

Chef Bill Bailey

Nutrition & Food Service Supervisor

Cuyahoga Falls School District – Summit County

Hello my name is Chef Bill Bailey, I am the Nutrition and Food Service Supervisor for Cuyahoga Falls School District. I am also a Member of the National School Nutrition Association, School Nutrition Association of Ohio and the Northeast Ohio Supervisors and Nutrition Directors Chapter 43. The Cuyahoga Falls School District has an enrollment of 3900 students at six elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. Our Black Tiger Cafes serve about 2100 lunches and about 1300 breakfasts daily.

At 26%, our free and reduced meal percentages are not high enough to receive Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). When we count in applications based on income, this percentage increases to about 46%. This does not provide the information needed for our district to qualify for CEP.

Our current Student Meal Debt is -\$17,689.00 and growing. Our food service department and district administrators have worked tirelessly to contact families who have a negative balance to try to get them too paid with no prevail. We send emails, student take home letters, we hand delivered invoices to families who stop by the main office, and make robo-calls. We have even have principals, counselors, district administrators and myself make personal calls to families who owe fifteen dollars or more. There are a number of different reasons why these families are not paying. Some families have not updated or applied for free and reduced benefits after the 2-years of free meals for all provide by the federal government. Some families don't pay because we are not handing out an alternative *lunch-shaming meal*, the student will receive the meal everyone is served, so, why pay.

I am going to reintroduce myself. Hello my name is CHEF Bill Bailey. I love cooking. I love going into the elementary schools to present my *Chef Bill's Lunchroom Takeovers*. This is a program I started to get kids excited about eating school meals, introducing fresh fruits and vegetables and most of all feeding the students. I am not a debt collect, yes I do have some administrative duties that are tied to my position but it should not consume my day like it is doing this year.

I am write to ask you to ensure our state budget includes funding for school meals for all of our children. Our budget is a moral document reflecting our values as a state. If we don't stand for ending child hunger in our schools, we don't stand for much. Nutrition is part of education. A student cannot learn if they are hungry. Hunger and malnutrition can negatively impact a student's physical and mental health, as well as their academic performance. Providing free meals can help reduce hunger and ensure that students receive the nutrition they need to thrive. Many students may not have access to healthy foods at home, which can lead to poor

dietary habits. By providing free meals, schools can ensure that all students have access to healthy, balanced meals.

Research has shown that student that receive meals at school are eating on of the healthiest meals of their day. Reducing Stigma and Bullying: When only certain students receive free meals, it can create a stigma and lead to bullying. Providing free meals to all students can help eliminate this stigma and create a more inclusive and supportive school environment. Providing free meals can help alleviate financial strain on families and ensure that all students have access to nutritious meals, regardless of their family's income.

In summary, providing free meals to all students can improve student health and academic performance, reduce stigma and bullying, increase access to healthy foods, and support families. Please include school meals for all children in our states budget.

Thank You
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