 then certainly the nurses and the
21 dieticians in the public school system
22 should know it.

23 The majority of the children in
24 our school system are African-American,
25 and they are going to develop the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 majority of the health problems 15 and 20
3 years from now. So we put the babies in
4 there in kindergarten and force them to
5 drink the dairy milk, and then when
6 they're acting up in class every day and
7 causing problems, then they're getting
8 charged with that and there's no
9 relationship related back to their diet.

10 The other problem that I have
11 is that Hassan is a Muslim. His name is
12 Hassan Ali. Now, if we're going to allow
13 the children to wear Muslim garb to
14 school and acknowledge that there's such
15 another religion as Islam, then we should
16 have choices on the days that they serve
17 pork.

18 In that little menu sheet that
19 you have at George Washington, they do
20 not follow that menu. Sometimes two or
21 three days a week they have pizzas.
22 Pizzas have cheese on them. Most of the
23 cheese that they serve is processed and
24 the cheese is flavored with a chemical
25 called Rennet, which comes out of the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 pig's intestines. So a Muslim child
3 can't eat that. And so many days Hassan
4 doesn't have lunch, because he knows
5 about these things, I've taught him what
6 to eat, and so he can't eat that. So we
7 do need to have some non-pork choices and
8 some vegetarian choices.

9 Most of the children in the
10 school system are overweight and bloated.
11 They don't need to eat meat anyway. They
12 don't need potatoes and a lot of pasta.

13 We have to do health education.
14 That is part of teaching our children to
15 survive.

16 And so I just wanted to mention
17 my main point, is that we need to educate
18 the parents and the other teachers about
19 this lactose-intolerant problem that is
20 rampant among all of our school
21 population so that we can perhaps change
22 the milk in there and just make it an
23 option to have dairy milk, because the
24 majority of them, as I just stated from
25 CDC, they need Lactaid milk.

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 I'm not even going to deal with
3 the beef issue, but those are my two
4 issues that I wanted to talk about.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you very much. Important testimony.

7 Councilman Greenlee.

8 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
9 you, Madam Chair.

10 Just one question. On the
11 issue of the Lactaid milk, how long did
12 you ask for it before it was finally made
13 available?

14 MS. ALI: Well, I always put it
15 down from day one of the school, but it
16 took two months. And then after it ran
17 out, then it took another month and a
18 half. As I said, he was forced to eat
19 his little cereal with apple juice in it.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Because I
21 know it says -- and, again, this is just
22 one menu that was given to us. It does
23 say Lactaid milk is available in
24 substitution, but --

25 MS. ALI: But it's not

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 available. They say that. They say a
3 lot of things in there. And if you came
4 to the school every day and checked that
5 menu, that's not what they're serving
6 every day. They serve whatever they have
7 available. They don't follow that, but
8 that's just demonstrative of some of the
9 samples of what they might serve. But he
10 had to keep asking for it, and then, as I
11 said, when I went down and wrote a note
12 and asked for it, then they got an
13 attitude and were annoyed about it and
14 forced him every day to drink all of --
15 every drop of the milk. If he didn't
16 want the entire eight ounces, they forced
17 him to drink it anyway. So they may put
18 that on there, but it's not available
19 every day.

20 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
21 Thank you.

22 MS. ALI: You're welcome.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you very much. Thank you.

25 Shaharazad Ali, George

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 Washington -- oh, I'm sorry, Ms. Ali. It
3 sure is.

4 Sandy Sherman, Food Trust.

5 MS. SHERMAN: I'm the last one
6 for Parents United. Not the last one.
7 The last one speaking at the moment.

8 Good afternoon. My name is
9 Sandy Sherman. I'm the Director of
10 Nutrition Education at The Food Trust.
11 Thank you for the opportunity to speak
12 today on school meals.

13 I've been working on school
14 nutrition issues in Philadelphia for over
15 25 years. My focus has been how to help
16 children have access to healthy foods and
17 have the information to make healthy food
18 choices.

19 Most recently, I worked with
20 the School District of Philadelphia and
21 Temple University's Center for Obesity
22 Research and Education to convene a
23 citywide Nutrition Policy Task Force to
24 develop and evaluate programs to fight
25 obesity among urban youth. This study

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 found that the nutrition policy we
3 developed and piloted in Philadelphia
4 reduced the number of children who became
5 overweight by 50 percent in two years
6 here in Philadelphia. The study also
7 found that by preventing overweight --
8 and this was among 4th to 6th graders --
9 there were fewer absences from school.
10 And these were randomized, controlled
11 studies, so we really have a lot of faith
12 in their ability to predict what
13 happened.

14 I'm a strong believer in the
15 importance of involving parents and
16 students in a participatory process to
17 bring about change. No one knows better
18 than the students and their parents --
19 and certainly as we heard here today from
20 the parents -- what their children want
21 to eat. I'm here today in support of
22 Parents United for Public Education and
23 their efforts to improve the foods served
24 in Philadelphia schools.

25 Through the School Nutrition

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 Policy Task Force work I just mentioned,
3 we developed Nutrition Advisory
4 Councils -- in the past we called them
5 NACs -- to involve students in taste
6 testing foods for the School Breakfast
7 and Lunch Programs and providing comments
8 back to the School District's Division of
9 Food Services on what the youngsters
10 preferred. The District would provide us
11 with foods to sample; for example,
12 breakfast foods, and the students would
13 select their favorite items. As most of
14 them do at home, we tried things out, we
15 picked the foods that were most popular,
16 and we found that the students were far
17 more likely to eat them if they had had a
18 say in it.

19 During this time, during our
20 School Nutrition Policy work, we also
21 convened School Health Councils. Wayne
22 Grasela spoke about these as part of the
23 Wellness Policy earlier. The effort was
24 to involve parents and school staff in
25 the process. While the task of the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 School Health Council is to look at the
3 total school health environment, most of
4 our time was always spent talking about
5 food. I know how easy it is to be
6 critical of food, and we made sure that
7 we always took a positive approach.
8 These two groups, the NACs and the School
9 Health Councils, are the reason I believe
10 we are able to achieve such strong
11 results in reducing the number of
12 children who were overweight. We
13 involved parents. They felt listened to,
14 and they became involved in the School
15 Breakfast and Lunch Program and in
16 creating a healthier school environment.

17 The Steps Program in the School
18 District's Office of Health, Safety,
19 Physical Education and Sports
20 Administration continues to work to
21 develop and support School Health
22 Councils through the Steps Program. More
23 schools should become involved in this
24 program to find ways to involve students
25 and parents in school meal issues. I

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 also strongly recommend that we develop
3 youth councils to work with your
4 committee and the Division of Food
5 Services to recommend improvements for
6 the school meals that we've heard about
7 from parents who aren't happy with them.
8 These recommendations should be compiled
9 into a report and submitted on a regular
10 basis to your Education Committee and to
11 the Mayor's Office and Food Services here
12 at the School District. We do have a
13 responsibility to listen to students and
14 their parents and to follow, to the
15 extent possible, their recommendations.

16 I've worked for years also on
17 the national level. Prior to my work
18 here in Philadelphia, I was the Executive
19 Director of a group called the National
20 Child Nutrition Project, and we worked
21 throughout the country to improve access
22 to food for children and their families.
23 In the past few years, I've been involved
24 with the initiative called the Urban
25 School Food Network, which is funded by

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 the Kellogg Foundation, and its work is
3 to procure changes to strengthen the
4 buying practices in school districts in
5 big cities throughout the country to get
6 healthier and more local foods. Most of
7 the big school districts throughout the
8 country, including New York, LA, Chicago
9 and Miami, are part of this network. As
10 far as I know, Philadelphia has not
11 participated. We really need
12 Philadelphia to be part of this effort.
13 These are all big cities with the same
14 problems.

15 Everyone wants to see fresh and
16 healthy food in our school meals, and
17 many districts are finding ways to
18 purchase more locally grown foods. I
19 applaud Philadelphia for working with The
20 Food Trust -- and I know Charlie
21 Baltimore also spoke to this -- and other
22 groups to try to do this, but much more
23 does need to be done in this area.

24 School districts throughout the
25 country are finding ways to prepare foods

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 on school premises. We've heard a lot
3 today about the lack of ability to cook
4 on school premises. Philadelphia seems
5 to be moving in the opposite direction
6 from any other districts throughout the
7 country. The meals that are -- I won't
8 mention much more. Everybody else spoke
9 to these issues of the lack of quality of
10 some of the foods that are served off
11 premises. I know that we have a big
12 problem of schools without kitchens, but
13 we really need to work together to find
14 more creative works to make sure that
15 students will eat.

16 I already spoke -- New York
17 City has been working for years to try to
18 get local foods throughout the City in
19 all of their schools. They started with
20 apples and carrots. And they've also
21 helped students learn the value of good
22 food and the importance of local
23 agriculture. So I strongly recommend
24 that we find more ways to bring fresh
25 and, whenever possible, local foods in

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 our schools. We have a strong nutrition
3 education program here, the Eat.Right.Now
4 Program, that helps students learn the
5 value of choosing healthy foods, so we
6 need to make sure that the meals are
7 there so they can make healthy choices.

8 The last thing I wanted to
9 mention is, I've been working for the
10 last couple of years to try to change
11 what students buy from the local corner
12 stores before and after school.
13 Youngsters carrying these black bags full
14 of candy and chips and Hugs are really
15 part of what we see throughout the City.
16 The Food Trust is working with these
17 stores to encourage them to sell fresh
18 fruit and healthier food options, but
19 we're working to make sure that the
20 students choose the healthier snacks and
21 drinks in the school and eat their meals
22 in school before going to the stores.

23 We need to make sure that the
24 District works with the national
25 initiatives and continues to work with

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 the groups throughout the City to make
3 sure that we continue to make
4 improvements.

5 Thank you. I'm happy to answer
6 any questions you have.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you very much.

9 Questions?

10 (No response.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you, Ms. Sherman.

13 We'll ask Mr. Farlino and
14 Mr. Grasela to come back. And if my
15 memory serves me right, since we've had
16 the discussions about young people being
17 involved in school choices with regard to
18 food for quite some time, I believe when
19 that time comes up, aren't students
20 involved in helping to review their
21 menus?

22 (Witnesses approached witness
23 table.)

24 MR. GRASELA: Yeah. We do
25 surveys and we do some of those Nutrition

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 Advisory Councils, NACs, where we
3 actually get input from the children. We
4 actually bring in samples of products
5 where we share to taste test to see
6 approval levels.

7 MR. FARLINO: We are available,
8 Councilwoman, to meet with Student
9 Councils and have done so to conduct
10 these kinds of services, especially in
11 those places where kids want more variety
12 or they want particular things in the
13 menu that we're not serving.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 We thank Jimmy Lewis for being
17 here as well.

18 Councilman Greenlee.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
20 you, Madam Chair.

21 Thanks for staying around to
22 answer some more questions. First of
23 all, if I can just say so it doesn't
24 sound like I'm just criticizing, it
25 certainly sounds from what I hear that

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 you handled the beef recall situation to
3 the best of your ability. So I don't
4 think there's -- in my opinion, there's
5 not a problem there.

6 Just a couple of things kind of
7 jumped out in the testimony, and the one
8 thing you heard me raise. And I know in
9 large schools, I'm sure it's difficult,
10 but when you talk about 9:00 a.m.
11 lunches, that sounds kind of -- I mean,
12 if I had lunch at 9:00 a.m., I'd be
13 eating my homework. Forget the dog
14 eating it. I'd be eating it by 1:30. I
15 know it's tough, but are you looking into
16 that at all?

17 MR. FARLINO: Councilman, we're
18 aware -- and I would defer to some of the
19 previous speakers. We know of a handful.
20 This is not a widespread issue. The
21 number one school that comes to my mind
22 is Central High School, frankly. They
23 have 2,200, 2,300 students and the age of
24 their building is up there, to the point
25 where they do not have the capacity to

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 divide the group up into manageable
3 numbers that literally fit into the
4 lunchroom. So they're the one school
5 that I know. There may be one or two
6 others. It's not a widespread thing, but
7 I know that Dr. Pavel and his staff are
8 very flexible, in that even though you
9 may have a lunch period, that there are
10 other opportunities for kids to get food
11 during the day. It's not a perfect
12 solution, but, again, we have just a
13 handful, and I have no problem with the
14 speakers noting that. It is a problem.

15 MR. GRASELA: If I could add to
16 that. We work closely with these few
17 schools to try to make them comply with
18 the federal regulation, because, quite
19 frankly, there's a federal regulation
20 that establishes the parameters which the
21 meal service has to be provided.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And when
23 is that?

24 MR. GRASELA: It's in the
25 Wellness Policy and it's between 10:00 --

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. for
3 lunch. In order to be reimbursed for
4 those meals, we have to request a waiver
5 from the USDA, and we do so only as a
6 last resort. But I believe, as
7 Mr. Farlino has said, there's only two,
8 maybe three schools that are doing this.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Are they
10 high schools? Because when I asked that
11 question, it sounded like it was more --

12 MR. GRASELA: High school.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Just high
14 schools?

15 MR. GRASELA: Yes.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Other
17 than that, you fit in pretty much the
18 11:00 to 1:00?

19 MR. GRASELA: Absolutely. And
20 it's audited.

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: All
22 right. The question -- and I guess I
23 kind of know the answer, but just so I'm
24 clear. The satellite lunch programs are
25 in schools that don't have kitchens, I

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 would assume, right?

3 MR. GRASELA: Correct.

4 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: How many
5 percentage-wise? Maybe it's in there and
6 I missed it.

7 MR. GRASELA: I think I have a
8 breakdown in your facts sheet. I think
9 it's about 200-and-some schools of the --
10 actually, we call them meal sites. We
11 serve meals in 322 buildings, and that
12 includes annexes and charters.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: You heard
14 the complaint that that quality is below
15 what other lunches are. Has there been
16 studies to that? I mean, do you have --

17 MR. FARLINO: Councilman, we
18 meet as often as we can with most of the
19 speakers that were here today, and we're
20 certainly open to continue these
21 discussions. We serve 20 million meals
22 in the School District of Philadelphia
23 annually, and to do it in a way that is
24 efficient and effective, we do use what
25 is called -- we call it a pre-plate

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214
2 program or an enhanced pre-plate program,
3 and in every single case, we either
4 meet -- with what we serve, we either
5 meet or exceed the USDA standards.

6 Now, I agree with many of the
7 speakers, in that the nation is now more
8 conscious of what we're eating, and I
9 anticipate that the government is going
10 to begin to recognize the need to include
11 more organic food in our menus and the
12 way the beef is processed. So my sense
13 is that's going to be a slow process
14 starting from the United States
15 government. Because we really abide by
16 their direction. They provide us the
17 food. They provide us the commodities
18 that we have to send out to our vendors
19 to process. And I think that everyone in
20 the room who goes grocery shopping makes
21 a decision over whether or not they're
22 going to pay for the regular bananas or
23 the organic bananas, and while I don't
24 dispute the need for us to think more
25 about that, it is a dollar and cents

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 issue.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I

4 understand.

5 MR. FARLINO: And just to give
6 you the parameter of this, I was talking
7 to Mr. Baltimore earlier and I think he
8 said that to implement a completely
9 organic -- you can correct me if I'm
10 wrong -- is about a 40 percent --
11 anywhere between a 25 and 40 percent
12 increase in cost. And just to give you
13 the parameters of the District, if we
14 were to raise the cost of our meals that
15 we serve by a nickel, that would be a
16 million dollars annually.

17 So if you were to really
18 implement the kind of program that we
19 would like to see and that the parents
20 would like to see, it's a huge cost, and
21 I think that the way the School District
22 of Philadelphia has been approaching
23 this, Food Services, while it serves food
24 to children, it is still part of the
25 Operations Division, and I think the

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 District looks to Operations when there
3 are hard times financially, look to
4 Operations to fund a lot of the deficit
5 so that we don't impact classroom
6 instruction.

7 But, in fact, I agree with the
8 parents, that if we're not serving
9 breakfast to every kid, nutritional food,
10 that it does impact a classroom, because
11 this is something that we're focused on
12 and it's something that we have been
13 paying attention to. We have a Wellness
14 Policy, and I might add that the Wellness
15 Policy has impacted the kind of food we
16 serve; namely, we don't serve soda, we
17 don't serve the snacks that are deemed
18 unhealthy, and as a result, the revenue
19 that Food Services would get because we
20 are now serving healthier products, the
21 kids don't buy it. The kids don't like
22 it, and as a result, our revenues have
23 gone down. That doesn't mean that we
24 shouldn't continue to do that. We still
25 should continue to strive for better

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 food.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I
4 understand. I appreciate that. And,
5 again, I wasn't trying be critical, but I
6 think there were some legitimate
7 questions brought up. And I know you
8 guys have a difficult job, so I
9 appreciate everything you do and I
10 appreciate your time here.

11 Thank you.

12 MR. FARLINO: Your comment
13 about the milk, I think we've served
14 lactose-free milk for years, and so while
15 I don't dispute Mrs. Ali's testimony, I
16 would like to look into why that happened
17 with her son, because we've served
18 lactose-free milk for years.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That was
20 my understanding, too, because I know
21 there's other parents whose children have
22 the same issues.

23 Okay. Thank you.

24 Thank you, Madam Chair.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

1 5/6/08 - EDUCATION - RES. 080214

2 you.

3 Thank you very much, all who
4 are here. We appreciate this insightful,
5 thoughtful testimony. We all love our
6 youth and have to do what we can to
7 protect them.

8 Thank you again.

9 MR. FARLINO: Thank you, Madam
10 Chair.

11 MR. GRASELA: Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: This
13 hearing is recessed subject to the call
14 of the Chair.

15 Thank you all.

16 (Committee on Education
17 adjourned at 2:55 p.m.)

18 - - -

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1

2

CERTIFICATE

3

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the

4

proceedings, evidence and objections are

5

contained fully and accurately in the

6

stenographic notes taken by me upon the

7

foregoing matter on May 6, 2008, and that this

8

is a true and correct transcript of same.

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

MICHELE L. MURPHY

16

RPR-Notary Public

17

18

19

(The foregoing certification of this

20

transcript does not apply to any reproduction

21

of the same by any means, unless under the

22

direct control and/or supervision of the

23

certifying reporter.)

24

25