

“Schools look for ways to stop students from tossing their lunches” from the LA Times (English 8)

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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LOS ANGELES — It's lunchtime, but high school junior Parrish Jackson has barely touched her turkey burger and apricots.

She's dumping them into the trash can.

The apricots are “sour,” says the 16-year-old student at Washington Preparatory High School in Los Angeles. And the meat is “nasty.” If it were up to Jackson, she would just have taken the potato wedges — they're close enough to fries — then headed to the student store to fuel up on hot Cheetos and juice.

And so it goes in hundreds of schools in Los Angeles Unified, the nation's second-largest school system, which serves 650,000 meals a day. Students throw out at least \$100,000 worth of food a day — and probably far more, according to estimates by David Binkle, the district's food services director. That comes to \$18 million a year — based on a **conservative** estimate that 10 percent of the food is wasted.

"What Can We Do About This?"

The money, Binkle says, would be far better spent on higher quality items, such as strawberries or watermelons.

But under federal school meals rules, Jackson and other students must take at least three items — including one fruit or vegetable — even if they don't want them. Otherwise, the federal government won't pay back school districts for the meals.

“What can we do about this?” Binkle says, “We can stop forcing children to take food they don't like and throw in the garbage.”

Many nutrition and health experts disagree. They point to studies that show repeated **exposure** to fruits and vegetables eventually leads children to eat more of them. That, in turn, will help prevent obesity and related health problems, says William J. McCarthy, a UCLA professor of health policy and management.

McCarthy called the cost a small investment to get kids to eat foods "most likely to prolong their lives" and lower the risk for major diseases.

The different views reflect the national debate over how to improve child nutrition without the massive food waste and climbing costs. The \$11.6 billion federal school lunch program feeds 31 million students daily. The rules are part of the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act **championed** by first lady Michelle Obama.

The act imposed a dizzying **array** of requirements on calories, portion sizes, even the color of fruits and vegetables. The law increased the amount of fruits, vegetables and whole grains that must be offered, and this costs school districts more money.

Tossed In The Trash

For Binkle and many other school food managers, the hardest change has been the requirement to offer both a fruit and vegetable. Previously schools had to offer one or the other, but now students take both in order for schools to receive

federal money for the meal.

The extra produce costs school districts \$5.4 million a day. But about \$3.8 million of that is being tossed in the trash, according to national estimates.

Other studies also have found significant waste. A study discovered that a total of 40 percent of all the lunches served in four Boston schools are thrown out. In the LA Unified District, another study found that many students don't even want to choose a fruit or a vegetable in the first place, according to McCarthy, who co-wrote it.

Nationally, the cost of wasted food overall — including milk, meats and grains — is estimated at more than \$1 billion annually. A federal survey found that 48 of 50 states reported that food waste and higher costs have been their top challenges.

In response, the **School Nutrition Association** is trying to change the child nutrition law, which is up for renewal next year.

Among other things, the group wants to remove the requirement forcing students to take a fruit or vegetable. The group wants to end rules requiring lower sodium and also drop a planned shift from half grain to full whole grain in food products.

“We’re not opposed to healthy changes,” said Julia Bauscher, the group’s president-elect. “We just want changes that don’t unnecessarily increase cost and force students to take foods they have no intention of eating.”

Making Meals Tastier

Other nutrition experts are pushing back. Juliana Cohen, a Harvard University nutrition research fellow, said the rules have helped children eat healthier food. That's particularly important, she said, for inner-city, low-income students who get up to half their daily calories from school meals. She co-wrote a study, which found that students in four Boston schools ate more fruits and vegetables after the new rules took effect — although they still threw away much of them.

The solution to waste, Cohen and others say, isn’t to end the rules but to find other ways to get children to eat their vegetables. They include working with professional chefs to make meals tastier, planting school gardens and scheduling recess before lunch.

Rewards such as raffle tickets and small amounts of money got students to eat more produce with far less waste than set servings.

At LA Unified, celebrity chefs, such as Jamie Oliver, have helped develop menus. More than 270 schools offer “harvest of the month” lessons about **produce**, and 450 schools have started campus gardens.

Still the food piles up in school trash cans.

Back at Washington Prep, a few students said they ate their entire lunches. Daniel Ofa, a hulking sophomore, said he doesn’t really enjoy the spaghetti or enchiladas but downs them anyway.

“Since we’re football players, we eat all of it, bad or good,” he said.

“If the food was good food, we’d have no problems,” said senior A’lea Rendey, who pulled a hair from her turkey burger. She then dumped her food and headed off to the school store for a Pop-Tart.

