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Serrano, Christyna

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The Political Economy of School Lunch and the Welfare State:
An Analysis of Federal School Food Policy and its Implementation at the Local Level

By

Christyna M. Serrano

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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Education

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kris Gutiérrez, Chair

Professor Jabari Mahiri

Professor G. Cristina Mora

Fall 2017

Abstract

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By

Christyna M. Serrano

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Kris Gutiérrez, Chair

This dissertation's overarching and guiding research question was: "How are education policies and schools both reproducing structural inequality and promoting educational equity and social justice?" This dissertation explores this broad question through an exemplary case: The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and its implementation in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Three papers, representing two "planes of analysis" (Rogoff, 1995) – the federal policy formulation and local implementation levels – and structured to focus on the interplay between "policy, people, and place" (Honig, 2006), were used to explore this question. Each paper also interrogates 1) how federal policy-makers use education policy (NSLP) to position public schools as sites of intervention for mitigating broader social inequities (food insecurity), and 2) the efficacy of delivery of social provision (nutritious food) at the local level.

Paper one focuses on the historicity of policy through an examination of the historical and contemporary (1930-2010) landscape of the NSLP. The paper demonstrated how the NSLP has served as a quintessential example of the "educationalized welfare state" – that is, the American preference for using education policy to redress broader social problems and schools as sites of intervention and for the delivery of social provision. Furthermore, this paper includes an analysis of the tensions between and the affordances and limitations of federal versus local level policy-making. Finally, paper one considers how the privatization of the NSLP in the 1970s-1990s reflects the dangers of education privatization, which undermines the educationalized welfare state and thus, social welfare more broadly.

Paper two focuses on policy, people, and place at the federal policy-making level. Using the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Text Analysis, this paper analyzed the discourse utilized by legislators and Congressional hearing witnesses throughout the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) that led to the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 – the most recent reauthorization of the NSLP. This research finds that legislators and witnesses defined and framed the problems of childhood hunger and obesity as both a consequence of the Great Recession of 2007-2009 and children and parents' bad dietary choices. Furthermore, these problems were considered a moral responsibility of the U.S. government to resolve for the benefit of children's physical and cognitive development, a critical part of health care reform and long-term public health, and as a matter of national security as well as American competitiveness in the world. Finally, legislator's discourses led to the

construction of the HHFKA as a means for expanding and increasing students' access to healthier school meals through, for example, mandated, science-based nutrition standards and the provision of universal free lunch in high-poverty schools. However, partisan politics and the tradition of placing social provision in the realm of schools also led to legislators taking away funding from the Food Stamp program (a broad food assistance program) to pay for the HHFKA (food assistance in schools).

Finally, paper three focuses on policy, people, and place at the local policy implementation level. Drawing on data from a three-year ethnographic case study of the implementation of the HHFKA in OUSD, paper three examines the constraining and enabling conditions that allowed California Thursdays – an innovative farm to school initiative – to go to scale across 84 districts in California. This study finds that local level actors developed a “bite-sized implementation strategy” that broke down the process of changing school food systems into small, scaffolding manageable tasks that, through a “progress-based journey,” accumulated into larger systems change. This research also finds that the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) in Berkeley, CA, played a critical role as an “intermediary organization” in its use of a “collective impact model” to organize school districts implementing California Thursdays into a network. The California Thursdays network shared resources and best practices through an email listserv, which advanced the initiative’s “co-construction” and ability to scale across a variety of implementation contexts. Furthermore, CEL also positively shaped the discourse of school lunch through the trademarking and branding of California Thursdays, and its use and facilitation of empowering language through the listserv. Finally, this research finds that California Thursdays is reshaping the school food landscape in California and creating broader, cross-sectoral impacts.

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through “the best and worst of times.” You are my sister from another mother and I love you to the moon and back. Thank you for being my friend through it all. Thank you for always knowing how to have a good time. Girl, we always laugh through it all – even when we might need to cry. And now look at us! I know that there’s still so much more fabulousness to come along.

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Introduction to the Dissertation

How are education policies and schools both reproducing structural inequality and also promoting educational equity and social justice? This dissertation explores this guiding question through an exemplary case: The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and its implementation in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Specifically, this study uses a multidimensional research design to interrogate 1) how federal policy-makers use education policy (NSLP) to position public schools as sites of intervention for mitigating broader social inequities (food insecurity), and 2) the efficacy of delivery of social provision (nutritious food) at the local level. To explain this dissertation's research design, I first provide historical context regarding the relationship between the NSLP and the American welfare state (which is also a focus of paper one). Second, I describe the study's significance to education scholarship in how I define the NSLP as an example of the use of education policy and schools to promote educational equity and social justice (a focus of paper three). Third, I explain my conceptual framework, which was constructed on the premise that education policy is part of a dynamic process that involves the interplay between "policies, people, and places" (Honig, 2006). Finally, I present a brief overview of the three papers that comprise this dissertation.

Historical Context: The Educationalized Welfare State

The "educationalized welfare state" (Kantor & Lowe, 2013)—that is, the American proclivity for using education policy as a mechanism for social intervention, and public schools as vehicles for the delivery of social provision—can be traced back to the ideological and institutional roots of the common school movement (Labaree, 2010; 1997; Cohen, 2005). The birth of compulsory education filled schoolhouses with impoverished, hungry, and malnourished immigrant children. Progressive era welfare advocates argued that children could not possibly learn under these conditions; a view that was articulated by child welfare activist, John Spargo, in *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (1906), where he writes:

...society, having assumed the responsibility of insisting that every child shall be educated, and providing the means of education, is necessarily bound to assume the responsibility of seeing that they are made fit to receive that education" (as quoted in Gunderson, 2003, p. 264).

The conviction that a system of mandated education should in turn obligate that same system to redress issues that interfere with children's ability to learn, has produced a uniquely American education paradigm: one in which education policy and public schools are expected to play a principal role in the amelioration of all types of social problems (Katz, 2013; Kantor & Lowe, 2013; Rebell, 2012; Labaree, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As argued by Anyon (2005),

Rules and regulations regarding teaching, curriculum, and assessment certainly are important, but policies to eliminate poverty-wage work and housing segregation (for example) should be part of the educational policy panoply as well, for these have consequences for urban education at least as profound as curriculum, pedagogy, and testing. (p. 66)

A statement from former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, regarding the USDA's efforts to "make school food environments healthier" (USDA FNS, 2016a) reflect this particular ideology. Vilsack notes that "children's ability to learn in the classroom and reach their fullest potential depends on what we do right now to ensure their health" (as quoted in USDA FNS, 2016a). And on September 1, 2015, Vilsack publically remarked that the NSLP is "important work" in its "relationship and significance to national security, centrality to the future economic competitiveness of the United States, and its significant ability to reduce expenditures in health care" (Center for American Progress, 2015). These positions convey not only the long-held ethos regarding the education system's responsibility for addressing wide-ranging social issues, they also invoke normative discourse about the central role that education policy and public schools play in buttressing our nation's social welfare.

The paradox of this particular role is that the American education system serves both contradictory and competing public and private interests (Labaree, 2010; 1997). In the United States, social mobility and the endorsed route to the "American Dream" (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003) are through "doors" of educational opportunity rather than "floors" that provide for the equality and welfare of all individuals by virtue of U.S. citizenship (Cohen, 2005). This "doors not floors" approach to social welfare intersects with our neoliberal capitalist social structure (Harvey, 2005; Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976); and consequently, produces an increasingly commoditized system of education that serves individual and private interests, rather than collective and public ones (Labaree, 2010; 1997).

Given these competing and contradictory interests, as well as the customary use of educational remedies to address social problems, what capacity does education policy and public schools truly have to promote educational equity and social justice? If we as a society are determined to use our education system as a means for confronting, for example, poverty (Berliner, 2013), then what are the ways in which education policy constrains and enables these efforts within public schools across the country? Furthermore, "policy still has to be negotiated and implemented through interaction" (Hargreaves, 1985, p. 43). Therefore, how is a given policy mediated by implementation actors and the local level contexts in which they work?

Significance of the Dissertation

To explore these broad questions this dissertation engages in 1) a historical and contemporary (1930-2010) examination of the NSLP, 2) Critical Discourse Analysis (Johnstone, 2008) and Qualitative Text Analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HFKA) of 2010, and (3) an ethnographic case study of the HFKFA's implementation at the local level – OUSD. The HFKFA is the most recent reauthorization of the NSLP and endeavors to "reduce childhood hunger, [and] improve the nutritional quality of meals to promote health and address childhood obesity" (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 2). Childhood hunger and obesity are preventable health threats that significantly, and negatively impact children's overall health, long-term well-being, and quality of life (Holben & Taylor, 2015; Pyle, et al., 2006). Several studies have demonstrated that insufficient access to healthy food has a negative impact on students' health, cognitive development and academic outcomes (Holben & Taylor, 2015; Arteaga & Heflin, 2014; Taras, 2005; Nestle, 2002). And others have shown that healthier students learn better (Basch, 2011). Therefore, I argue that childhood hunger and obesity are symptoms and consequences of structural inequality and that their amelioration both promotes educational equity and is a form of social justice.

Given this premise, an examination of the NSLP/HHFKA provides a compelling case for exploring the role of education policy formulation and implementation in the mitigation or perpetuation of structural inequality in the lives of children and families. To explore these considerations this paper analyzes the NSLP on two “planes of analysis” (Rogoff, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

The work of Rogoff (1995) has provided a useful conceptual frame for understanding three levels, or “planes of analysis,” corresponding to an ecological system of macro, mezzo, and micro. These levels are “inseparable, mutually constituting planes comprising activities that can become the focus of analysis at different times, but with others necessarily remaining in the background of the analysis” (p. 139). For this dissertation, I focus on two levels of analysis: the federal policy level and the local implementation level through three papers. Furthermore, I also draw on contemporary policy implementation literature, which delineates the policy formulation and implementation process as the dynamic interplay between and mutual constitution of “policies, people, and places” (Honig, 2006) to inform this dissertation’s conceptual framework and research design.

Policy formulation and Implementation: Policy, People, and Place

Education policy literature follows a particular historical trajectory in terms of how scholars have understood and explained the process and outcomes of implementation. Specifically, policy studies between the 1960s to the present can be characterized as falling into three distinct eras (Odden, 1991), or “waves” (Honig, 2006) of implementation.

Wave 1: A Focus on Policy. Early education policy studies (1960s-1970s) conceptualized the policy process as a techno-rational endeavor and top-down, unidirectional process (Honig, 2006). Policy outcomes were evaluated along the criteria of “fidelity to design”—that is, how closely subjects followed policy-makers’ guidelines (Odden, 1991). And policy failure was largely understood as the result of conflicts of interest between policy-makers and local level implementation actors, or “street level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980), and inadequacies or disinclinations to carry out policy makers’ intentions in a faithful manner (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). However, these perspectives “assume a relatively direct relationship between federal policy ‘inputs,’ local responses, and program ‘outputs’” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 11); and they lack capacity to explain the “multi-dimensional character of the policy process” (Hupe & Hill, 2016, p. 104), and the way that variation is produced when a policy moves from text to enactment at the local level (Hupe, 2014; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012).

Wave 2: A Focus on Mutual Adaptation between Policy, People, and Place. During the 1970s-1990s, scholars began to have more dynamic understandings of the policy process; for example, as one of “mutual adaptation” (McLaughlin, 1990) between a policy and sites of implementation. More specifically, “...a two-way process of adaptation, in which the [policy] is modified to suit the institution, and the institution changes in some degree to accommodate the [policy]” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974, p. 10). Furthermore, scholars also started to consider the ways in which context (local level variation) matters to the implementation process. Specifically, policy studies began to account for how factors such as “size, intra-organizational relations, commitment, capacity, and institutional complexity molded [different] responses to

policy” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 10). However, this era of policy scholarship did not engage questions regarding what “dimensions of context...mattered, under what conditions they mattered, whether context could be attended to, and if it could, how policy makers should do so” (Honig, 2006, p. 7).

Wave 3: A focus on Policy Implementation as a Co-Constructed Process between Policy, People, and Place. Policy implementation studies from the 1990s to the present have engaged in explicit considerations of the ways that context matters to implementation through analyses that have explored the ways that “policies, people, and places” (Honig, 2006) influence implementation in specific ways and interact to produce variability in policy outcomes. The most salient aspects of this body of scholarship have been the use of sociocultural approaches to the study of education policy (for example, studies that investigate the policy process through an anthropological lens and that use qualitative methods, such as ethnography) (Levinson & Sutton, 2001); and scholarship that has broadened our understandings about who counts as actors and stakeholders in the implementation process and the ways in which they influence outcomes in substantive ways (McLaughlin, 2006). For example, Coburn (2005) has explored how “nonsystems actors,” such as “independent professional development providers, reform organizations, publishers, and universities...promote, translate, and even transform policy ideas as they carry them to teachers” (p. 23). And Honig (2004) has investigated the role of “intermediary organizations” in their “operat[ion] between policy makers and implementers to affect changes in roles and practices for both parties” (p. 65).

Taken together, contemporary policy studies have illuminated the ways in which the implementation process is a “complex social practice” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 1) between policies, people, and places, which draws attention to the fact that although federal policies provide authoritative statements to guide enactment at the local level, “policy still has to be negotiated and implemented through interaction” (Hargreaves, 1985, p. 43). Policies are therefore mediated by actors through their daily work activities, or implementation practices, which involve “sensemaking” (Spillane, 2004; Coburn, 2001), meaning that actors’ interpret policy texts from different positionalities, which subsequently influences how policies are adapted (through interaction and negotiation) to local contexts in distinct ways; furthermore, these variegated policy spaces reflect different regional and institutional histories and cultures – all of which mediate policies to produce variation of outcomes across contexts.

The Two by Three Dissertation: Two Planes of Analysis Within Three Papers

Based on the premise that policy, people, and places so significantly shape the policy formulation and implementation process, it was necessary to engage in a holistic examination of the NSLP and its most recent reiteration, the HHFKA of 2010. Therefore, this dissertation uses three papers to explore (1) the historical and contemporary (1930-2010) context of the NSLP (policy), (2) policy-makers’ (people) formulation of the HHFKA (policy) at the federal level in Washington, D.C. (place), and (3) local level actors’ (people) implementation of the HHFKA (policy) in Oakland, CA (place).

Paper one investigates the NSLP and its relationship to the American Welfare State. The purpose of this examination is to situate the use of education policy and schools as spaces of intervention and sites for the delivery of social provision within the historical context of an American educationalized welfare state. The paper also considers the tensions between and the

affordances and limitations of federal versus local level policy-making. Finally, the paper contemplates how privatization in the NSLP during the 1970s-1990s reflects a larger problematic of neoliberalism and the privatization of education.

Paper two employs the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Text analysis to examine policy-makers' discourse throughout the Child Nutrition Reauthorization process, which led to the passage of the HRFKA of 2010. The purpose of this investigation is to consider how legislators' discourse constructs education policy at the federal level, which then has implications for how it impacts the process and shapes outcomes of implementation at the local level.

Finally, paper three draws data from a three-year (2013 – 2017) ethnographic case study of the HRFKA's implementation in OUSD (the local level). Specifically, this paper explores the factors and enabling conditions that allowed an innovative farm to school initiative developed by OUSD in partnership with the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, CA, to go to scale across 84 other districts in California. This paper also demonstrates how policy is mediated by contextual conditions at the local level, which positions implementation actors as “co-constructors” (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002) of policy in how they, too shape outcomes.

This multidimensional research design allowed me to engage in problem-oriented research by looking at specific phenomena within each paper, such as the particular ways that policy, people, and place shape the policy process in distinctive ways. Together, these papers afford a greater understanding of the ways in which each constituent part of the policy process contributes to the mutually constitutive whole as reflected by the construction of the HRFKA at the federal level and in its implementation in OUSD.

Paper #1

Title: The Political Economy of School Lunch: A Historical and Contemporary Examination of the National School Lunch Program, 1930-2010 and its Relationship to the American Welfare State

Abstract

This paper examines the history and contemporary landscape (1930-2010) of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Through this investigation, the paper illuminates three broad issues in education reform: (1) the relationship between education policy, schools, and social provision; (2) the affordances and limitations of and tensions between centralized (federal level) and decentralized (local level) education policy-making; and (3) the privatization of public education. This investigation demonstrates that the NSLP reveals a longstanding and complex relationship regarding the public and private purposes of schooling as a means for fulfilling individualist values and collective aspirations. Finally, this research finds that Americans have a historical and pervasive dependency on schools to solve issues pertaining to social inequality. Therefore, the NSLP is an important case for illustrating how the privatization of public education can only increase inequality in a way that is dangerous to the democratic ideals and foundations of our nation.

Introduction

It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in-aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of foods and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation, and expansion of nonprofit school-lunch programs. (National School Lunch Act of 1946)

This paper examines the history and contemporary landscape of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) prior to its most recent reauthorization in 2010: The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010. The purpose of this investigation is to illuminate three broad issues in education reform: (1) the relationship between education policy, schools, and social provision; (2) the affordances and limitations of and tensions between centralized (federal level) and decentralized (local level) education policy-making; and (3) the privatization of public education.

The first issue is the role of public education in the delivery of social provision and how public education shapes how we think about it. The conception of the common school and its expansion both created the institution in which it was most convenient to locate social provision programs and shaped the rationale for those programs in terms of opportunity rather than merely the elimination of poverty. Thus, the ideological and institutional roots of the common school nurtured not only the massive growth in public education during the twentieth century, but also—as authors such as Cohen (2005) have shown—they were a key component in the creation and expansion of the American welfare state. This paper will demonstrate how the NSLP is a part of that larger story of schools as creators and providers of social welfare.

The second issue is regarding the normative debate around applying certain types of policy prescriptions to our schools' problems, and the kinds of unintended consequences that can emerge from those applications. Under the umbrella of centralized/federal level education policy-making, the locus of reform lies with the federal government. In this model, the government attempts to ensure the viability and sustainability of the commonwealth by redressing the larger social inequities that children embody and bring to the classroom. Examples of such mechanisms range from the desegregation of schools to the redistribution of financial resources, to highly standardized curriculums paired with punitive accountability measures, for example, the No Child Left Behind Act. These particular practices can have the consequence of a “one-size-fits-all” type approach “...[inviting] policy remedies that are universally slathered on all schools” (Fuller, 2009, p. 855) without regard to their local circumstances and varying needs. It also risks obscuring what Nancy Fraser (1997) calls “claims for recognition,” that is, claims for equality and social justice that are multicultural.

Conversely, decentralized/local level education policy-making places decision making and problem-solving within local hands. The theory of action under this model is that local reformers can create tailored approaches and respond more rapidly, in comparison to the federal government, to the educational needs and desires of their particular constituencies (Fuller, 2009). However, two significant consequences present themselves within this realm of education policy. The first is that it is an inherently insufficient solution to the more substantial problem of social inequality since it cannot adequately address and engage in fundamental systemic transformation (Cohen, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). The second is that schools become subject to individual rather

than collective preferences moving them from the domain of a pure public good to occupying a space of competing and contradictory purposes as both a public and private good (Labaree, 2010; 1997).

The NSLP is emblematic of the continuous debate, tensions, and consequences in education around centralized versus decentralized reforms. As stated by Historian Susan Levine (2008) “food policy plays a central role in shaping American health, welfare, and equality” (p.2). Hence, an examination of “the National School Lunch Program is...a crucial mirror into the variety of interest that continually vie for power and authority in American public life” (Levine, 2008, p.2). Tracing the roots of the NSLP reveals these dynamics and provides insight into how these types of reforms are operationalized within a distinct context. Furthermore, through a review of the history and contemporary landscape of the NSLP, I will demonstrate how decentralized reforms can invite the move of education from a public to private good, and thus facilitate privatization (but does not require it).

Finally, an examination of the NSLP also illuminates the ways in which public education is becoming increasingly privatized and the kinds of consequences it can impose as foreshadowed by the effects privatization has had on the NSLP. However, before I tell the story how privatization has unfolded within the NSLP, I want to establish a working conception of education as a public good, and the ways in which it becomes privatized.

Samuelson (1954) defined public goods as “collective consumption goods...which all enjoy in common in the sense that each individual’s consumption of such a good leads to no subtraction from any other individual’s consumption of that good” (as cited in Tiebout, 1956, p. 416). Universal education in this country was created to ensure, what Labaree (2010; 1997) terms, democratic equality amongst its citizens, which is the public good supplied by education. Democratic equality is an approach to schooling that argues,

A democratic society cannot persist unless it prepares all of its young with equal care to take on the full responsibilities of citizenship in a competent manner. We all depend on this political competence of our fellow citizens, since we put ourselves at the mercy of their collective judgment about the running of our society. A corollary is that, in the democratic political arena, we are all considered equal (according to the rule of one person, one vote), but this political equality can be undermined if the social inequality of citizens grows to great. Therefore, schools must promote both effective citizenship and relative equality. Both of these outcomes are collective benefits of schooling without which we cannot function as a polity. (Labaree, 1997, p. 42)

Hence, when we allow schools to become subjected to individual preferences, we shift them from being a public good that promotes democratic equality, to a private good, which “accents the influence of the family’s purchasing power [and thus] the assumption that the individual will act from exogenous preferences to maximize his or her utility” (Fuller, 2009, p. 857).

Creating conditions that encourage individuals to “maximize” their utility within public education sets up educational problems that are bound to arise from the differing values and competing perspectives about what the purposes and goals of education ought to be (Labaree, 2010; 1997). These purposes and goals will be very different for each person depending on where they are located in the U.S. capitalist and hierarchical social strata (Labaree, 2010; 1997). Furthermore, maximizing utility through exercising individual preference creates a “social mobility approach to schooling” (Labaree, 2010; 1997). Within this approach to schooling,

“education is a commodity, the only purpose of which is to provide individual students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable social positions. The aim [then] is to get more of this valuable commodity than one’s competitors” (Labaree, 1997, p. 42). Under this model, conceptions of the marketplace are applied to what has historically been a public service and frames education as a private good for individual rather than collective enrichment.

John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) are examples of scholars that advocate for privatization in public education as a means for increasing the effectiveness of schools. They argue that the failures of education are due to centrist policies that tie schools to an overly bureaucratic state thus, impeding their ability to innovate and make progress. As such, Chubb and Moe’s panacea is that all families should have vouchers that they can take to any school of their choosing. The logic behind vouchers hinges on likening schools to businesses. So, the hypothesis goes, a good business will continuously work to serve the needs and desires of its customer base, and as a result stay in business. Conversely, a bad business will not be able to give the people what they want and as such, go out of business. Therefore, if a school continuously fails children—as measured by standardized test scores—then that school will not be able to stay open because no one will choose to go there.

The problem with this type of deductive reasoning is twofold. First, vouchers are the most extreme version of decentralized reforms, because they completely subject schools to the volatility of the market as well as choices that are raced and classed. Second, it perverts the meaning and purposes of public schools since they are not businesses. Schools are public service institutions tasked with promoting democratic equality amongst the nation’s citizens (Cuban & Tyack, 1995; Labaree, 2010; 1997). Therefore, schools should be protected from a capricious driven market so as not to be enfolded in the endless class warfare of a capitalist economy that requires social inequality to function (Marx, in Tucker, 1978, pp. 203-443). From this perspective then, vouchers are a dangerous proposition in education reform because they destabilize and hinder public schools’ ability to fulfill their democratic missions.

Furthermore, and to use the language of markets, schools are also constrained by their so-called “customer base.” The United States has profoundly segregated residential patterns by both race and class. These patterns limit mobility, and thus choices that are unfettered. Moreover, these patterns constrain public schools because they, unlike families with choices, cannot select the composition of their student body (Johnson & Shapiro, 2013). True public schools (that is to say, not charter schools) must serve all of the students within their catchment area, which is an essential feature of public schools because it guarantees all citizens the right to an education. However, it also means that some schools more than others must contend and work with the continuous restrictions that race and class can impose on a given student body (Rothstein, 2004) or school (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003).

Finally, this approach assumes that individuals have all the information they need to make truly informed choices—or that people will make rational decisions even with the provision of perfect information. As shown by Fuller (2009) “whether parents choose from among public schools, or from a rising count of charter schools, depends upon local institutional conditions, not only upon the mechanism of individual choice” (p. 857).

My aim in laying out the views of Chubb and Moe (1990) is to demonstrate the kinds of arguments that are made to increase decentralized reforms, as well as to supply critiques of such logic. Laying out these views provides context for how the same type of logic is applied to reform efforts in the NSLP, which will be discussed in subsequent sections. It also forms the foundation for one of my concluding arguments, which states that decentralized approaches to

changing the school food system are ultimately inadequate measures for ensuring, and prioritizing the nutritional needs of children over other interests—such as big agriculture and mass fast food corporations.

Finally, the use of the term “political economy” in the title of this paper and my dissertation felt appropriate since its definition has “roots in moral philosophy, as the more comprehensive study of societies and states in all their economic, political, legal, historical, and moral aspects” (Banzhaf, 2012, p. 3). The application of a political and economic analysis to school lunch (at both the federal and local level) was my attempt to dig into an aspect of schooling that might reveal something about the broader, complex nature of the education system of which it is a part. What I discovered was that much like the process of educating children, the act of feeding them in schools is a highly complicated endeavor shaped by power and woven through by larger political forces. Using the NSLP as my unit of analysis was a useful method not only for making this discovery, but for also understanding the relationship of schools to the social welfare state, the affordances and limitation of and tensions between centralization and decentralization, and, finally, the implications of increasing privatization within public education.

The National School Lunch Program

A Brief Overview

The NSLP, and its subsidiary the School Breakfast Program (SBP), are federally administered child nutrition programs through the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Department of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which both subsidizes and regulates school meals. In 2016, almost 30.4 million children participated on an average day (down from 31.8 million per day in 2010 when the HHFKA was signed into law) – of which 73.3% were free or reduced-price meals (USDA FNS, 2017a). The SBP served more than 14.5 million children on a typical school day (up from 11.7 million in 2010) – of which 85.1% were free or reduced-price breakfasts (USDA FNS, 2017b). Together, the two programs support more than seven and a half billion meals a year (USDA FNS, 2017a; 2017b).

As stated by Janet Poppendieck (2010) “large numbers have a tendency to wash over us without sinking in” (p.3). Since I want to emphasize the prodigiousness of the NSLP, I borrow Poppendieck’s apt analogy for contextualizing the difference between a million and a billion:

If [a speaker] could keep us in [an] auditorium listening to [their] impassioned arguments for a million seconds...we would be there for a little over eleven and a half days. If, however, [they] were allocated a *billion* seconds to make [their] case, we would be there for thirty-one years, eight months, two weeks, one day, eleven hours, sixteen minutes and forty-eight seconds. Seven [and a half] billion meals is a very large number. Feeding our children at school is an enormous undertaking. (2010, p. 3)

The National School Lunch Program: A Brief History

The NSLP and the American Welfare State

In *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (1995), Tyack and Cuban write, “Reforming the public schools has long been a favorite way of improving not just education but society” (p. 1). Furthermore, they continue, “repeatedly, Americans have followed a common pattern in devising educational prescriptions for specific social or economic ills” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 2). The genesis of the American proclivity for depending on schools to fix social problems, what Kantor & Lowe (2013) refer to as the “educationalized welfare state” arises out of two particular conditions. The first is the American preference for educational rather than social entitlement programs—a “doors not floors” approach to social provision, meaning the United States has “little inclination to provide ‘floors’—that is, social guarantees for a minimum standard of living, but most Americans are willing to open ‘doors’ of opportunity by providing education” (Cohen, 2005, p. 513).

The second condition arises out of the first. Social program activist of the twentieth century strategically used the nation’s commitment to universal education to generate support for social services, specifically, mothers’ pensions (the predecessor to Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]), and child labor laws (Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, the United States was characterized by a weak state structure—the federal government did not even possess the right to tax incomes of businesses and individuals until 1914 (Berkowitz & McQuaid, 1980, p. 25). Hence, Progressive era welfare reformers built with what they had available and used the public-school bureaucracy, since it was one of the only institutions that had the capacity to implement the welfare state (Cohen, 2005, p. 515).

Like mothers’ pensions, feeding children in schools has roots in the use of schools as creators and expanders of the social welfare state. Compulsory education filled schoolhouses with the very poor, hungry, and malnourished children of immigrants (Levine, 2008). Many child welfare advocates, concerned about these children’s inability to concentrate on their studies because they suffered from hunger, used the same strategy of drumming up support for feeding children at school by relying on the American commitment to education. For example, in *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (1906), child welfare activist John Spargo wrote:

“...society, having assumed the responsibility of insisting that every child shall be educated, and providing the means of education, is necessarily bound to assume the responsibility of seeing that they are made fit to receive that education.” (as quoted in Gunderson, 1971, p. 9)

Initial efforts for feeding children lunch at school were purely local and depended on a combination of public and private initiatives and resources. Some school districts appropriated public funds for lunchroom operations offered free meals to poor children or charged for food. Most often, however, funding for school food programs came from parent-teacher fundraisers and private charities interested in child welfare and education. Volunteers (generally women) supplied the labor needed for serving lunches via mothers’ “hot lunch clubs,” (Levine, 2008).

The first push for the expansion of school meals occurred post-World War I (1914-1918) when doctors discovered high levels of malnutrition in America. Almost one-third of the nation’s young men called to service were rejected because they were under weight or suffered from a nutrition-deficiency related condition (Levine, 2008; Gunderson, 1971). Consequently, home economists and nutrition scientists of the Progressive era within university departments and the USDA were tasked with exploring whether malnutrition constituted a severe problem in its public schools and for the nation; and prescribing an ideal American diet for increasing

individual health that, by extension, would raise the nation's standard of living and strengthen its democratic capacities and national security (Levine, 2008).

Due to the severe nutrition problems facing American children, educators, academics, scientists, and child welfare advocates combined efforts to propose that a universal school lunch program could address hunger and malnutrition in America's public schools (Levine, 2008). Subsequently, school systems throughout the country began to offer hot lunches. However, the programs varied widely in nutritional content, and in how and to which children they delivered school meals. These variations in local hot lunch programs reflected the highly decentralized school system during that period (Gunderson, 1971; Levine, 2008). However, the genesis of school meals demonstrates the use of schools to deliver the provision of social services and the preference of keeping social welfare within the realm of schools. That is to say, rather than creating an anti-hunger policy to address the nation's issues of malnutrition reformers instead, turned to the schools.

The Great Depression, the New Deal, and School Food

It was not until the Great Depression of the 1930s, which intensified the problems of hunger and malnutrition, that federal participation in school meals occurred (Michelmann, 1976; Gunderson, 1971). Destitution reached levels unimaginable to contemporary Americans due to widespread unemployment that affected about a third of the workforce (Gunderson, 1971). Families struggled to provide meals at home and sought help through public assistance programs, and the dangers of malnutrition among school children once again became a national concern. However, it was not hungry children's nutritional requirements that prompted federal intervention. Instead, the needs of farmers are what galvanized the government to take action (Levine, 2008).

A decade earlier, in an attempt to compensate for price declines, farmers increased their production and output of farm products. As a result, there was a large accumulation of farm commodity surpluses, which drove down the income of farmers and compromised their livelihood leaving many in poverty. To protect the interests of farmers, Southern Democrats in Congress and the Agricultural lobby demanded assistance from the federal government, which led to the passage of Public Law 320 on August 24, 1936. The law was a part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the legislation's objective was to "remove price-depressing surplus foods from the market through government purchase and dispose of them through exports and domestic donations to consumers in such a way as not to interfere with normal sales" (Gunderson, 1971, p. 15). The law allowed the USDA Secretary to purchase and thus, remove price-depressing agricultural surpluses as a way balance the agricultural market and increase the incomes of farmers.

Surpluses were then to be disposed of through exports and domestic donations to consumers in such a way as not to interfere with regular sales (Levine, 2008). School lunches appeared a diplomatic means to both provide relief from the deprivation being experienced by hungry children living through the Great Depression's while also serving as a practical outlet for the surplus commodities purchased by the USDA (Gunderson, 1971; Michelmann, 1976; Poppendieck, 2010). For schools to participate and qualify for the donations, they had to enter into contracts with the USDA in which they would agree not to sell or exchange the commodities, discontinue or reduce their normal food purchases, operate on a nonprofit basis, and provide free meals to needy children. This arrangement shifted the focus in the 1920s from

schools offering a meal to address the nutritional needs and social welfare of children, to schools serving as a mechanism for stabilizing the income of farmers.

In addition to the commodity donation program, one of the New Deal's central relief agencies, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, began to lend money to communities that wanted to start school meal programs (Levine, 2008). The funds were given to states and school districts to pay for cafeteria space or equipment. Within a few years, every state in the nation had signed on to receive the loans, and school food programs proliferated as a result of federal support.

The growth of school meal programs also provided a substantial number of jobs to participants in the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA was one of the largest components of the New Deal programs, and it employed millions of unskilled workers through public works projects. Using federal relief funds, the WPA paid wages to over 5,000 women to work in school cafeterias as bakers, cooks, and clerks. The WPA also operated gardening and canning projects that produced food for school lunches while simultaneously employing men in state food warehouses, as well as in the labor of shipping and storing donated food for children's meals. By the early 1940s, the WPA's "school lunch units" operated in 35,000 schools throughout the country and served an estimated two million children (Levine, p. 44-45, 2008). The WPA demonstrates the way that education policy and public schools were used to provide for the economic stability and the welfare of US citizens.

While the partnership that was forged between the Department of Agriculture and schools to feed children seemed successful, unfortunately, it was failing many needy children. Due to the lack of enforcement and funding for providing meals to poor children, many of them did not benefit from the arrangement or were almost entirely excluded from the lunchroom. The underlying reasons for these "gross inequities was that the program was administered as a surplus food distribution activity and the methods of administration largely ignored the question of need" (Levine, 2008, p. 110). Furthermore, the USDA had initially become the administrator of school lunch programs based on these distribution activities, and not because it was necessarily the best department for the job—a critical point in the history of school food.

The fact that children's nutritional needs were a convenient remedy for agricultural ones, rather than the primary force behind creating a federally supported school lunch program, speaks to some of the limitations of centralized policy-making. Chubb and Moe (1990) would probably argue that in the case of the NSLP, the interests of bureaucrats superseded the needs of children, and this is why centrist policies are inadequate for addressing educational problems. Indeed, this administrative arrangement between the USDA and the NSLP has fundamentally shaped the character of the government's role in school meals and child nutrition programs to the present.

World War II and Malnutrition

The rapid pace of growth for school lunch programs was stymied when the nation entered World War II in 1941. With the nation gearing up for defense, labor and food surpluses became scarce due to their diversion away from schools toward feeding the nation's army and its allies. In a repetition of history, considerable numbers of young men failed draft physicals for reasons related to malnutrition in childhood, and it again called attention to the importance of a well-fed citizenry (Poppendieck, 2010). This sentiment is reflected in the statement of Representative John R. Murdoch, as Congress debated the passage of a permanent program for school meals:

What a shameful thing that this greatest and richest Nation on earth in its mightiest crisis and in its hour of direst need, as during this and the other World War should find so large a proportion of our young men physically unfit for military service, mostly because they had not had enough to eat. That is a sobering fact and there is no denying it. My two sons were regarded as fit to put on the uniform and to be able to take what punishment the war had for them. They did not have the benefit of hot school lunches, for I cannot forget that during the twenties and the early thirties, in the midst of the great depression, their father as a school teacher did not have the cash to pay for hot lunches. Yet I do recall that their mother worked her fingers off to see that they had the equivalent of a hot lunch and that they grew in stature, strength, and stamina which later enabled them to take part in the strenuous cruelties of war. The sad thing is that not all mothers of that generation of soldiers had opportunity or ability to do as much for their sons, and hot school lunches were not furnished all the millions whose fighting strength was needed to preserve us from the cohorts of hell. Call on them to die, yes, but do not help them to live and grow. (79 Cong. Rec. 1463, 1946)

Government concerns over malnutrition prompted the Federal Security Agency to ask the Committee on Food and Nutrition of the National Research Council to prescribe an ideal American diet that would meet the various vitamins, minerals, and calorie requirements needed to maintain health and productivity and be the nutritional basis for school lunch meals (Poppendieck, 2010; Levine, 2008).

The result was not only the development of the Recommended Dietary Allowances, or RDAs, which stipulated how much vitamin B1, B2, A and D, calcium, iron, fats, proteins, and calories people should be consuming per day (Levine, 2008), it also created a foundation for how American's eat today, which Pollan (2008) refers to as "nutritionism." Nutritionism is the scientific breakdown of any given whole food into its nutrient parts. The practice has become problematic because it has brought about the fortification of highly processed foods, what Pollan (2008) refers to as "edible, food-like substances," to be classified as part of a balanced diet. As a result, our nation's food system, and consequently the American school food system,¹ shifted from being food- to nutrient-based in the recommendation for consumption of a certain amount of servings of fruits, vegetables, and grains to getting in a certain amount of vitamin A, B, C, etc., per day.

The nutrition-based diet standards have also had consequences for what crops are primarily produced and subsidized in the United States (specifically, corn and soy) that then form the building blocks for processed and fast-foods (Pollan, 2008; Patel, 2008). Again, these changes effect what foods enter the school food system. For example, through the USDA's Nutrient Standard Menu Planning, or NSMP (a system that allows school food administrators to determine what will be served in school meals), a Hot Pocket can be compliant with USDA school lunch dietary requirements simply by fortifying it with *essential* vitamins and minerals (Poppendieck, 2010).

Along with the RDAs, the USDA also changed the way in which it administered the school lunch program to compensate for the changes brought about by World War II. Southern farmers, concerned with losing outlets for surplus commodities once the war came to an end lobbied Congress to protect those interests. In response, Congress passed the Steagall Act, which

¹ The HRFKA of 2010, moved from nutrient- back to food-based school meals. (See "Performance-based reimbursement rate increase for new meal patters" in S. Rep. No. 111-178, p. 7).

committed the nation to support farm prices after World War II. The Steagall Act virtually guaranteed that there would once again be large food surpluses in federal hands at the end of the war (Levine, 2008). However, with the loss of surplus commodities and free WPA labor to the war, many schools could no longer afford to run their school lunch programs and were dropping out of the program. Since Congress had already committed to removing surpluses under the Steagall provisions, proponents of a federal lunch program argued that without it Congress would again face the thorny question of how to dispose of surpluses (Levine 2008).

To ensure that school lunch programs would still be around to take those surpluses off the USDA's hands, advocates of a school lunch program teamed up with farmers and succeeded in lobbying Congress to provide cash reimbursements to schools for funds spent to procure local food during the war (Levine, 2008). Hence, commodity donations and free labor were replaced during the war with a modest cash subsidy. The War Food Administration (WFA), looking for a basis to determine which meals would qualify for the cash reimbursement, turned to the new RDAs to establish a standard. The WFA's meal requirements turned out to be the basis for long-term public policy, because it created a meal pattern (referred to as The Type A meal designed to provide one-third to one-half the RDAs for children aged 10 to 12) that (until the passage of the HRFKA of 2010), was very similar to the meals served in contemporary school lunch programs (Levine, 2008). However, even with the cash subsidy schools were still leaving the program because it was just not enough money to sustain the total costs of their programs. To ensure that schools remained a viable outlet for surpluses after the war, Congress created a permanent and more comprehensively funded school lunch program, which led to the National School Lunch Act of 1946 (Levine, 2008).

The Creation of a National School Lunch Program

On June 4, 1946, the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act was signed into law by President Harry Truman. In his Presidential signing statement, Truman declared:

I feel that the Congress has acted with great wisdom in providing the basis for strengthening the nation through better nutrition for our school children. In my message to Congress last January, I pointed out that we have the technical knowledge to provide plenty of good food for every man, woman, and child in this country, but that despite our capacity to produce food we have often failed to distribute it as well as we should. This action by the Congress represents a basic forward step toward correcting that failure. In the long view, no nation is any healthier than its children or more prosperous than its farmers; and in the National School Lunch Act, the Congress has contributed immeasurably both to the welfare of our farmers and the health of our children.

The Act established the NSLP and created an across-the-board payment to schools called the Section 4 subsidy for all meals served in the program. The appropriation of funds was distributed within the states by a state agency (usually the State Department of Education rather than directly by the USDA to schools), and by a formula that took into account the number of school-aged children in the state and the state's relative poverty. Federal funds had to be matched by funds from within the state, including the fees that children paid for lunches, and the federal share was scheduled to decline over time. Participating schools had to agree to feed needy children free or at reduced price, serve meals that met minimum nutritional requirements, operate

on a nonprofit basis, maintain adequate records of all receipts and expenditures, and utilize commodities declared by the Secretary of Agriculture to be in abundant supply (National School Lunch Act of 1946).

After the legislation was passed, overall participation in the NSLP doubled, rising from seven million in 1947 to fourteen million at the start of the 1960s, and school food policy entered a period of calm and stability—that is, until the early 1960s when hunger was discovered in America, once again (Poppendieck, pp. 52-53, 2010).

President Kennedy and Discovering Hunger in America (Again)

During a tour of the nation while campaigning for the Democratic nomination in 1960, John F. Kennedy encountered deep poverty and deprivation among the residents of Appalachia. He vowed to do something about it when he took office (Levine, 2008). Staying true to his promise, his first executive order (signed on inauguration day) expanded the USDA's list of commodities to be donated both to impoverished families and schools (Levine, 2008; Michelman, 1976). A month later, in February 1961, he announced the first sites for the pilot food stamps project. And in his Message to Congress on Agriculture in March, he recommended the expansion of the school lunch program, urging increased funding for schools providing a high proportion of free lunches and a redesign of the formula allocating school lunch funds among the states (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 54). Congress responded in 1962 by revamping the allocation formula and added a new Section 11 to the National School Lunch Act. The amendment authorized funding, for the first time, to reimburse schools that served free meals in impoverished areas (Michelman, 1976; Ralston et al., 2008).

President Johnson and the War on Poverty

Unfortunately, on November 22, 1963, only one year after his inauguration, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. President Lyndon Johnson continued Kennedy's administrative agenda by taking up his causes and declaring an "unconditional war on poverty" in his first State of the Union address in January 1964, and thereafter creating the Office of Economic Opportunity (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 55). By 1966 poverty was a high-profile issue, both within the Johnson administration and in larger society. The civil rights movement had done much to call attention to the living conditions of impoverished African Americans. Furthermore, newspaper and television reports, books, and magazine articles were all converging to raise the nation's consciousness about the *other America* (Levine, 2008).

As a response, the school lunch program was used as an attempt to ameliorate one of the consequences of poverty: hunger. In 1966, Congress passed the Child Nutrition Act (CNA), which provided federal money for state administrative expenses, and also expanded the program to include more poor children. The lunch program benefits were extended to preschool programs operated by the schools and also authorized a two-year pilot School Breakfast Program (SBP). Schools that participated in the SBP were selected based on "areas in which poor economic conditions exist and to those schools to which a substantial proportion of the children enrolled must travel long distances daily" (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 57). Finally, the act also reaffirmed the NSLP's link with agriculture by officially designating the USDA as the administrative home for all federal child nutrition efforts (Ralston, Newman, Clauson, Guthrie, Buzby, & Economic Research Service, 2008).

Discovering Hunger in the Other America

During the spring of 1967, hunger in America once again became a highly publicized issue. Hearings on the War on Poverty took a Senate subcommittee to deep South Mississippi. Civil rights attorney Marian Wright convinced several senators, photographers, and news reporters to accompany her on a tour of the back roads of the Mississippi Delta. Among the senators was Robert Kennedy. Kennedy's visit allowed the rest of America to discover hunger when the nightly news showed the tour of the Mississippi Delta, and their encounter with poverty in its most desperate forms, on televisions across the nation (Levine, 2008; Poppendieck, 2010). The public was shocked since hunger in the context of American abundance was not something that was acceptable to the "best-fed nation on earth" (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 58).

Antipoverty activist seized the opportunity and undertook efforts to document the extent of hunger and poverty-related malnutrition and to investigate the performance of the federal food assistance programs. Among them was a coalition of women's organizations, the Committee on School Lunch Participation, which turned its attention to the fate of needy children in the NSLP. The committee found that only about two million of the nation's nearly fifty million schoolchildren, about a third of the estimated six million poor children of school age, were receiving free or reduced-price lunches (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 58). The committee's report titled, *Their Daily Bread* (1968), portrayed a program impeded in many ways from meeting the needs of the nation's hungriest children.

The most significant and long-standing obstacle to serving children in poverty through the NSLP was the fact that the program lacked uniform national standards for determining the eligibility requirement for a free or reduced lunch. The legislation only stated that meals "shall be served without cost or at a reduced cost to children who are determined by local school authorities to be unable to pay the full cost of the lunch" (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 59). However, neither "without cost" or "reduced cost" had any legal or operational definition. Hence, discretion was left to local schools to determine who would receive such meals. The lack of clarity allowed anyone from the local principal to the school board, to the cafeteria manager to determine who was "needy," with the process of that identification varying greatly across schools. With discrimination in the Jim Crow South, this arrangement excluded many Black children from receiving any of these meals as well (Poppendieck, 2010; Levine, 2008).

In the context of broad public concern about hunger, poverty, and a growing commitment to rights and entitlements supported by the Johnson administration, Congress overhauled the funding structure of the school lunch and breakfast programs. In a series of bills, it established uniform national standards to define eligibility for both free and reduced-price meals, and it coupled those rules with differential reimbursement rates (Michelman, 1976). In other words, all schools participating in the program would now have a funded mandate to supply free and reduced-price meals to children from households with incomes below federally defined standards. For the first time, schools had an incentive to identify children eligible to receive free meals, and participation rose dramatically. Between 1967 and 1970, the number of children receiving free lunches doubled, and it continued to rise, nearly doubling again by 1973 (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 62).

The bolstering of the NSLP was not the only federal response to the outrage engendered by the vivid discovery of hunger. In 1968, Congress established programs to feed children when school was not in session and to provide meals in child care settings—what eventually became

the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Meals Program (Gunderson, 1971; Michelman, 1976). The Special Supplemental Feeding Program and the Summer Meals Program for Women, Infants, and Children (more commonly known as WIC) was established as a two-year pilot in 1972 and made permanent in 1964. The Food Stamp Program was dramatically expanded and liberalized. And a program of nutrition assistance for the elderly was also established. Taking all of the federal nutrition programs into account food assistance spending rose from about \$1.25 billion in 1970 to \$12.5 in 1980, a tenfold increase (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 63).

The Nixon Administration and the Origins of Privatization in the NSLP

The dramatic expansion of food assistance programs from the 1970s to 1980s was due in significant part to President Nixon. Shortly after taking office in 1969, Nixon announced that he would, within a year's time, provide every poor child a free school lunch. He then vastly increased funds for free meals, and, ultimately, "transformed the NSLP from being primarily an agricultural subsidy into one of the nation's premier poverty programs" (Levine, 2008, p. 198). However, as a result of the mounting pressure to feed the poor, there was a fundamental shift in school lunch priorities, which had significant unintended consequences for the demographics of school lunchrooms and the quality of school meals. As the number of free meals rose, and the number of paying children precipitously declined, the bodies that now mostly filled lunchrooms visually represented the racial and class inequality of the nation. These conditions created a massive shortfall in lunchroom budgets because free lunch reimbursements were insufficient to cover the operational costs of running large-scale lunchroom operations.

Furthermore, although Nixon increased the reimbursements of free meals, he simultaneously decreased funds for equipment, labor, and operating expenses. School lunch administrators found themselves searching for ways to maintain the viability of free meal programs. Unfortunately, the "search for financial stability eroded both the nutritional integrity and the public nature of the National School Lunch Program" (Levine, 2008, p. 151). To bring down the cost of lunchroom operations, "school administrators and liberal reformers began to look to the private food service industry to keep school cafeterias afloat" (Levine, 2008, p. 151).

In conjunction with these more significant shifts, the Department of Agriculture began to "modify its nutrition standards for children's meals, making it easier for the food industry to enter the school lunch market" (Levine, 2008, p.151). Hoping that fast-food corporations and giant food service companies would be able to supply food, and in some cases run their meal programs, "reformers saw privatization as a way to allow lunchrooms to continue to serve both free and paying children" (Levine, 2008, p. 3). What emerged in many school districts was a public/private partnership shaped fundamentally by business concerns such as profitability and efficiency. By the end of the 1970s, "school cafeterias came more and more to resemble fast-food restaurants" (Levine, 2008, p. 152). Hence, the Presidency of Nixon had opened the cafeteria door to private, corporate food interests.

The Reagan Administration and the Increasing Privatization of the NSLP

Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 represented an abrupt shift in the direction and nature of the NSLP. The NSLP under the Reagan administration is an example of how "the years that

span presidencies constitute episodes in the recurring dialectic of reform and reaction that punctuates American history” (Katz, 1989, p. 4). Indeed, an analysis of the school lunch program and its policies during this period reflects the neoliberal politics of the Reagan administration writ large. According to Harvey (2005), “the neoliberal revolution is popularly attributed to Reagan after 1979” (p. 2), and is as an ideology that “emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace” (p. 3). Neoliberals believe that “the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). Deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” are standard features of neoliberal practices (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

The Withdrawal of Social Provisions from the NSLP

Charging that social programs were bloated, out of control, and prone to fraud and abuse, the new administration won cuts in a whole host of programs serving poor and working-class families. Therefore, what had essentially become a welfare program for the poor under the previous administrations of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, the NSLP now became a victim in the all-out assault on state welfare provisions under the Reagan administration. Reagan proposed to eliminate all federal subsidies for non-means-tested meals.² The proposed cut was predicated on the assumption that the subsidy was wasted on children from middle- and upper-class families that could afford to pay the full price. The administration assumed that these families would continue to use the program since they felt the full-price meal was still a great deal (Poppendieck, 2010).

Furthermore, Reagan administration officials also believed that they could save the government money by identifying and eliminating families who fraudulently applied for school lunches. Therefore, Reagan proposed revisions to the application procedures for free and reduced meals as well. The purpose behind this measure was to find the children undeserving of a free or reduced-price lunch in the view of the neoliberal administration. In response to this proposal, and as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Congress sharply raised allowable prices for meals and then cut the full-priced meal subsidy by more than one-third. They also lowered the reimbursement rate for reduced-priced meals and lowered the eligibility ceilings for the free- and reduced-price meals. Furthermore, Congress increased the accountability and verification requirements both for families applying for free meals and food service departments.

The new application was highly invasive, requiring parents to provide the names and social security numbers for each adult in the household; they were also costly and time-consuming for schools since officials were now required to verify all of the information on the applications, whereas before they accepted self-declarations of income and family size (Levine, 2008). Furthermore, in addition to the cuts in subsidies and the new application requirements, Congress also terminated non-food assistance for equipment, reduced funding for nutrition education and training, and eliminated participation in the NSLP for most private schools (Poppendieck, 2010, pp. 72-73).

When lunch prices increased in schools across the nation, participation by full-price students declined from 15.3 million in 1979 to 11.2 million in 1983 (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 73).

² The school lunch program has a three-tiered meal structure: full-price, reduced-price, and free meals. However, the “full-priced meal” is somewhat of a misnomer, because all three meals are subsidized by the Department of Agriculture, which reduces the cost of meals for children that pay for the “full-price” lunch (Ralston, et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the Reagan budget cuts to the school lunch program disproportionately affected Black children. One study estimated that three million fewer black children qualified for free lunches, and 500,000 fewer received breakfasts; furthermore, the cuts doubled the cost of breakfast and lunch for four million black children in families earning between \$13,000 and \$19,000 a year (Levine, 2008, pp. 174-175).

Students eligible for reduced-price meals saw their prices double and dropped out in substantial numbers as well, and nearly 2,700 schools dropped out of the program, for a total loss of more than a quarter of the NSLP's paying customers (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 73). With fewer lunches sold because of the mass departure of students from the program, smaller reimbursements per meal, a more trivial commodity entitlement, and expensive new accounting requirements, school systems were unable to pick up the additional financial burden. The financial shortfalls thus triggered profound changes in the nation's school lunch program.

Deregulation, Breaking Even, and the Privatization of the NSLP

With Reagan's cuts to the program and no other public funding to cover the gaps in costs, school boards increasingly began requiring school food service directors to break even (Levine, 2008; Poppendieck, 2010). As a result, the commercialization and privatization trend that had begun in the 1970s under Nixon (when he welcomed greater involvement from the private sector to meet the need brought on by the rapid increase in participation) was escalated by the financial crunch placed on school lunch programs in the 1980s under Reagan. Consequently, and as a response to the Reagan cuts, the privatization of school food became one of the only viable options for many schools (Levine, 2008, p. 178). To maintain student participation, meaning keeping paying customers in the lunchroom, cafeterias across the nation started to sell nutritionally unregulated, highly processed and branded fast food items. Companies such as Pizza Hut, Dominoes, and Taco Bell - known as "a la carte" and "competitive foods" in the school food literature - started to proliferate in the nation's lunchrooms after Nixon (Nestle, 2007; Poppendieck, 2010).

Furthermore, to cope with the deficit and keep lunchrooms open (as well as to pay for other educational activities), the use of "pouring rights contracts" became quite common (Nestle, 2007). School districts would receive large lump-sum payments and additional payments over five to ten years in return for exclusive sales of a company's products, for example, PepsiCo or Coca-Cola, in vending machines and at all school events (Nestle, 2007). However, while this move toward the commercialization of the schools and their cafeterias fit nicely with the neoliberal agenda to shift the responsibility of feeding children from the state to the market, it also had highly problematic implications for the health of our nation's children. The persistent march forward toward the privatization of lunchrooms and the attempt by corporations to develop product preferences and brand loyalty among children, begs the question of how children's nutritional needs will be a priority when they are in direct competition with companies primarily concerned with stockholders' interests, market share and the maximization of profits.

Nestle (2007), argues that the linkage of the NSLP to the USDA is egregious. This administrative relationship represents a conflict of interest because the USDA is in a precarious position of being "caught between the students they feed, and the farmers they are tasked to serve" (Robert & Weaver-Hightower, 2011, p. 18). Indeed, much of the prevalent issues within contemporary school food are a result of this conflict of interest. As will soon be discussed in the contemporary school food section, when it comes to the priorities of industrial agriculture versus

the nutritional needs of students, it is the former's interests, not the latter, that tend to prevail under this legislative arrangement.

The Start of the “Obesity Epidemic” and the NSLP

While schools were dealing with extensive budget cuts and the increased privatization of school lunch programs in the 1980s, there was a simultaneous shift in what now constituted the ideal American diet. Earlier preoccupations with hunger and malnutrition became primarily replaced by the need to address the growing rate of heart problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity among Americans. Washington-based consumer advocacy groups began to criticize the NSLP in general, and USDA-donated commodities in particular, for their high-fat content (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 76). The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, first published in 1980 and revised every five years under the joint auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services and USDA, “increasingly urged Americans to reduce their consumption of fats, especially saturated fats, as well as sodium and cholesterol” (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 77).

Throughout the rest of the decade several agencies, such as Public Voice for Food and Health, and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), created publications that drew attention to the questionable nutritional profile of food served in the NSLP. The criticism was particularly persistent because of the USDA's contradiction of providing dietary guidelines while seemingly being unable to have the lunch program meet them due to its use of surplus commodities high in saturated fats and cholesterols such as dairy, and beef (Poppendieck, 2010). In response to the scrutiny, the USDA secretary contracted with a research firm, Mathematica Policy Research Inc., to conduct a study. The study, titled “School Nutrition Dietary Assessment” (SNDA), measured school food against the standards set by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Poppendieck, 2010). The findings of the SNDA revealed that “only 1% of schools were serving, on average, meals that complied with the dietary guidelines for percentage of calories from fat” (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 78).

By November of 1994, a year after the SNDA report was released, Congress passed the Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act (HMHAA), which required schools participating in the NSLP to follow nutrition standards based on the 1995 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Ralston, et al., 2008; Poppendieck, 2010).

To assist schools with meeting the new nutrition standards under the HMHAA, the USDA launched a program of technical assistance called “Team Nutrition” and provided financial support for training of food service personnel and resources for nutrition education in schools (Poppendieck, 2010). The HMHAA also included a program to improve the nutritional profile of the commodities donated to the schools by the USDA. The new legislation contained regulations that allowed schools to trade their commodities to processors for branded, finished products. Therefore, rather than shipping raw commodities (for example, chicken) directly to the schools, districts could opt to have the USDA send them to commercial processors, which was referred to as the “commodity value pass-through.” The pass-through is what allowed commodities like chicken to be turned into heat-and-serve chicken nuggets, or potatoes to become “tater tots” and French fries for school lunch programs across the country (Poppendieck, 2010, pp. 79-80).

The 1990s up to the reauthorization of the NSLP in 2010, represent continued efforts to “safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children” (Gunderson, 2003, p. 256), and overcome the rising tide of childhood obesity. Following the 1994 HMHAA, the USDA added a

menu-planning option in 1996 that authorized more fruits, vegetables, and grains within meals, and provided schools with more flexibility in meeting nutrition standards concerning the use of commodity provisions (Ralston et al., 2008). In 2001, results from the second School Nutrition Dietary Assessment (SNDA II) were released. The SNDA II found that the average fat content of school lunches fell from 39% percent to 35% of calories. Unfortunately, however, this reduction still did not meet the 1995 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Ralston et al., 2008). In a continued effort to improve the nutritional profile of the NSLP, the USDA partnered with the Department of Defense (DoD) in 2002 and was allocated \$50 million for fresh produce for school meals (a program called “DoD Fresh”). Furthermore, the Nutrition Title of the 2002 Farm Act provided 6 million dollars for a Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program, which provided designated schools with free fresh and dried fruits, and vegetables (Ralston et al., 2008).

In what has been the last significant piece of school food legislation until the reauthorization of the NSLP in 2010 (the HHFKA), the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 was enacted, which expanded and permanently authorized the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. Included in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act was a Wellness Policy mandate from Congress. The mandate required school districts participating in the NSLP to form committees comprised of local stakeholders, such as administrators, parents, students, school boards, and representatives of the public. These groups were to establish local level policies that would govern physical activity at school and nutritional standards for all foods sold or served on campus (Poppendieck, 2010; Ralston et al., 2008).

The most crucial component of this legislation was that it allowed individual school districts to decide to eliminate vending machines, ban soda, and get rid of the sale of competitive foods on campus. This provision was a compromise on the part of Congress in response to dual and competing demands from parents, child nutrition advocates, and educators pushing for the USDA to have more power to regulate the type of food that could be sold in schools, and powerful food industry lobbyist that continuously mounted an offensive claiming that such legislation would violate their rights. For example, in 1983 the National Soft Drink Association filed suit in the district court to set aside such regulation arguing that it was “arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion” (Fleischhacker, 2007, p. 150). The food industry believed that any legislation attempting to regulate their ability to enter schools impeded the purview of local school districts and parents’ ability to make their own choices (Nestle, 2007; Poppendieck, 2010). The argument for local control was also brought into play during the Congressional hearings and debates for the HHFKA of 2010.

As will be discussed in paper two of this dissertation, policy-makers determined that placing these types of policy-making decisions at the local level were not an adequate approach to achieving the NSLP’s nutritional goals. An issue that reflects the continuous tension between and the affordances and limitations of policies formulated at the federal versus local level. By shifting the responsibility of determining nutritional standards for all foods sold or served on campus to local schools, the USDA relinquished responsibility for ensuring that there was equitable implementation of standards that attended to children’s dietary interests across all of the nation’s schools.

By 2005 another version of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans was published, which had implications for school meal requirements. The newer guidelines recommended different calorie limits for varying levels of activity, and fat intake between 24% and 35% of calories, rather than below 30%. Additionally, the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2006 further expanded the Fresh

Fruit and Vegetable Program to a total of 375 schools in fourteen States and three Indian Tribal Organizations (Ralston et al., 2008). Finally, in 2007 results from the third School Nutrition Dietary Assessment (SNDA III), which was conducted during 2004 and 2005, found that “less than one-third of schools served lunches containing at most 30% percent of calories from fat and less than 10% percent of calories from saturated fat” (Gordon & Fox, 2007). The results of the SNDA III demonstrated that the USDA still had a lot of work to do in aligning the ideal American diet prescribed by the Dietary Guidelines. Furthermore, and as an analysis of the HHSFKA of 2010 in paper two of this dissertation will demonstrate, the exponential increase of obesity has added to the social welfare activities of the NSLP – specifically, in addition to addressing childhood hunger, the program must now also attend to the nation’s “obesity epidemic” and long-term public health.

The Contemporary Landscape of the NSLP

The Role of the NSLP in Combatting and Preventing Obesity

The epidemic of childhood and adult obesity is considered one of the most pressing health issues and serious threats facing the nation today (Fahlman, McCaughy, Martin, Shen, 2010). In 2010, the year of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization leading to the HHSFKA of 2010, more than two-thirds (68%) of American adults age 20 and over were overweight or obese (Fahlman, et al., 2010). Furthermore, nearly one-third (32%) of children and adolescents ages two to 19 were overweight or obese and were said to be the first generation in history to have a shorter estimated lifespan than their parents (Fahlman, et al., 2010). Presently, (based on data from 2011-2014), the prevalence of obesity among adults and youth was just over 36% and 17%, respectively (Ogden, Carroll, Fryar, & Flegal, 2015). And Childhood obesity is now down to 17% and affects about 12.7 million children and adolescents (ages two to 19) (Ogden, Carroll, Lawman, Fryar, Kruszon-Moran, Kit, & Flegal (2016).

Obesity contributes to five of the ten leading causes of death in America, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, stroke and kidney disease (Center for Disease Control, as quoted in Walker, 2011, p. 41). Based on 2008 data, obesity-related health care costs about \$147 billion annually, and on average, obese individuals pay about \$1400 more per year (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). The National League of Cities website cites an “estimated annual health care costs of obesity-related illness [at a] staggering [cost of] \$190.2 billion or nearly 21% of annual medical spending in the United States,” of which “childhood obesity alone [was] responsible for \$14 billion in direct medical costs” (2017, para. 2) .

A number of studies (e.g., Fahlman et al., 2010; Pyle, Sharkey, Yetter, Felix, Furlong, & Poston, 2006) on childhood obesity argue that schools are the most logical place for its prevention since “no other institution has as much continuous and intensive contact with children in their first two decades of life” (Story et al., 2006, p. 110). Furthermore, given the educational mission of schools, researchers argue that they can also influence dietary habits through nutrition education (Fahlman et al., 2010; Story et al., 2006; Pyle et al., 2006). Finally, because children eat a significant share of their daily calories in schools, obesity, they argue, can be combated and prevented through the creation of healthier school food environments and the provision of nutritious meals (Gosliner, 2011; Walker, 2011; Hinrichs, 2010; Story et al., 2006; Schanzenbach, 2005).

However, a recent article titled, “How Washington Went Soft on Childhood Obesity” provides a poignant and contemporary example of why the privatization and prevailing corporate interest of the food industry make that task difficult. The biggest barrier to creating healthy school food environments is the fact that school food is big business and highly political (Weaver-Hightower, 2011; Poppendieck, 2010; Levine, 2008). As stated by Nestle (2011), “for the federal government to suggest that anyone eat less of any food does not play well in our political environment; such suggestions hurt sales” (p. 144). We vastly overproduce food in this country. Hence, overproduction makes for a highly competitive food supply. People can only eat so much. Therefore, to make a profit, companies must get people to eat more of their foods rather than those of competitors (Nestle, 2011).

This is the impetus behind pouring rights contracts—to develop brand preferences in the nation’s youngest consumers as means to gain a competitive edge; and it is why “after aggressive lobbying, Congress declared pizza a vegetable to protect it from a nutritional overhaul of the school lunch program this year” (Wilson & Roberts, 2012, para. 2). That action harkens back to the Reagan era when ketchup was also considered a vegetable for similar purposes (Poppendieck, 2010; Levine, 2008). The amount of power that corporate interests have over school food, and by extension what children will grow up eating during their school tenures, is overwhelming and pervasive. As reported by Reuters (2012):

The White House kept silent last year as Congress killed a plan by four federal agencies to reduce sugar, salt and fat in food marketed to children. And during the past two years, each of the 24 states and five cities that considered “soda taxes” to discourage consumption of sugary drinks has seen the efforts dropped or defeated. At every level of government, the food and beverage industries won fight after fight during the last decade. They have never lost a significant political battle in the United States despite mounting scientific evidence of the role of unhealthy food and children's marketing in obesity. Lobbying records analyzed by Reuters reveal that the industries more than doubled their spending in Washington during the past three years. In the process, they largely dominated policymaking – pledging voluntary action while defeating government proposals aimed at changing the nation's diet. In contrast, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, widely regarded as the lead lobbying force for healthier food, spent about \$70,000 lobbying last year -- roughly what those opposing the stricter guidelines spent every 13 hours (Wilson & Roberts, 2012, para. 2-5).

The Reuters’ (2012) report is likely highly disconcerting for advocates of healthier school food environments, and education reformers that advocate using schools as a central arena for combatting childhood obesity (among other social issues).

The Role of the NSLP in Academic Achievement

Despite its original use as a means for the disposal of surplus commodities, the NSLP has nonetheless been a champion of providing meals for hungry children to promote academic achievement. However, hunger has been overshadowed recently by obesity (though it became a significant issue during the Great Recession of 2007-2009 – and one of the impetuses for the HHFKA of 2010).

Several studies (much like the use of studies in the past to document the effect of hunger and malnutrition and to shape school food policy) have attempted to document the impact of obesity on students. For example, in a meta-analysis of the literature on obesity and how it shapes students' social, emotional, physical, and academic health, Pyle, et al. (2006) found that obesity has severe impacts. Obesity was found to be linked to a number of social, emotional, and psychological difficulties, such as: "a higher risk of depression, eating disorders, distorted body image, and low self-esteem; and that children ages 9 to 12 years with obesity report more negative physical perceptions of themselves and lower self-worth than their average weight peers" (Pyle et al., 2006, p. 364). Furthermore, among youth with obesity ages 13 and 14, they reported: "more sadness, loneliness, and anxiety than their peers that are not obese" (Pyle et al., 2006, p. 364). Pyle et al. (2006) also found that among kindergartners and first graders with obesity compared to their non-obese peers, students had lower math and reading achievement (Pyle et al., 2006, p. 365).

Taras (2005), conducted a study on child nutrition and its potential effects on academic performance. The study found that the provision of a healthy breakfast through the School Breakfast Program improves attendance, decrease tardiness, and "short-term cognitive function and academic performance on assessment tests" (p. 213).

In an examination of the association between diet quality and academic performance among 5200 students in the fifth grade in Nova Scotia, Canada, researchers found a positive relationship between diet quality and academic achievement (Florence, Asbridge, & Veugelers, 2008). Furthermore, the study also found that students with decreased diet quality were significantly more likely to perform poorly on assessment tests. Finally, the study posited that improving the quality of school meals would enhance the academic performance of students, and therefore, students' future socioeconomic status (Florence, Asbridge, & Veugelers, 2008).

As will be discussed in paper two of this dissertation, the notion that using education interventions to create greater self-efficacy around the dietary choices of young children as a means for mitigating obesity was a common argument employed during the Congressional hearings and debates for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization process that occurred between December 2008 - 2010.

The Alternative Food Movement and the NSLP

The term "alternative food movement" (Guthman, 2011) denotes the broad range of proponents and activists that support local, sustainable, organic, and slow, etc., food production and consumption. Michael Pollan (2006)—arguably one of the alternative food movement's most famous proponents—claims that the ubiquitous and vacuous nature of fast, junky food in the United States is the reason there is an obesity epidemic. Pollan, and other alternative food movement activists believe that the way to transform the conventional food system and combat obesity is by mobilizing as many people as possible through education.

By teaching people where their food comes from, making them aware of the appalling business practices of industrial agriculture and large food corporations, and by encouraging them to change their purchasing practices toward sustainable, organic, and locally produced food, the market will respond to what people want and eventually transform to create food in line with alternative food movement principals. A "vote with your fork" (and neoliberal) approach, if you will (Alkon, & Agyeman, 2011; Allen & Guthman, 2006; Guthman, 2011, 2008, 2007; Nestle, 2011, 2007; Pollan, 2008, 2006; Winne, 2008).

Activists that want to change the content and character of the NSLP have taken up these central tenets of the alternative food movement. In a chapter entitled “Local Heroes,” Poppendieck (2010, pp. 222-256) discusses various local practices that schools are engaging in to change their school lunch programs. One of the most visible of these local practices is the Edible School Yard (ESY) at Martin Luther King middle school in the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD). The ESY, created by Alice Waters in 1996, is a “public school curriculum that includes hands-on experiences in school kitchens, gardens, and lunchrooms, and that provides healthy, freshly prepared meals as part of each school day” (Waters, n.d.) In a publication by the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL), Waters detailed her philosophy (what she terms “a delicious revolution”) on what school food should be, and what the ESY represents:

Learning to make the right choices about food is the single most important key to environmental awareness — for ourselves, and especially for our children. Food and nourishment are right at the point where human rights and the environment intersect. Everyone has a right to wholesome, affordable food. What could be a more delicious revolution than to start committing our best resources to teaching this to children — by feeding them and giving them pleasure; by teaching them how to grow food responsibly; and by teaching them how to cook it and eat it, together, around the table? There is nothing else as universal. There is nothing else so powerful. When you understand where your food comes from, you look at the world in an entirely different way. We must teach the children that taking care of the land and learning to feed yourself are just as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. For the most part, our families and institutions are not doing this. Therefore, I believe that it's up to the public education system to teach our kids these important values. There should be gardens in every school, and school lunch programs that serve the things the children grow themselves, supplemented by local, organically grown products. This could transform both education and agriculture (Waters, n.d.).

Critiques of the Alternative Food Movement and the NSLP

I very much admire all the work that Alice Waters has done (and continues to do), for both the alternative food movement and the NSLP. However, and, unfortunately, the alternative school food movement that Waters’ advocates for is ultimately not transformative of the political structures that limit the NSLP writ large. Guthman (2011), gets to the heart of what is problematic about the alternative food movement when she states, “the very notion of starting a food revolution by changing what you personally eat is wrong-headed” (p. 147). This approach presumes that “foodways” are individual choices removed from their “institutional, structural, social, and economic constraints” (Alkon, & Agyeman, 2011, p. 12). Furthermore, and according to Guthman (2011), there are other factors in play, such as environmental, which contribute to obesity (p. 107). Beyond obesogenic environments, however, are expansive powerful political and economic forces that shape the food system, and thus, delimit many individuals’ ability to participate in the alternative food movement.

Therefore, an argument posited by food systems scholars is that the creation of an unequal and bifurcated food system is not transformative and makes the alternative food movement an elitist venture since it privileges individuals able to make unfettered choices regarding their food. Furthermore, the idea that we only need to encourage different choice sets

does not go far enough. Individual decisions do not add up to efficiently challenge inequality in the food system. Hence, rather than focusing on personal consumption choices we should be “paying attention to the role of corporate behavior, state regulation, and the political economy more generally in producing or allowing pollution, degraded food, and problematic built environments, irrespective of the ‘choices’ people make” (Guthman, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, the alternative food movement is an inadequate countermeasure to the public health problems (such as obesity) the NSLP is tasked with addressing, because the proposed strategies for change fall under the realm of decentralized, or local level reforms and “do not address the political-economic foundations of the larger food system” (Guthman, p. 147, 2011).

Furthermore, this strategy is ultimately part of the problem of privatization in that it shifts the responsibility of public health from the government to the individual and the market. That is to say, by having a principle tenet of a movement be an idea that “if we could only educate people about their food and have them see the light so that they will buy organic, local, sustainable food” etc., it is falling directly into a framework of privatization that induces citizens to make few demands of the state, and instead exercise consumer choice within the market. Unfortunately, this course of action cannot ultimately transform the food system, or the NSLP, since it does nothing to change the institutionalized structures that promote inequality within it. Instead, the best that decentralized/local level policies can do to improve school lunch and address the problem of obesity is to shape children’s dietary preferences and consumption choices through nutrition education, gardening, and cooking programs (Godfrey, 2011; Allen & Guthman, 2006).

To use the example of Alice Waters and the ESY once again, it is particularly telling that even within Waters’ district where she was a major contributor to the Berkeley School Lunch Initiative (for example, her foundation paid the \$100,000 salary of Executive Chef Ann Cooper, self-described “renegade lunch lady,” to reform BUSD’s lunch program) issues presented themselves.

While BUSD’s school lunch program is lauded nationally for its use of local, organic ingredients, scratch cooking, and ESY’s “edible education,” an article (Henry, 2011) in a local paper described the program as “flawed” in many respects from the perspective of insiders. For example, the article revealed that King Middle School, which houses Alice Waters’ ESY, the new Dining Commons, and the district’s central kitchen “unfairly receives more resources than the other schools in the district; and that the reality of Berkeley’s program reveals just how many obstacles school districts face in trying to improve school nutrition for all its students” (Henry, 2011, para. 4).

Furthermore, the fact is that most public-school districts in the nation do not have someone like Alice Waters to help them transform their school lunch programs. Therefore, her work does not ultimately address the broader and more significant political and structural issues within the NSLP that hamper its ability at every turn to meet the nutritional needs of all school children, and combat obesity. Therefore, those who want to remedy the problem of obesity and other public health issues should not just be focusing on educating people to make better dietary choices. Instead, their efforts should also be directed at reforming the policies that allow bad food to be produced in the first place.

Conclusion

An examination of the history and contemporary landscape of the NSLP reveals that school lunch is complicated and highly political – demonstrated by the use of our schools as both a private and public good. This analysis of the NSLP also reflects a longstanding and complex relationship about the purposes of schooling as a means for fulfilling individualist values and collective aspirations. As my investigation of the NSLP has shown, social reformers have used the American commitment to education as a method for building social programs and expanding government action in the provision of social entitlements (Cohen, 2005). However, this relationship has placed a heavy burden on schools—one in which we require so much from them, while simultaneously blaming them when they are unable to provide solutions to problems beyond their reach (Rothstein, 2010; Cohen, 2005; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Academic achievement in schools is continuously hamstrung by issues such as malnutrition, hunger, and the current public health crisis of obesity. However, these issues are symptoms of larger social inequality converging upon and within the nation’s classrooms. The NSLP has been one longstanding measure for attempting to ameliorate these issues. However, if we as a nation are interested in eliminating these problems as opposed to merely placing a Band-Aid on them, then we need to engage in careful consideration about the types of policies that genuinely have the capacity to address the task at hand. As stated by Rothstein (2004):

Eliminating the social class differences in student outcomes requires eliminating the impact of social class on children in American society. It requires abandoning the illusion that school reform alone can save us from having to make the difficult economic and political decisions that the goal of equality inevitably entails. School improvement does have an important role to play, but it cannot shoulder the entire burden, or even most of it, on its own (p. 149).

Therefore, the interventions need to come from broader social and economic policy, or policy-makers’ need to, as Anyon (2005) states, “create a new paradigm for what counts as educational policy” (p. 65).

Unfortunately, the use of decentralized/local level policies combined with the increasing privatization of schools is not conducive to the kind of policy enactments that are needed to solve the problems at hand. They restrict and reduce the reach of the welfare state. Furthermore, the placement of problem-solving within the realm of schools is at once deceptive and pernicious. It is deceptive because it obfuscates the extent to which the federal government/structures of inequity should be held responsible for causing, maintaining, reinforcing and perpetuating social inequality, and engaging in actions that would provide viable solutions to those problems.

It is pernicious because the historical trend of placing the responsibility on schools to redress social inequality silently and effectively cuts off the reach that federal policy can ultimately have in changing the status quo. This is precisely the slight of hand within ideologies that support privatization in education. The use of the NSLP to address hunger is an example of this. As stated by Poppendieck (2010), “hunger is at once a radical and conservative issue: radical because it reveals the depth of the failings of the economic system, conservative because it can be ameliorated without seriously undermining that system through the provision of ‘in kind’ food assistance” (p. 63).

The public-school system was meant to serve democratic purposes, and schools are the last vestiges of those ideals (Labaree, 2010; 1997). However, the continuous decrease of expenditures to both schools and social provision, coupled with the increasing privatization of

public education, is steadily eroding the one institution that serves as a protective mechanism to the ravages of an unchecked capitalist market. As stated by Horace Mann (1957),

Vast and overshadowing private fortunes are among the greatest dangers to which the happiness of the people in a republic can be subjected. . . surely nothing but Universal Education can counter-work this tendency to the domination of capital and the servility of labor [education is thus] the balance-wheel of the social machinery. (As cited in Labaree, 1997, p. 45)

As this quote from Mann illustrates, we have a historical and pervasive dependency on schools to solve issues pertaining to social inequality. Hence, while addressing the nation's problems will require a move beyond educational prescriptions, it is essential to highlight the fact that undermining the public purposes of education ultimately undermines welfare provision in the United States. Given the nation's preference for doors of opportunity through education rather than the provision of a safety net to all of its citizens, the privatization of public education can only increase inequality in a way that is dangerous to the democratic ideals and foundations of our nation.

Paper #2

Title: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010

Background to Paper Two

Paper one provided historical and contemporary context of the landscape of the National School Lunch Program. It was a reflection of the ways in which policy, people, and places (federal and local levels) interact with one another to produce particular policy outcomes. Paper two will focus on the interplay of policy, people, and place at the federal level. Specifically, it examines the discourse of policy-makers (people) in Washington, D.C. (place) and their construction of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (policy).

Abstract

During the period of December 8, 2008 – December 2, 2010, Congress reauthorized the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which led to the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010. This paper draws on Congressional documents pertaining to the HHFKA’s legislative history for the purpose of gaining insight into how and why we ended up with the federal child nutrition legislation that we have today. Specifically, the guiding questions of this research were: What were the discourses used by policy-makers and other stakeholders involved with the NSLP’s reauthorization process to (1) frame and define the problems and consequences of childhood hunger and obesity, and (2) define the role of the Federal Government and schools in addressing these problems through policy? Moreover, what solutions were formulated as a result of these discourses to construct the HHFKA? To answer these questions, this investigation employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Qualitative Text Analysis (QTA) to examine the HHFKA’s Congressional documents – namely, Congressional hearings and debates. This research finds that policy-makers largely defined the problems of childhood hunger as the consequence of the Great Recession of 2007-2009, and childhood obesity as the result of poverty or a lack of education leading to bad dietary choices and child feeding practices. Legislators also framed childhood obesity as an epidemic and public health crisis, and their resolution as part of broader health care reform efforts and as a matter of national security. Arguments that urged passage of the legislation, and which focused on childhood hunger, highlighted families’ need for economic relief. Furthermore, some proponents claimed that it was the United States’ moral responsibility and obligation to feed hungry children, and to ensure that kids had access to nutritious food as a basic necessity for healthy development, learning, and academic achievement. Other rationales for passing the bill included references to the legislation as an investment in children’s futures, their productivity as citizens, and by extension the country’s competitiveness on a global scale. These frames and definitions resulted in legislators using the HHFKA to expand and increase students’ access to healthier school meals – specifically, through mandated, science-based nutrition programs and universal school lunch in high poverty schools, and after school, “supper,” feeding programs.

Introduction

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

On December 13, 2010, President Barack Obama signed into law the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 (Public Law 111-296). As of this writing, the HHFKA is the most recent reauthorization of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Child Nutrition Act (CNA) of 1966,³ and endeavors to “expand access to child nutrition programs to reduce childhood hunger, [and] improve the nutritional quality of meals to promote health and address childhood obesity....” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 2; H.R. 5504, Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act [hereafter, “H.R. 5504”], 2010, p. 3).

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) process took place between December 8, 2008 and December 2, 2010 (see Table 1) and occurred in the context of North America’s recovery from the “Great Recession” of 2007-2009, which was “the worst downturn the US economy has experienced since the Great Depression” (Ireland, 2010).

In response to the economic crisis, on February 17, 2009, President Obama passed Public Law 111-5 – an economic stimulus package costing \$787 billion (Congressional Budget Office, 2009) and known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The ARRA was a bill established, among other things, to “preserve and create jobs and promote economic recovery [and] assist those most impacted by the recession....” (123 Stat. 116). A little over a year later, on March 23, 2010, President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act (ACA) into law (Public Law 111-148, and also referred to as “Obamacare”). Nine months after that, the HHFKA was passed. The policy represented the first significant change to and federal investment in the NSLP in 30 years (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p.8) and continued President Obama’s historic legislative response to the Great Recession.

The HHFKA’s Policy Objectives and Solutions

The 2010 CNR included a total of nine significant provisions to the NSLP and CNA, which added an additional \$4.5 billion⁴ over ten years to the nearly \$20 billion that the Federal government was already spending each year for child nutrition programs (H.R. 5504, 2010, p. 6). This paper primarily focuses on the major changes made to the NSLP⁵ that aim to redress the problems of childhood hunger and obesity through two primary means: *expanded* and *increased access* to healthier school meals. Specifically, the HHFKA expanded students’ access to school

³ The reauthorization of the National School Lunch Program also includes the opportunity to revise and improve Federal child nutrition programs contained in the Child Nutrition Act of 1966. Specifically, the School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Summer Food Service Program, the State Administrative Expense Program, and the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (S. Rep. 111-178, 2010, p. 1).

⁴ According to USDA Secretary Vilsack, President Obama initially proposed \$10 billion in additional funding over ten years for the 2010 reauthorization of child nutrition programs (Reauthorization of U.S. Child Nutrition Programs: Opportunities to Fight Hunger and Improve Child Health, 2009, p. 5).

⁵ Other major provisions included in this reauthorization were (1) “local school wellness policy implementation,” such as “school-based policies that promote student wellness” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 8); (2) nutrition standards for CACFP (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 9); (3) program development by the USDA Secretary that supports breastfeeding in the WIC program through bonuses for and recognition of “exemplary breastfeeding support practices” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 9); and (4) nationwide implementation of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) technology in the WIC program (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 10).

meals through “direct certification”— a process whereby students receiving Medicaid are automatically enrolled to receive free or reduced-price school meals (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, pp. 5-6) — and its “Community Eligibility” provision (CEP). (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, pp. 5-6). The benefits of direct certification are that it eliminates the need for students to turn in paper applications, and for school districts to go through a lengthy and costly means-tested process of determining children’s eligibility. The same qualifications that qualify children to receive Medicaid apply for eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. CEP allows schools to become “a hunger-free zone” by providing universal free meals in high-poverty schools, which are defined as having a student population where “more than 80 percent of the students are certified for free or reduced-priced meals” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 6). Finally, the HHFKA extended the federal reimbursement for school meals to those served in afterschool (“supper”) and summer feeding programs, which also expanded students’ access to school meals.

The HHFKA also increases students’ access to healthier meals by requiring schools to produce breakfasts and lunches in compliance with mandated, science-based nutrition standards that are “consistent with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 7). These guidelines include a requirement to serve fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or non-fat dairy products, in addition to reductions in sodium and fat in school meals (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010). Furthermore, these standards apply to *all* food sold in schools, such as through “vending machines, snack bars, and a la carte lines” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 8). To support the estimated increase in costs to implement the nutrition standards, the HHFKA provided an increase of 6-cents increase in the federal reimbursement for school meals in compliance with the standards. Furthermore, the HHFKA also increases students access to fresh and healthier school meals through the provision of up to \$5 million dollars per year in USDA grants and technical assistance for schools to implement farm to school programs (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 21)

The HHFKA and “Educationalized Welfare State” Discourse

As previously discussed in this dissertation, the NSLP is a quintessential example of what Kantor & Lowe (2013) have referred to as the “educationalized welfare state.” And as will be demonstrated in this paper, the HHFKA continues in this tradition in its use of education policy as a mechanism for improving both education and society (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and public schools as “agencies of broad social welfare” (Tyack, 1992, p. 28). This ethos was evidenced when on the day that President Obama signed the HHFKA into law, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2010) published a press release featuring 21 different supportive statements for the legislation from politicians, to chefs, food service workers, faith and military leaders, anti-hunger advocates, and child nutrition policy and advocacy organizations. The statements below are drawn from the press release and reflect discourses that elucidate the intersections between education policy, schooling, and the welfare state in their reference to not only the HHFKA’s potential for improving education but also poverty, public health, and national security. As an illustration:

I look forward to continuing to work with the First Lady and [U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)] Secretary Vilsack to combat our national childhood obesity epidemic and increase students access to the nutritional food they need to help them learn.

- U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

This critical legislation ensures that more of our nation's children have access to healthy nutritious food and reaffirms our commitment as a nation to addressing the problem of childhood hunger. It is unacceptable that one in four children in poverty in America are hungry. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 is an essential step in helping the 43.6 million American families who struggle every day to feed their children.

- Father Larry Snyder, President, Catholic Charities USA, Co-chair Fighting Poverty with Faith

On behalf of Mission: Readiness and over 100 retired generals and admirals who support child nutrition legislation as a matter of national security, we are very pleased that the nation has taken this important step in addressing the nation's obesity epidemic.

- Retired Army Generals John M. Shalikashvili and Hugh Shelton, Former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Beyond the connection of these statements to the educationalized welfare state, these discourses also reflect additional underlying values about what public policy is, what it should do, how it should do it, and who should benefit from it. As stated by Lester, Lochmiller, Gabriel (2016) "...language [i.e., discourse] is both the content and conduit of policy" (p. 5). Therefore, this paper argues that an examination of legislative discourse "illuminate[s] not only the substance or impact of education policy, but also the processes by which such substance and impact come to be, and come to be understood" (p. 5). In other words, discourse shapes the construction of federal legislation, and, thus, provides an analytical frame through which to understand its material consequences. Consider, for example, that public policy directs tax-payer dollars and other resources toward particular objectives tied to specific activities that local implementation actors must carry out across different contextual circumstances that produce a particular set of policy outcomes.

Given the premise that discourse shapes the process of policy implementation and its outcomes, my unit of analysis focused on the discourses employed by Congressional Members and witnesses that participated in the construction of the HHFKA through the reauthorization process. The purpose of this investigation was to gain insight into the social construction of the HHFKA. Specifically, the guiding questions of this research were: What were the discourses used by policy-makers and other stakeholders⁶ involved with the CNR to (1) frame and define the problems and consequences of childhood hunger and obesity, and (2) define the role of the Federal Government and schools in addressing these problems through policy? Moreover, what solutions were formulated as a result of these discourses to construct the HHFKA?

To answer these questions, this investigation employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Johnstone, 2008) and Qualitative Text Analysis (QTA) (Kuckartz, 2014) to examine Congressional documents pertaining to the HHFKA. In the next sections, I will describe my

⁶ In addition to policy-makers, stakeholders also refer to the witnesses that provided testimony at the six Congressional hearings (see Table 1) for the CNR.

methodology and present my findings. Then, I will discuss my results and provide a brief update on the HHFKA’s impact on schools and kids since it was signed into law in 2010. Finally, I will conclude with a consideration of what the future might hold for the HHFKA if federal child nutrition programs are reauthorized during President Trump’s administration.

Methodology

Data Collection

The ProQuest Legislative Insight, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry (CANF), and Congress.gov websites were utilized to access and download digital PDF records of the HHFKA’s full legislative history. These documents include the statute, and Congressional Records, Reports, Hearings, and other documents (see Table 1).

Table 1.0
HHFKA of 2010 Legislative Documents

Legislative Document	Document Title	Date of Document
Public Law 111-296	Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010	December 13, 2010
Bills and House Resolutions	H.R. 5504 Improving Nutrition for America’s Children Act	June 10, 2010
	H. Res. 1742 Report on Resolution Providing Consideration of S. 3307, Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010	November 30, 2010 -- December 1, 2010
Congressional Records	Congressional Record Proceedings and Debates of the 111 th Congress, Second Session, Vol. 156, No. 118	August 5, 2010
	Congressional Record Proceedings and Debates of the 111 th Congress, Second Session, Vol. 156, No. 155	December 1, 2010
	Congressional Record Proceedings and Debates of the 111 th Congress, Second Session, Vol. 156, No. 156	December 2, 2010
	Congressional Record Proceedings and Debates of the 111 th Congress, Second Session, Vol. 156, No. 156, <i>Extension of Remarks</i>	December 2, 2010
Reports	Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 by Senate CANF	May 5, 2010
	Providing for Consideration of Bill (S. 3307) To Reauthorize Child Nutrition Programs by House Committee on Rules	November 30, 2010
Hearings	Promoting Health, Preventing Chronic Disease, and Fighting Hunger: Assessment of USDA Food Assistance and Child Nutrition Programs in the Economic Downturn	December 8, 2008
		March 4, 2009

	Improving Nutrition for America's Children in Difficult Economic Times	March 31, 2009
	Beyond Federal School Meal Programs: Reforming Nutrition for Kids in Schools	May 15, 2009
	Benefits of Farm-to-School Projects: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for School Children	November 17, 2009
	Reauthorization of U.S. Child Nutrition Programs: Opportunities to Fight Hunger and Improve Child Health	July 1, 2010
	H.R. 5504, Improving Nutrition for America's Children Act	
Congressional Research Service Reports for Congress	Reducing SNAP (Food Stamp) benefits provided by the ARRA: P.L. 11-226 and P.L. 11-296	December 21, 2010
	Child nutrition and WIC reauthorization: Issues and legislation in the 111 th Congress	December 23, 2010

Data Analysis

All of the digital PDF records of the HHFKA's full legislative history were uploaded to MAXQDA software and analyzed using CDA and QTA.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis is, essentially, a study of language in all its forms, for example, utterances, media, and texts, etc. It is also a method for studying language within its social context by examining the ways in which humans use words as a linguistic tool to describe, represent, create, mediate, and shape material life (Johnstone, 2008⁷). CDA has its roots in critical social theory (for example, Gramsci, Buttigieg, & Callari, 1992; Foucault & Gordon, 1980; Foucault, 1972; Althusser, 1971), whereby the goal of analysis is to attend to and uncover the ways in which language is used to circulate power through, for example, texts or media that normalize, reinforce, and maintain the status quo and perpetuate systems of oppression and social inequality. Johnstone (2008) argues that,

...every linguistic choice – every choice about how to produce discourse, but also every choice about how to interpret it – is a choice about how the world is divided up and explained. Every choice is strategic, in the sense that *every utterance has an epistemological agenda* [*emphasis my own*], that is, a way of seeing [and creating] the world via that choice and not via others. (p. 54)

Given the premise that discourse represents a set of epistemic choices, one can critically examine artifacts of discourse, such as texts, to locate and examine the choices made in discourse production and consider the consequences of these decisions. For example, when people use specific words to represent actions, actors, and events they can do so by choosing to use a passive or active voice. Passive voice can “portray the agents of actions as unknown...

⁷ There are several options to choose from when it comes to referencing texts that provide general overviews of discourse analysis, for example, Gee (2011). For this paper, I decided to primarily use Johnstone's (2008) text, “Discourse Analysis,” because the book brings together a comprehensive and solid foundational survey of the field of discourse analysis in addition to an accessible set of methods for independent discourse analysis studies.

unimportant...[or] hide an agent who is known, or downplay the fact that an agent was involved” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 55). Another example of choices of representation within discourse are the use of metaphors “that both reflect and create ways of imagining what is normal”; and euphemisms, for example, “the military uses ‘casualties’ for ‘deaths’...” which reflects the ways that we engage in “rewording” and reveal the “ideological significance” of language (Johnstone, 2008, p. 59). I will provide examples of these type of linguistic devices used within the CNR process in the findings section.

In the application of CDA to policy analysis, I propose that the discourse used by policy-makers throughout the policy formulation process (captured by transcripts within Congressional hearings and records) and in the text of a policy itself (for example, the HHFKA) reflect the different discursive choices made during the policy-making process that define legislative problems and their solutions. The definitions—reflected within legislative texts—have material ramifications in how they, for example, impact and shape teaching practices or the administration of social programs such as the NSLP. As stated by Prunty (1985), policy is imbued with “...values, interests, and power...[and], as a result, select groups and social classes benefit or suffer” (p. 135) – making the study of policy discourse consequential.

This value-laden aspect of policy is illustrated by Schneider & Ingram’s (1993) discussion of the ways in which populations targeted and effected by a given policy are socially constructed through legislative discourse. They argue that social constructions are “...stereotypes about particular groups of people...” (p. 335) used to characterize groups through “normative and evaluative” statements that portray policy targets in “positive or negative terms through [the use of] symbolic language, metaphors, and stories” (p. 334). Furthermore, these social constructions have “...a powerful influence on [legislators, which] shapes both the policy agenda and the actual design of policy” (p. 334). Policy is therefore, discursive in the ways that it “...forms identities within policy ‘talk’ and/or legislative texts...” (Lester, et al., 2016, p. 2) and reflects “...political struggles over meaning...” (Taylor, 1997, p. 26). Therefore, a critical analysis of policy-making discourses helps us understand why a policy such as the HHFKA might be constructed in particular ways versus others, and helps us better understand how its outcome has particular material consequences.

Qualitative Text Analysis (QTA). While CDA provided a critical epistemological orientation and method for my reading and analysis of the HHFKA’s legislative documents, QTA supplied a systematic, rigorous process for analyzing the texts using MAXQDA. As defined by Kuckartz (2014), QTA is a “*category-based method for the systematic analysis of qualitative data*” [*italics in original*] (p. xv). The data analysis process moves in phases in which data is reduced through the creation of general themes, to building conceptual categories then refining to sub-categories, and then analyzing each of the categories in relationship to others as a way to build theory regarding the phenomena under investigation. My project engaged in three phases of analysis explicated below in sections titled “Phase 1, 2, and 3.”

QTA also offers several analytic methods that can be used in each phase of the data analysis process using MAXQDA. These techniques include, writing document summaries and code memos⁸; creating data displays or matrices (see Table 2); and using concept maps to delineate the relationships among codes to produce more refined sub-categories.

⁸ MAXQDA has a feature that allows the user to compile code memos into a document to serve as a “code thesaurus,” in which a code is defined by the researcher and attaches to a passage, sentence, or set of words in the text(s) to illustrate the concept that the code represents.

Phase 1. First, to develop an understanding of the texts as a whole, I read all of the legislative documents in chronological order and their entirety. Throughout this initial review, I used MAXQDA to both highlight interesting sections in the texts and write brief descriptive memos within the software, which I linked to the highlighted parts. This process allowed me to record and describe what I was observing within and across the documents, bookmark compelling and relevant quotes, and make connections across the legislative documents and between the education policy and food systems literature from which my dissertation draws.

Second, after reviewing each legislative text, I created a document memo within the software that operated as a “case summary” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, pp. 131-134; Kuckartz, 2014, p. 52). The document memo was a summary statement of my overall impressions of the text and included attention to both the key points articulated by experts invited to provide testimony about child nutrition at Congressional hearings, and Members’ responses or questions directed to witnesses during the designated question and answer period of the Hearing. Finally, the document memo also identified preliminary themes (for example, “health”) for further investigation, which is a process that Kuckartz (2014) refers to as “open coding” (p. 23).

Phase 2. In the second phase of my data analysis process, I wrote analytic memos about the preliminary themes developed in phase 1, and explored their connections to my research questions. This memoing process helped me to refine my initial themes into more nuanced categorizations. For example, the theme “health” was broken into the categories, or codes of “health care reform,” “national security,” “economic security,” and “nutrition standards.” These codes reflect how I was organizing the data in categories that illustrated how policy-makers defined and framed the problems and consequences of childhood hunger and obesity, and the policy solutions that were being formulated to address these issues.

Phase two also involved analytic memoing, which explored participants’ discourse regarding the causes and consequences of childhood obesity (specifically, active or passive representations of who is responsible for the problems and their solutions). These memos also attended to the “silences” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 70) I noticed within the legislative texts. As described by Johnstone (2008), “the worlds that shape and are shaped in discourse involve absences as well as presences” (p. 70). She further elaborates, “Political processes, and the discursive practices that enact these processes, often involve the creation of silences. Struggles over power and control are often struggles over whose words get used and whose do not and over who gets to speak and who does not” (p. 71). For example, in reading through the Congressional documents, there was a noticeable absence of discussions about the role of food products manufacturers in causing what legislators and witnesses were describing as the childhood “obesity crisis” and “obesity epidemic.” As I will review in the discussion section, this silence regarding the food industry’s role in making and selling products that significantly contribute to America’s high obesity rates has consequences for the HHS’s ability to achieve its goal of solving the problem of childhood obesity.

Finally, phase two also included a process of *tracing the discourse* of each participating Member of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry (CANF), and the Committee on Education and Labor (COEL) to observe the ways that they, for example, defined problems such as childhood hunger and obesity and the solutions for which they advocated. This was done because each legislative document reflected the product of what Johnstone (2008) refers to as a “discourse community” (p. 133). Within discourse communities, members engage in “joint discourse activities” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 132) in which there are shared norms for participation

and decision making. Therefore, the transcripts from the CANF and COEL hearings provided an opportunity to examine the ways that each Member of the committee shaped a hearing’s discourse and by extension, the development of the HHFKA. Congressional committees receive bill referrals over the course of a Congress that are specific to their jurisdiction and area of policy expertise. And committee Members are responsible for choosing, developing, and marking up policy proposals to advance to the Chamber floor; they are, essentially, the chief architects of federal policies.⁹

To trace the discourse for each Member on the CANF and COEL committees, I created individual Member codes that I linked to relevant sections of text in which they were the speaker. For example, for Democrat, U.S. Senator, Tom Harkin from Iowa, and the Chairman of the CANF, I created the code: “Harkin.” These Member codes allowed me to disaggregate their statements from each of the documents and longitudinally examine (over the course of the reauthorization process) their discourse, or “stancetaking” (Johnstone, 2008, pp. 137-139) on childhood hunger and obesity and the role of public policy and schools in redressing these issues through the HHFKA.

Stancetaking is a concept that describes the way in which speakers within a discourse community demonstrate “...knowledge and their degree of certainty (evidentiality) as well as their attitudes about the propositions they utter (affect)” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 137). Stancetaking is a significant part of the legislative process. It involves choices about a speakers’ “representation of knowledge status” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 56); meaning, an individual can use specific words that are intended to “indicate certainty [as a] way of discouraging debate” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 57), which ensure a particular policy agenda is pushed forward. Congressional Members come to the legislative process with specific (and often, partisan) positions and intent to shape policy in certain ways; they also carefully select witnesses to provide testimony (another form of stancetaking) at Congressional hearings, which also shape the policy-making process and ultimately, the final architecture of a bill.

As an example of this tracing discourse process, Table 2 shows Senator Tom Harkin’s statements regarding “health,” which was one of my preliminary thematic categories. From the CANF’s first Congressional hearing on December 8, 2008, to their last on May 15, 2009, Senator Harkin continuously expressed his position about the purpose of the CNR as being part of what he believed was a broader effort to reform America’s health care system. As a result of this stance, and his power as the Chairman¹⁰ of the CANF, Senator Harkin pushed forward a policy agenda that ensured the final legislation included mandated, science-based nutrition standards, which he believed could accomplish a broader health care reform goal for the HHFKA. As will be demonstrated in the findings section (and in paper three of this dissertation), these standards have had considerable impacts on food providers, school districts’ food preparation and procurement practices, and the character and content of school meals.

Table 2.0

Trace of Senator Tom Harkin’s Health Discourse

Member Code: “Harkin”	Thematic Code: “Health”
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⁹ A full overview of the legislative process is available at the Congress.gov website. <https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process>

¹⁰ Senator Harkin was Chairman of the CANF for the first four of the five of this committee’s hearings for the CNR. The fifth hearing, “Reauthorization of U.S. Child Nutrition Programs: Opportunities to Fight Hunger and Improve Child Health,” held on November 17, 2009, was chaired by Senator Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas.

<p><u>Hearing 1: Dec. 8, 2008</u> <i>Promoting Health...in the Economic Downturn</i></p>	<p>I just feel so strongly that we have to be thinking about the reauthorization of these Child Nutrition Programs, not just in the context of nutrition, but also in the context of the overall wellness of our society and health care reform (p.2).</p>
<p><u>Hearing 2: March 4, 2009</u> <i>Improving Nutrition...in Difficult Economic Times</i></p>	<p>I feel we must reorient our health care system so that it focuses on preventing diet-related illnesses and promoting good nutrition and wellness (p. 1)</p>
<p><u>Hearing 3: March 31, 2009</u> <i>Beyond Federal School Meal Programs....</i></p>	<p>That is why the child nutrition bill that we are writing is integral to reforming our nation's health system, and I want to emphasize that (p. 1).</p> <p>I see it as a part of health care reform and how we deal with our kids in schools and the kind of food and beverages that they consume in schools. So, I hope all of you see it in that light, also, that it is an integral part of our health reform measures [the ACA] that we want to enact, hopefully this year (p. 38).</p>
<p><u>Hearing 4: May 15, 2009</u> <i>Benefits of Farm-to-School Projects....</i></p>	<p>...the health and nutrition of our nation's children is closely connected to the overall cost and status of healthcare in the United States and its impact on our economy. For example, healthy nutrition and physical activity are directly related to better learning, preventing illness, reducing healthcare costs and of course, building and maintaining a strong economy (p. 4).</p>
<p><u>Hearing 5: Nov. 17, 2009</u> <i>Opportunities to Fight Hunger and Improve Child Health</i></p>	<p>We provide federal nutrition support to local schools based on the simple reality that sound nutrition in childhood and adolescence builds lifelong health, prevents illness and disease, and promotes learning and education. This child nutrition bill is integral to health care reform (p. 54).</p>

Phase 3. In the third phase of my data analysis process, I further refined my categories into more nuanced sub-categories, or codes. This was done using the visual tools available in MAXQDA, specifically, the concept mapping function, “MAXMaps,” which allows the user to visualize relationships between codes and see patterns within and across the “code system” (the collection of organized codes). For example, the theme “health” in phase 2 was sub-coded into “health care reform,” “national security,” “economic security,” and “nutrition standards.” In phase three, these codes were further subdivided into: “economic investment,” “nutrition education,” and “reverse learning.”¹¹ In the concept map, all seven of these sub-codes were visually represented with arrows connected to and coming out from the thematic code “health.” The concept map was then used to make further arrow connections to other co-occurring codes related to health, such as “obesity,” which had its own sub-codes of “parents,” and “choices,” all of which connected back to the health sub-codes of “nutrition standards,” “nutrition education,” and “reverse education,” etc. Visual representations of thematic categories and their connections to sub-categories were especially useful for seeing the relationship between and across codes, and for generating and organizing my findings.

Findings

¹¹ “Reverse learning” was a concept provided by Ms. Nancy Huehergarth, Director of New York State Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance, during the question and answer period of the “Beyond Federal School Meal Programs: Reforming Nutrition for Kids in Schools” Congressional hearing (p. 17) on March 31, 2008. The concept means that when children receive, for example, nutrition education, they will go home and teach their parents about healthy food choices, etc. It is a way in which education policy uses schools to indirectly educate parents for the purpose of achieving policy objectives.

An examination of legislators and stakeholders' discourses revealed how they understood, framed, and defined the problems of childhood hunger and obesity, the role they believed policy should play in addressing these issues, and the solutions they formulated based on these particular positions. This research finds that policy-makers largely defined the problems of childhood hunger as the consequence of the Great Recession, and childhood obesity as the result of poverty or a lack of education leading to bad dietary choices and child feeding practices. Legislators also framed childhood obesity as an epidemic and public health crisis, and their resolution as part of broader health care reform efforts and as a matter of national security. These frames and definitions resulted in legislators integrating mandated, science-based nutrition standards (that applied to all foods sold in schools) in the HHFKA. The purpose of this mandate was to ensure that kids would have increased access to healthier school meals (one of the HHFKA's goals). Because the nutrition standards would raise the cost of producing school meals, the HHFKA provided an additional 6 cents in the per meal (specifically, lunch) federal reimbursement.

Arguments that urged passage of the legislation, and which focused on childhood hunger, highlighted families' need for economic relief. Furthermore, some proponents claimed that it was the United States' moral responsibility and obligation to feed hungry children, and to ensure that kids had access to nutritious food as a basic necessity for healthy development, learning, and academic achievement. Other rationales for passing the bill included references to the legislation as an investment in children's futures, their productivity as citizens, and by extension the country's competitiveness on a global scale. These frames and definitions resulted in legislators expanding access to child nutrition programs through direct certification, the Community Eligibility provision, and extending the meal reimbursement to afterschool feeding (supper) programs.

Advocates of using the legislation to address childhood obesity argued that the HHFKA could ensure youth would receive proper nutrition while at school regardless of what their parents may give them to eat at home. The policy was also framed as an educational tool wherein children could be taught to make better food choices that would, in turn, shape families' food purchases and child feeding practices. Both feeding kids the right food at school and shaping their ability to make good dietary choices were seen as a way to decrease health care costs associated with childhood obesity and other dietary-related diseases, such as diabetes.

Opponents of the HHFKA argued that the bill reflected an inappropriate expansion of government (because of the mandated nutrition standards) and that the legislation was too costly (due to the reimbursement to help schools pay to make healthier meals) and thus, irresponsible because it would add to the national deficit. Finally, during the Congressional debates (November 30, 2010 – December 2, 2010) leading up to passage of the HHFKA, legislators disagreed over how the increased cost of \$4.5 billion for child nutrition programs would be paid for as part of a requirement of "PAYGO" rules.¹² Ultimately, despite opposition from several Democratic Senators and House Representatives, the HHFKA was funded by taking money from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as "food stamps." To be specific, legislators did not reduce the funding that SNAP recipients were already receiving. Instead, they took away the planned increase for SNAP from Obama's stimulus package (the

¹² "PAYGO" stands for "pay-as-you-go" (see Keith, 2010 for further details about and the legislative history of PAYGO). It is a Congressional budget rule that requires that increases in entitlement programs, like the NSLP, be offset by tax increases or cuts in mandatory spending.

ARRA of 2009). This method of paying for the child nutrition bill was characterized as disingenuous by some members of Congress, since planned increases for SNAP from stimulus funds were based on an outlay from emergency funding that allowed the ARRA to pass without having to adhere to PAYGO.

Nonetheless, to pay for the HHFKA, Congress decided to take money away from a broad food assistance program to pay for food assistance delivery in schools. Several members of Congress stated in their testimonies that they felt it was wrong to fund the HHFKA in this way. However, most also noted that they were willing to vote for the bill's passage – even with the SNAP cuts – because they wanted to see the HHFKA passed into law; and because President Obama had committed to working with them once the bill was passed to find a different offset to restore the ARRA funding to SNAP. However, ARRA SNAP funds were never reinstated (G. Falk, personal communication, November 29, 2017).¹³

The following sections draw on transcripts from the Congressional Record and CNR committee hearings to provide representative statements from different Members of Congress, and witnesses to illustrate the findings enumerated above.

Definitions, Frames, and Solutions to the Problems of Childhood Hunger and Obesity

Struggle Stories: The Great Recession, Economic Need, and Hunger. Throughout the HHFKA's Congressional hearings, and proceedings and debates, policy-makers and stakeholders defined and framed the problems of childhood hunger and obesity in several ways. Of immediate concern was how the Great Recession and rising unemployment rates were impacting the food security of families across the nation and the hardships they were enduring. This matter is expressed by Democratic Senator Leahy from Vermont during the Senate's first CANF hearing on the CNR:

This is one of the most severe periods of economic turmoil in modern history, and as I said, when times are tough, more Americans go hungry. I think nobody has to be a genius to know that hunger is going to get worse. It is not going to get better as the recession goes on. Hunger is a leading indicator, an indicator during tough economic times, but it is a lot more than just statistics. It is deeply personal. It takes its toll one child at a time, one family at a time. Parents, as they are out there trying to get work, going without food because they want to at least feed their children, or children embarrassed to say when they go to school why they are hungry, because their family can't feed them. (Promoting Health, Preventing Chronic Disease, and Fighting Hunger: Assessment of USDA Food Assistance and Child Nutrition Programs in the Economic Downturn [hereafter, "Promoting Health"], p. 24, 2008)

Many legislators and witnesses engaged in discourses where they utilized representations of struggle (what I refer to as "struggle stories") to bring voice to their constituents' plights and

¹³ After reviewing the Congressional records, I contacted Gene Falk, one of the authors of a SNAP benefit reduction report for the Congressional Research Service (CRS) (Richardson, Monke, & Falk, 2010). Falk informed me that the "ARRA benefit increase sunset on October 31, 2013, so the offset was never restored" (G. Falk, personal communication, November 29, 2017). Furthermore, Falk referred me to USDA's Food and Nutrition Services website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/cost-living-adjustment-cola-information>) to see the effect of the benefit reduction.

emphasize the urgent nature of the CNR. These struggle stories were especially prevalent during the first hearing for the CNR on December 8, 2008, which was when the U.S. was in the middle of the Great Recession. For example, in Senator Leahy's continued statements, he uses a struggle story to highlight the economic conditions and consequences that were occurring in Vermont:

Right now, in my own home State of Vermont, nearly one in ten people are, as these statistics call it, hunger insecure. Hunger insecure. I cannot begin to tell you what they are going through. These people are running out of food. They reduce the quality of food their family eats. They feed their children unbalanced diets. They skip meals altogether so families can afford to feed their children. The current economic condition severely affects this food security. Then they show up at Food Stamp and food shelves, and the food shelves are strained far beyond their resources. (Promoting Health, p. 24, 2008)

Dr. Mariana Chilton (one of the witnesses for the first CANF hearing), from the School of Public Health at Drexel University, and whose research focuses on child nutrition programs, expressed similar urgent concerns as Senator Leahy in her testimony:

...with the economic downturn and also the hike in food prices...families are stretching their food. They are watering down formula. They are taking on more jobs, which puts more strain on the household. ...the child begins to lose weight. And when you see food insecurity manifest in a loss of weight, you know that that food insecurity is very severe, because you can actually have food insecurity which affects a child's behavior and their emotional well-being and their cognitive performance, but when you see it have an effect on their growth and their growth potential, you know you are dealing with something very severe. And I have to say that if we do not boost Child Nutrition Programs, we will see a major downturn in child health and well-being and we would lose out on a generation. And this is an emergency. (Promoting Health, p. 28, 2008)

In the presentation of her testimony at the start of the hearing, Chilton also makes use of struggle stories to urge Congressional action on the CNR. The following quotes are drawn from her statement to illustrate how she puts a face to the impacts of the Great Recession as a way to elicit compassion and a call to action:

I present to you today the scientific evidence from more than 30,000 children and their families across the nation. All 30,000 that we meet and touch in our emergency rooms and in our clinics, are witnesses to hunger. One of these witnesses, Angela Sutton, a mother of two young children, struggles to feed her children in inner-city Philadelphia. When I asked her how she wanted to improve her children's health, she said, "I want to march right down to Washington and put my babies on the steps of Congress." Senators, during this major economic recession, how you write policies for these children on your steps can make a remarkable difference in the health and well-being of the American population. (Promoting Health, p. 12, 2008)

Chilton, continues:

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization process must take into account the true context of family poverty. Crystal Sears of Philadelphia has three children, all with major health problems. For her, it is a full-time job to keep her children and herself whole. From her perspective, Federal programs are good, but they don't go far enough. "There are some benefits," she says. "They provide our children with vaccinations. I can get some medical care. But the rest of me is just dangling out there, hanging on a rope." Senators let us not leave this generation dangling and unmoored. (Promoting Health, p. 14, 2008)

Feeding Children: A Moral Responsibility and Obligation. Chilton's call to action through the use of struggle stories, also taps into various discourses regarding the moral responsibility and obligation of legislators to ameliorate childhood hunger. This view is reflected in the following statement made by Democratic Senator Robert Casey of Pennsylvania during the CANF's first hearing as well:

I think what summons us here is our conscience and the moral gravity of [childhood hunger], especially at a time of economic crisis.... I was just handed...a postcard entitled, "Witness to Hunger," ...it is a picture of a child in the city of Philadelphia, a beautiful child in that city.... There is a lot of hope in that child's face. Our obligation is to make sure that the spark and the life in that child is not diminished by our failure to do what is right with these [child nutrition] programs. I don't think that is too grand or too broad a goal. I think this child reminds us more than anything else what our obligation is. (Promoting Health, p. 4, 2008)

Democratic Representative George Miller, a longtime advocate for the eradication of childhood hunger, statement follows from Senator Casey's in his expressing that reauthorizing child nutrition programs "...really should not be a Republican or a Democratic...issue. Providing a safety net for those in need during dire economic times is a moral and ethical responsibility that we have" (156 Cong. Rec. H7807, 2010). Furthermore, Miller argues:

...the poorest children in our country who are hungry and malnourished... need our help. Child nutrition is not a political issue. It's not a partisan issue. It's a question of what's a moral thing to do for our children. It's about being on the right side of history and ensuring a healthy and productive future for our country. Our children will make and determine our future, and that is what is at stake. In a country as great as ours, no child should go hungry.... (156 Cong. Rec. H7880, 2010)

America the Strong. Another way that legislators and stakeholders employed discourse of moral obligation was in the context of the unacceptability of childhood hunger in a nation that is as "great," "strong," and "wealthy" as the United States. For example, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack argues that,

...there is the whole moral issue associated with this particular legislation. A country as strong, as rich, as powerful as ours, and yet we have youngsters who are hungry, hundreds of thousands of youngsters who are hungry? So, I am here today to urge action on this bill. There are many priorities that this Congress has faced, many complex issues, but I believe there is none more important than this. This is an opportunity for us to make

a clear, unconditional statement about the importance of our children and their future. (H.R. 5504, 2010, p. 8)

Emanating from characterizations of a strong and powerful America was the idea that while the issue of childhood hunger is a moral issue, it is also a threat to American competitiveness. Maintaining America's international competitiveness is a concern reflected in Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi of California's statement on the floor of Congress where she argued:

We all know that this legislation is important for moral reasons. It is also a competitiveness issue for our country. It is important for children to learn in order for us to compete internationally They can't learn if they are not eating, if they don't have the proper nutrition. So, it is not just about what it means to the children, although that is foremost. It is what it means to our country, our community, to our economy. Again, let us address this moral issue, this competitiveness issue, this national security issue. (156 Cong. Rec. H7802, 2010)

Finally, during the same debate, Democratic Representative Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, also drew on a moral argument for passing the HRFKA. However, McGovern's advocacy highlighted the broader implications and importance of the HRFKA – specifically, as the legislation related to public health and health care reform. McGovern states:

The need to act is clear. Our moral obligation is clear. Our children are getting sicker and sicker and sicker. If kids don't have enough nutritious food to eat they don't learn. We are wasting millions and millions of dollars on health care for diseases like diabetes and heart disease that are preventable with healthier diets. Today, we could begin to turn that tide. Please join us in doing the right thing. I urge my colleagues to support this bill. (156 Cong. Rec. H7768, 2010)

The HRFKA as Health Care Reform and Public Health. Democratic Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, and Chairman of the CANF¹⁴ also saw the CNR as part of broader health care reform efforts. During Harkin's opening statement for the first CANF CNR hearing, he delivered the following declaration:

Today, we begin a process to reauthorize what we call the Child Nutrition Programs. At the outset, I just want to say that what this hearing is about today, and what the other hearings will be about is not just about childhood nutrition or what our kids eat and how they get it and all that. What it really is a part of, is the debate, that this Congress will have and this new President will have on fundamentally reforming the health care system of America. (Promoting Health, p. 1)

Harkin follows this statement by saying that in this nation “we don't have a health care system...we have a sick care system”; and he further elaborates on how when people get sick

¹⁴ Senator Tom Harkin was also a Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. At the time of the CNR, Harkin was simultaneously working in this committee on national health care reform and, specifically, the development of legislation that would ultimately become the ACA.

they “...get care, one way or the other—Medicare, Medicaid, Title 19, charity, emergency room, community health center, some way or another” (Promoting Health, 2008, p. 2). Harkin further argues:

We are very good at patching, fixing, and mending. We will spend billions, untold—no, trillions on patching, fixing, and mending. But what do we do up front to keep people healthy and out of the hospital, to keep them well? So, this whole debate...is going to be a part of our health care debate, a big part of it, and it is going to be a part of the prevention and wellness part of that debate, how we get adequate nutritional foods to our kids in school and before school. (Promoting Health, 2008, p. 2)

Harkin’s framing of the HHFKA as part of health care reform efforts set the foundation for mandated, science based nutrition standards and the increase in meal reimbursements. These health care reform and public health frames also allowed proponents of the HHFKA to contend that the legislation, while seemingly expensive to some (specifically, Republicans), is actually a health care cost saving measure in the long-term. For example, during the fourth CANF hearing held on May 15, 2009, Dr. David Satcher, Director of the Center of Excellence on Health Disparities at the Morehouse School of Medicine, provided testimony in which agrees that the HHFKA is a necessary investment that would save money in the long run and discusses the importance of mandated, science-based nutrition standards as part of promoting public health and preventative care efforts:

[Healthier food requires] more funding and I happen to believe it is a good investment for government in terms of spending money now as opposed to spending it later when people are ill, suffering from cancer and cardiovascular disease and diabetes. So, I support providing more funds that would strengthen the schools’ ability in [providing] good nutrition. I think it will be a good investment. (Benefits of Farm-to-School Projects: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for School Children [hereafter, “Benefits of Farm”], p. 18)

Dr. Chilton also noted that the CNR was an investment in the future of children and the nation when she highlights how the CNR is “two-for-one deal” stating:

A young child in its most critical moments of cognitive, social, and emotional development does not have time to wait. By treating the Child Nutrition Reauthorization as if it is medicine, an immunization against preventable chronic disease, you can boost the health and well-being of an entire generation. (Promoting Health, 2008, p. 14)

Democratic Representative Dave Loebsack of Iowa also asserted that the HHFKA “is an investment that we can make in the short term so that we can actually save a lot of money, I think, in the long term by preventing the development of chronic diseases, so it is a health care issue, and it is a fiscal issue, but not just in the short term—in the long term, as well” (H.R. 5504, 2010, p. 23).

Providing Proper Nutrition and Shaping Dietary Choices. In addition to framing the HHFKA as an investment in public health, stakeholders and policy-makers also viewed the legislation as an opportunity to ensure that at a minimum, children would receive healthy food at

school, and the HHFKA was also a way to mitigate their (or their parents) not making good food choices at home. For example, in his Congressional *Extension of Remarks*, Democratic Representative John Conyers of Michigan argued that the HHFKA was important for shaping food choices because obesity was “increasing at an alarming rate due to poor dieting” (156 Cong. Rec. E2043, 2010). Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota also discusses her perspective on kids’ food choices and its relationship to obesity (note Klobuchar’s classed and racialized discourse characterizing the dietary choices of kids in high-poverty, “inner-city schools”):

I have spoken on this issue [of children having food choices at school] a bit before from my perspective, being a mother with a 13-year-old and really seeing a tale of two schools, one, the school she attended in Minneapolis that was 90 percent free and reduced lunch for a number of years, and now in Arlington, Virginia, two public schools, which is a little different demographic make-up, and just seeing the differences in the school with less free and reduced lunch kids in terms of their fitness and their moms packing them carrots and things like that, and then seeing in the inner-city school just the vending machines being used a lot, I think a lot of kids going for maybe the less healthy alternative when there were choices and then some healthy food given out, as well. Minnesota, as you have noted, has put a lot of emphasis on this. But even despite our State’s emphasis to see the difference between the schools and the nutrition these kids are getting is very stark, and also see the huge obesity problem with some of these kids. (Improving Nutrition, 2009, p 16)

These arguments reflect not only how the framing of choices led to mandated nutrition standards, but also how the standards ended up being extended to all food sold in schools.

Educating for better choices. In thinking about regulating and shaping food choices, legislators also viewed the HHFKA as an educational tool to teach children how to make better dietary decisions. In his witness testimony, Chef and Restaurateur, Tom Colicchio, employs discourse that reaffirms the idea that the HHFKA is essential for health care savings, but that it is also an investment in the development of productive and competitive adults through shaping children’s palates and their future food choices. Colicchio states:

There could be no better investment, no better stimulus to our economy than feeding this nation’s children healthy and well. If we give kids in this country delicious, nutritious food, we will instill in them a lifetime preference for eating healthy that will translate into vast savings in health care costs down the line. Providing the building blocks for millions of children to grow and develop as they should, this will mean a population of robust, productive adults and a more competitive America. Malnourished kids are not capable of vision and ideas. And without that, we are relegating this great nation to a future of mediocrity and poor health. (H.R. 5504, 2010, p. 42)

No choice at all. While legislators saw the CNR as a way to shape children’s dietary choices through mandating what they were allowed to eat at school, there was also recognition from some witnesses and policy-makers that the causes of obesity are the consequence of poverty and economic hardship. This reframed the notion of choices as not really a choice at all. For example, in the question and answer session during the COEL hearing, Chef Colicchio, says:

...how does obesity correlate to poverty...when you are forced to choose between a Happy Meal that costs a dollar, it is cheap, but there is very little nutrition involved, there are a lot of calories, empty calories from sugar and starch and fat. And so, it is affordable, but we are providing our kids no nutrition at all and just a tremendous amount of calories. And so, kids are getting more than a 2,000-calorie, you know, meal. That is what is making them fat. (H.R. 5504, 2010, p. 75)

Poverty as a cause of obesity is further articulated by Representative McGovern in which he tells the members of Congress that, "It's also important to remember that hunger and obesity are two sides of the same coin. The fact is that highly processed, empty calorie foods are less expensive than fresh, nutritious foods. That's why so many families are forced to make unhealthy choices" (156 Cong. Rec. H7767, 2010).

McGovern's view is a similar one to Dr. David Paige, a professor at Johns Hopkins medical school, where in his testimony to Congress he theorizes that, "...it is really poverty that we are talking about with respect to the problems of under nutrition and poor nutrition" (Improving Nutrition for America's Children in Difficult Economic Times [hereafter, "Improving Nutrition"], 2009, p. 27). He continues, "Poverty in general, the overarching issue, results in poor health" (Improving Nutrition, 2009, p. 28). And Paige further asserts:

We need to think of obesity as poverty induced, resulting in food insecurity and obesity as part of this continuing spectrum of issues that we are dealing with in populations in poverty. Of course, obesity is not limited to only the population in poverty. Nevertheless, this is a very important population group that is suffering from the epidemic of obesity as a result of the inadequate food purchasing, calorie-dense foods that are available, inadequate numbers of supermarkets and other choices that exist in many of our poor communities, both urban as well as rural throughout our country. (Improving Nutrition, 2009, p. 29)

Continued discourse regarding economic hardship and how it was negatively shaping families and children's food choices is illustrated by an exchange between Senator Klobuchar and Dr. Eileen Kennedy, Dean of the Friedman School of Nutrition and Policy Science at Tufts University (Promoting Health, 2008):

Senator Klobuchar: "...yesterday...I saw an ad for a fast food restaurant that was clearly pushing [cheap food] because of the economy and they were showing their basically basket of bad-looking food and they said that you could feed each family member of four, which I have never heard before on a fast food ad, because people are suffering, for \$1.99 or something by using this. So, it made me think about it, as I looked at this food and it looked really fattening. It made me think about how [obesity] is going to get worse possibly because of the economy, that people are going to be getting more and more and more of the cheaper fast food, and so that will be an issue. (p. 19)

Dr. Kennedy: Yes. Excellent observation. Clearly when one is income constrained, what you try to do with your food dollar is maximize caloric intake, and I am not suggesting

that is good, but fast food restaurants are a great value for dollar on the calories you get per dollar spent. (p. 19)

As the exchange goes along, Kennedy and Klochubar's conversation reveals that despite how income constraints may negatively shape the dietary choices of families and children, the HHFKA can still be used as an educational tool to address this issue. In continuing with her response to Senator Klochubar, Dr. Kennedy explains:

Nutrient-dense foods need not be more expensive, but it takes a lot more planning and thinking about how you get not only calories, but nutrients out of the dollar, which gets back to my earlier comment about information given to parents. We have the opportunity to think about how do we use our safety net to not only get across a consistent nutrition education message, but nest this in the concept of parenting skills. (Promoting Health, 2008, p. 20)

The idea of "reverse learning" introduced by a witness in the third CANF hearing reflects Dr. Kennedy's notion regarding improving parenting skills through educating children to better food choices. As relayed by Ms. Huehergarth, Director of the New York State Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance:

The other thing I think we have to think about is what we call reverse learning. You know, a lot of times kids come home from school and they teach parents things. One thing that I learned was to turn off the water tap, because my kids told me, don't let it run too long. You are going to waste water. Well, it is going to be the same thing with healthy foods... If kids are eating healthy, then they are going to come back to their parents, demand those foods. And I think that is how families will learn.

Protecting Children's Health and Tax Payers Investments. The combination of these arguments regarding the need to feed kids during the recession and to use the HHFKA as an opportunity to increase children's (and parents') capacity to make better food choices, led to mandated, science-based nutrition standards that applied to the whole school food environment. In a Senate Congressional Report accompanying S. 3307 (the Senate's version of the HHFKA that they sent to the House for review¹⁵), the report explains that in past iterations of Child Nutrition Legislation, the USDA has had "very limited authority to set nutrition standards" for food sold alongside or outside of the NSLP – specifically, "vending machines, snack bars, a la carte lines, and the like" (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 8). The report continues:

Numerous scientific studies show that foods offered through these outlets are low in nutritional quality. In addition, research shows that when children gain access to such foods in schools, the quality of their diets decreases significantly. The widespread availability of unhealthy foods in our schools not only undermines children's health, but

¹⁵ S. 3307 (the Senate's version of the HHFKA) was sent to the floor for debate under a closed rule (156 Cong. Rec. H7767, 2010). Therefore, S. 3307, which unanimously passed on the Senate floor, which means that all Democrats and Republicans voted to pass the bill (156 Cong. Rec. H7815, 2010) is also the final version of the HHFKA, or Public Law 111-296 since the House's COEL revisions to the bill were not integrated into the bill before the debates that occurred between November 30 – December 2, 2010.

also undermines annual taxpayer investments of over \$15.5 billion in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. To promote healthful eating and to protect taxpayer investments in school meals, this provision requires the Secretary of Agriculture to establish science-based nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools.... Such standards will apply on the entire school campus until the end of the school day. (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 8)

“Too Fat to Fight”: A Matter of National Security. In addition to protecting taxpayers’ investments, the HHFKA is conceptualized as policy to protect the viability of military recruits for maintaining national security. In 2010, an organization of retired Generals that call themselves “Mission: Readiness,” published a report titled, *Too Fat to Fight: Retired Military Leaders Want Junk Food Out of America’s Schools*. The report was prepared to advocate for the military’s interest with regard to the CNR. The Generals write:

Being overweight or obese turns out to be the leading medical reason why applicants fail to qualify for military service. To reduce America’s obesity rates, we must start with the basics. In addition to exercise, we know that maintaining a balanced diet is key to long-term health and fitness. We also know that the childhood years are critical to the formation of sound eating habits. Millions of children buy breakfast, lunch and snacks in school every day. Properly managed, the school environment can be instrumental in fostering healthful eating habits that will last a lifetime. If we don’t take steps now to build a strong, healthy foundation for our young people, then it won’t just be our military that pays the price – our nation as a whole will suffer also.

On July 1, 2010, Major General, Paul Monroe, U.S. Army testified at the COEL hearing on behalf of Mission: Readiness, making the point that,

The grim reality is that we live in a dangerous world. As long as outside threats to our national security exist, we are well served to maintain a high level of military readiness. The Admirals and Generals of Mission: Readiness are in strong support of [the HHFKA] and we respectfully request, in the interest of national security, that the distinguished members of this Committee work to move this important legislation toward enactment. Doing so will help improve the health of our nation’s children and, ultimately, strengthen national security. (H.R. 5504, 2010, p.67)

Ensuring future national security was also one of the arguments put forth by USDA Secretary Vilsack. He reminds the COEL committee of how the school lunch program was a tool for national security in the past:

The health of our nation—of our economy, our communities, and our national security—depends on the health of our children. We will not succeed if our children are not learning as they should because they are hungry, and cannot achieve their dreams because they are unhealthy. When our future was on the line after World War II, our nation’s leaders understood the importance of well-fed and healthy youngsters. We would do well to remember that lesson today, and to act on it once again. (H.R. 5504, 2010, p.15)

Opposition to the HHFKA and Partisan Politics

Two interrelated points of disagreement were a sticking point between the Republicans and Democrats while the HHFKA was on the Chamber floor for debate. Specifically, Republican Representatives took issue with the mandated, science nutrition standards and the proposed cost of the legislation. During the CANF's third hearing, one of the witnesses, Reginald Felton, Director of Federal Legislation for the National School Boards Association, voiced his concerns about the federal government's imposition of mandates. Felton states,

... local school boards are committed to improving child nutrition and clearly view wellness policy as important. [However,] we feel that community-based decisions are much more effective in the long run than mandates from the Federal Government. Federal mandates in our public schools cannot be the vehicle for change in society. In order to significantly improve child nutrition and health, it will not be achieved through expanded authority of the Secretary of Agriculture. Rather, it will be through the active engagement of local communities that hold strongly to the belief that those at the local level should best make such determinations. (Beyond Federal School Meal Programs: Reforming Nutrition for Kids in Schools [hereafter, "Beyond Federal"], 2009, p. 14)

Felton's comment sparked further debate regarding whether it was better to leave it to local educational agencies to determine and follow nutrition standards. Ultimately, however, the general thought was that having variation in nutrition standards could lead to inequities across school food programs. And furthermore, schools are bogged down with other priorities. Therefore, if they are not mandated to implement nutrition standards, they will not do it on their own, which would be consequential for the HHFKA's goal of addressing childhood obesity through the provision of healthier school meals. The following exchange between Felton, Pat Cooper, former Superintendent and President of the Early Childhood and Family Learning Foundation, and Republican Senator Lugar of Indiana, illustrate the concerns over local control versus mandated nutrition standards:

Cooper: [Nutrition] has a direct connection to how our children perform in schools. I do not think we are going to do this locally, by and large, because we have too many other things that we put ahead of it because they are supposedly important, and they are important. But unless you codify this some way nationally, then I think people are going to pick and choose. And you will have some superintendents that do it, some boards that do it, but, in fact, most will not because they will go to the point of highest pressure, and that is the laws that are there that require the academic kinds of things. (Beyond Federal, 2009, p. 15)

Senator Lugar: I appreciate very much, Mr. Felton, your representation, and as a school board member, we fought everybody. But at the same time, my own judgment was that when we came down to even more serious issues, such as trying to desegregate even a part of our school system racially, once again, the local situation was very, very negative. And the thought that the Federal Government could ever intrude in this, which they did 12 years later with the Federal court suits and the whole situation was desegregated, but a sense at the local level at that particular time failed. (Beyond Federal, 2009, p. 22)

Felton: Again, I think we are overloading the system because we are expecting...the local school district to take on every issue facing society within a very, very limited resource budget. ...when the Federal Government on average invests only 10 percent of the total cost of education in America, someone has to question who is bearing this, and who is bearing this are States and local governments trying to figure out how to do what is best for all their kids given the limited resources available. (Beyond Federal, 2009, p.27)

Cooper. OK. I don't think voluntary guidelines are enough, but I do want to agree with Mr. Felton. I think we have overburdened our school districts with things, but I think our priority is in the wrong place. I think we ought to loosen some of the other things and take care of our children and the health of our children first. That definitely needs to be something that we all agree to. (Beyond Federal, 2009, p.30)

As this conversation between Senator Lugar and witnesses Cooper and Felton demonstrates, while there was an agreement that the federal government asks much of schools, nutrition standards were the only way to achieve the HRFKA's objectives. Senator Lugar's example of school desegregation shows that there is a belief that sometimes the government has to step in if it wants to achieve national goals.

Mandated Nutrition Standards: National Deficit and Big Government. During the only COEL hearing in which members of the House reviewed the Senate's bill and proposed amendments, and in an interesting discursive reframe of the argument regarding the use of federal child nutrition programs as national security, Republican Representative John Kline from Minnesota, argued that while "Our child nutrition programs are a worthy investment..."

...what has given us pause...is the almost \$8 billion price tag attached to [the HRFKA]. This is a threat to our long-term economic security. It is also a threat to our national security. Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently warned our national debt has become our greatest national security threat. As he noted, the interest on our debt is now roughly equal to the annual defense budget. Every dollar we spend and every program we create must be weighed against the crushing burden we are placing on future generations with this unchecked spending. This is a particularly valid question on legislation professing to improve our children's futures. (H.R. 5504, 2010, p. 5)

The price tag was due in large part to the mandated nutrition standards – a point of contention among House representatives who argued that not only were the standards costly, they were also a way to increase government control. For example, Republican Representative Paul Broun of Georgia argued,

This is not about child nutrition. This is about more government control. This is not about healthy children. It's about borrowing more money and putting our children in greater debt. It's not about creating a better environment for children in the schools. It's about more and more control from Washington, DC. We have got to stop the spending. This is a \$4.5 billion bill, and the pay-for [i.e., the SNAP offset] that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle have put into place is a farce. It's a lie, and it is borrowing more from our

children. This kind of idiocy has to stop. It includes a lot of Federal mandates. It is going to be extremely costly. (156 Cong. Rec. H7801, 2010)

Following Broun's scathing assessment of the HHFKA, Republican Representative Rob Bishop of Utah voiced his concerns about the legislation by saying he would like to "plead the 10th Amendment." Bishop, states:

There are great and noble goals within this particular bill... [However,] when we, in this bill, give the Secretary of Agriculture the unlimited control and authority to determine what is food and what is not, what kids will eat and what they will not, by nature of that action we take away that responsibility from local school boards, from parents, from local administrators... When you add 17 new Federal programs in this particular bill, you automatically, if nothing else, take away the ability of schools to concentrate on what they think is more significant and more important. There is nothing wrong with the goals and attitude and hopes of this particular bill, but we are not a school board. ... [and] not every idea has to germinate in Washington, not every concept has to be authorized, funded, and regulated in this particular body. I plead the 10th Amendment. (156 Cong. Rec. H7809, 2010)

Other comments regarding the HHFKA's increasing of the national deficit were also couched in arguments of it not being truly paid for under PAYGO rules. Representative Kline was especially adamant about this point throughout the Congressional debates. Kline, maintains:

The truth is, at least some portion of the billions the new program costs is deficit spending. This money was borrowed from our children and grandchildren in 2009 when it was put in the stimulus [i.e., the ARRA]; that borrowed money is simply being redirected today. It was borrowed then; it is borrowed now. This bill, with its so-called pay-for, is merely a stalling tactic. It obscures government expansion in the short term so this bill can become law and its spending can become permanent. So here we stand, playing a shell game with the Federal budget and hoping the American people do not notice that government continues to grow, spending continues to expand, and our children continue to fall deeper and deeper into debt. (156 Cong. Rec. H7800, 2010)

The warning of children falling into debt and it being as important of consideration as nutrition is also reflected by Republican Representative Lincoln Rafael Díaz-Balart of Florida when he says,

...the end result is that this bill is paid for by funds that are borrowed by the Federal Government. So, I guess we could say that we are voting to provide our children with nutritious school lunches which will be paid to foreign entities in the future, with interest, foreign entities from which we are borrowing funds, thus adding to our national debt and imposing new fees on families. (156 Cong. Rec. H7768, 2010)

In response to Republicans' complaints about the HHFKA increasing the national deficit, McGovern launched into a scathing lecture of his own:

When my friends talk about passing on to future generations debt, I can't help but wonder where they were when President Bush passed these tax cuts that added over a trillion dollars to our debt, totally unpaid for, most of it going to millionaires and billionaires. And I want to know where they are right now, they want to extend the tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires and they still don't want to pay for it. But somehow when it comes to debt and piling it on to future generations, when it comes to tax cuts for very wealthy people, they're silent. When it comes to closing loopholes for big corporations that routinely stick it to the American people, no, no, we can't do that. Even though it might save money for taxpayers, we can put it toward deficit reduction. No, no, no. Those are very wealthy special interests. They want to protect them, whether it's Big Oil or big pharmaceuticals or whatever, at any cost. So, when I hear them talk about debt, I am reminded of the fact that when President Clinton left office we had a surplus. They ran this place and drove this economy into a ditch. And quite frankly, it's been a nightmare trying to dig us out of this ditch. And I give the President great credit for his courage in trying to move this country forward in the area of healthcare, and today in the area of trying to move this bill forward on child nutrition. So, they have no credibility when it comes to talking about reducing deficits or debt. And, in fact, as we speak, they are trying to figure out a way I think probably to defeat this bill, to take the money that this bill costs, the offsets for this bill, take that money and put it toward tax cuts for rich people. (156 Cong. Rec. H7771, 2010)

“Penny wise, pound foolish.” Finally, another sentiment that many members of Congress articulated is the “penny wise, pound foolish” argument. (Which aligns with the frame of the HHFKA as a long-term investment and cost saving measure.) Democratic Representative Rosa DeLauro emphasizes this point in the following statement, which she shared on the Chamber floor:

The [HHFKA] represents an overdue, a much-needed recommitment to the health and the well-being of our schoolchildren. Our kids today are threatened by a growing obesity epidemic. Far too many kids are struggling and families are struggling with gnawing and unyielding hunger. Today, people want to talk about “food insecurity” and “food hardship.” Don't let them use those nice words. It's about one out of four kids going hungry in the United States of America every single day. We have an opportunity to move forward to address that issue today. I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: How many programs that get passed in this Congress are fully paid for? We are paying in order to feed our kids. Our kids consume roughly 35 to 50 percent of their daily calories during the school day. We can pass this bill. They will get enough nutritious food to stay healthy, to grow, to learn, and to succeed. For those who say how can we afford this bill right now, we say how can we afford not to pass it? Leaving millions of children hungry, leaving millions of children malnourished in the name of budget cutting is penny wise, it's pound foolish, and it is unconscionable. Vote for this bill. (156 Cong. Rec. H7809, 2010)

Paying for the HHFKA with SNAP

In 2005, the USDA convened a panel of experts from the Committee on National Statistics¹⁶ (CNSTAT) in order to develop new language that would make the prevalence of hunger a more operational and measurable concept. The panel developed the term “food security,” which they defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life”; and, in addition, created a spectrum of food security between “food secure”, “food insecure”, “low food security”, and “very low food insecurity.” The panel argued that the word hunger “is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity” and to measure it would require the “collection of more detailed and extensive information on physiological experiences of individual household members.” As argued by Representative DeLauro, the new labels for hunger are “nice words” that are controversial with anti-hunger advocates that believe it “...sugarcoats a national shame...” (Williamson, 2006, para.10) and does a “...huge disservice to the millions of Americans who struggle daily to feed themselves and their families” (David Beckmann, as quoted in Williamson, 2006, para.10).

During the CNR’s first CANF hearing in December of 2008, Congressional Members and the witnesses participating in the hearing had the impact of food insecurity (hunger) on families and children at the forefront of their minds. As CANF hearing participants settled in to discuss the CNR, Senator Leahy voiced,

...one of the near-term questions we have in front of the Congress, of course, is the stimulus legislation, which I believe that part of that should be Food Stamps, an increase in Food Stamp availability. (Promoting Health, p. 28, 2008)

Drs. Chilton and Kennedy also noted how important food stamps were for helping out families during the Great Recession, stating:

... children who are on Food Stamps, there is a significant health effect. The more Food Stamps that a family receives, the better the developmental outcomes, the greater the reduction in hospitalization rates, and the greater the reduction in poor health. So, you are not just getting a return on the dollar, but you are also stimulating and boosting the minds and the bodies of the very young children that need these Food Stamps the most. (Chilton, in Promoting Health, p. 26, 2008)

Over the next year, there is going to be an exponential growth in demand for Food Stamps and I think we want to look at what is realistic in order to ensure food security of income-constrained households who are unemployed through no fault of their own. Companies have closed. So, I would think about looking at, and I say temporary because I know this is not very popular, but a temporary increase in the level of funding [for Food Stamps] because we are in a very dire situation. (Kennedy, in Promoting Health, p. 29)

Given the recognition that Food Stamps were vital to the well-being of children and families during the “economic crisis,” I agree with McGovern (2010) when he stated, “The cuts to the SNAP, or food stamp, program don’t make a lot of sense to me. I don’t believe we should

¹⁶ An overview on definitions of food security, and the above quotes, can be found at the following URL: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx#.VEGI776yW1A>

be taking access to food away from some people in order to provide it for others” (156 Cong. Rec. H7767). And to Democratic Representative Sheila Jackson Lee’s point that,

“...we should remember this Act [should not be] an attempt to borrow money from one social welfare program to fund another. The intention [should be] to assure that both programs, which will benefit the health and wellbeing of children, are adequately funded. Under this bill, children who are on food stamps will receive healthy meals while at school, and should receive healthy dinners and weekend meals as well. (156 Cong. Rec. H7872)

Many others also expressed dismay regarding the use of SNAP funds to pay for the HHFKA. For example, Democratic Representative Peter DeFazio of Oregon stated,

While I believe this is important legislation, cutting SNAP benefits for families to pay for a hunger prevention program is illogical, and isn’t something that I could support. I signed a letter to House leadership, with over 100 of my colleagues, expressing our opposition to these cuts. While the Administration has promised to work to restore lost SNAP benefits, staggering deficits along with new Leadership in the House of Representatives, has created no clear path to reinstating future SNAP benefits. Meal programs inside and outside of school serve as a direct line to prevent hunger for needy children. I will continue to support child nutrition legislation that doesn’t cut critical SNAP benefits. (156 Cong. Rec. H7831, 2010)

Like DeFazio, several Congressional members shared their reservations about supporting a bill that would be paid for through needed SNAP funds. However, most of them voted for the bill, and, for example, stated the following for the record:

...we have been assured, repeatedly, by the President and the White House that they will work with us to restore these [SNAP] cuts, and I look forward to working with the administration and my colleagues to make sure that the White House lives up to that commitment. (156 Cong. Rec. H7767)

...while I wholeheartedly support what the [HHFKA] will do, it is unfortunate that we will have to take money away from the SNAP program in order to fund it. I am concerned that the bill is paid for with a severe reduction in SNAP ARRA benefits and that it does not fully address the access improvements needed to connect children with those programs. While the funding of this bill concerns me, both the SNAP benefits and the [HHFKA] are necessary to reduce hunger and to improve our Nation’s health. It would be a shame if either program were to fall by the wayside. Our President has indicated that he has all intention to ensure a positive commit to the restoration of SNAP funds; and given that commitment, I stand here today in support of the [HHFKA] of 2010. Finally, I believe the commitment to cure any funding issue calls for strong support of this bill. (156 Cong. Rec. H7872)

However, as previously mentioned, President Obama did not end up restoring the funds to SNAP after the HHFKA became Public Law. (G. Falk, personal communication, November 29, 2017).

Discussion

As stated by Levine (2008), “food policy plays a central role in shaping American health, welfare, and equality” (p.2). Therefore, an examination of “the National School Lunch Program [in this case, its most recent reauthorization] is... a crucial mirror into the variety of interest that continually vie for power and authority in American public life” (Levine, 2008, p.2). Indeed, an examination of the discourses of policy-makers and stakeholders involved with the CNR process between December 8, 2008 and December 2, 2010, demonstrate the ways in which language or discourse was used to frame and define the causes and consequences of childhood hunger and obesity and subsequently, formulate policy to address what are broader social problems through schools.

As the Congressional hearings and debates have shown, stakeholders and legislators defined and framed the issues of childhood hunger and obesity as the outcome of poverty or families’ bad dietary choices with consequences that have implications for children’s cognitive and physical development, American competitiveness, public health and health care reform, and national security.

Discursive devices used to push forward particular constructions of the HHFKA during the policy formulation process (to highlight a couple) were the use of struggle stories to create a sense of urgency for and compassion among legislators, or the reframing of national security in connection to the country’s deficit rather than its military readiness. While the HHFKA represents the most progressive changes to the NSLP in 30 years – for example, mandated, science-based nutrition standards, an increase in the federal meal reimbursement, and universal free lunch for high-poverty schools through the CEP – drawing on ARRA, or stimulus funds (the same legislation that “bailed out” Wall Street) for SNAP was particularly regressive. If one believes that access to healthy food should be a human right, the SNAP offset reveals something contemptible about this nation’s priorities. How, we fund our priorities demonstrate our values and what is important to us as a country, an underlying notion reflected in the following exchange between Republican Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana and USDA Secretary Vilsack:

Senator Lugar: My second line of questioning is the goals that you have expressed in your opening statement and that many members of the committee would reinforce with regard to things we ought to be doing in child nutrition. By and large, expansion of these programs is expensive. It carries some fiscal responsibility. I am just curious, as we reauthorize the programs, have you been able to work through the budget process to determine whether we can pay for them or what the prospects are of this?
(Reauthorization of U.S. Child Nutrition Programs: Opportunities to Fight Hunger and Improve Child Health [hereafter, “Reauthorization of U.S.”], 2009, p. 17)

Secretary Vilsack: Senator, I think it is important to focus when you are dealing with the issue of costs and affordability of what the cost of inaction and inactivity might be. I think Senator Harkin put his finger on the cost long-term. If we fail to address this issue aggressively now, we will clearly, clearly pay for it in significant increases in health care

expenditures in the future. So that is the first thing. If you combine the hunger issue with the obesity issue...I think we are at a tipping point in this country and hopefully in this Congress to take all of these matters to a different level. And when you take them to a different level they become a significant priority. And as you well know, Senator, from your experience, you fund your priorities. You fund your priorities. I believe this ought to be a priority. (Reauthorization of U.S., 2009, p. 17)

Furthermore, the legislation also maintains the historical use of schools in the delivery of social provision (that is, the educationalized welfare state) in its demonstrated preference for supporting food assistance through schools rather than a broader social provision program (SNAP). Additionally, there is a noticeable silence within the legislative documents regarding the relationship between structural inequality and childhood hunger and obesity. Hunger and not being able to afford food were defined as a consequence of the Great Recession, rather than a larger issue of inequitable access to food. Obesity is described as a consequence of bad food choices due to either or both a lack of education about what is good food or having no real choice because of poverty. It also does not hold into account food manufacturers that produce highly-processed (bad) food and that then engage in marketing these products to kids, and therefore, have some culpability for childhood obesity. Food assistance through the HHFKA then is more in the realm of charity rather than social justice. Hence, the HHFKA is problematic because schools can only do so much to redress what are ultimately symptoms of structural inequality and the “structural marginalization” of the HHFKA’s target population.

The concept of structural marginality, as applied to the problems of childhood hunger and obesity, shifts the focus away from individual actors (families and their diet related choices) to the ways in which structures marginalize whole groups of people and “unevenly distribute opportunities and depress life chances” (powell, 2013, p. 3). It reframes these poverty and diet-related health issues as symptoms of unjust food and social systems that shape and limit people’s options, and as outcomes of inequitable distribution of and access to healthy foods and environments. (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Guthman, 2011; Paarlberg, 2010; Patel, 2008; Nestle, 2007; Poppendieck, 1998). Childhood hunger and obesity are structural inequality in the body and demonstrate the ways in which structures can be violent. While violence is typically understood as something carried out by consciously motivated groups or individuals, as argued by Chasin (1997), “systems can [also] be violent” (p. 7) and a “part of the everyday life of a society, with people sometimes dying because they do not have access to the resources needed for a healthy life” (p. 80). Inequitable access to healthy food and its associated consequences, such as childhood hunger and obesity, are examples of both structural violence and what Berlant (2007) describes as “slow death.”

The concept of slow death “refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience” (Berlant, 2007, p. 754). Presently, more than one-third of children (or 15.9 million) under the age of 18 live in food insecure households (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014); and one in three children and adolescents (12.7 million) between the ages of 2 and 19 that are overweight or obese (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014). As has been argued by several Congressional members, and witnesses that testified throughout the CNR process, childhood hunger and obesity are preventable health threats that impact learning and depress academic performance in their impairment of children’s physical and cognitive development (Arteaga & Heflin, 2014; Taras, 2005); they also negatively impact children’s overall health, long-term well-

being, and quality of life (Holben & Taylor, 2015; Pyle, et al., 2006). Childhood hunger and obesity are also both strongly associated with race, class, and gender, with rates of prevalence being substantially higher than the national average among Black and Hispanic households, single-parent families, and households with low educational attainment and incomes near, or below the federal poverty line (Coleman-Jensen, et al., 2014; Ogden, et al., 2014).

Conclusion

On June 1, 2017, the USDA issued a press release titled, “FACT SHEET: Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act School Meals Implementation,” which provided information regarding the national impacts of the legislation since it was signed into law in 2010 and implemented across the nation in 2013 (USDA FNS, 2017c). Some of the findings report that, “Kids are eating more fruits and vegetables as a result of updated standards”; and “Over 90 percent of schools’ report that they are successfully meeting the updated nutrition standards” (USDA Food and Nutrition Services, 2017). These findings were supported by a recent study from Arizona State University, which found that nutrition standards have not negatively impacted participation rates of students and they are likely, with time, to continue accepting healthier options (Vaudrin, N., Lloyd, K., Yedidia, M.J., Todd, M., & Ohri-Vachaspati, P. (2017). While this is good news, these positive implementation outcomes will likely diminish under Trump. In a press release from May 1, 2017 titled, “Ag Secretary Perdue Moves to Make School Meals Great Again,” the statement says that the USDA Secretary will move to “provide local control of whole grains, sodium, milk to make meals healthful, appealing” (USDA, 2017). And on November 30, 2017, that announcement has materialized into an interim final rule, which rolls-back and weakens the HHFKA’s nutrition standards starting on July 1, 2018. The new rule allows schools to serve flavored milk (which have a lot of sugar), serve grains that are not “whole-grain rich,” and serve foods higher in sodium than levels limited by the HHFKA of 2010 (Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements, 2017).

In conclusion, legislator’s absence of a definition and framing of childhood hunger and obesity as the consequence of structural marginality, and as problems of structural violence that lead to “slow death” limits what the HHFKA and the actors tasked with its implementation can do to resolve symptoms of structural inequality (childhood hunger and obesity). Furthermore, as was argued by several members of Congress and witnesses during the CNR hearings, mandated standards from the federal level are necessary for ensuring broader social goals – even if using education policy and schools to achieve these goals reflect an educationalized and thus, limited welfare state. Unfortunately, based on Trump’s recent interim rule, it appears that the limitations of federal child nutrition programs to address the broader issues of structural inequality that lead to childhood hunger and obesity will only be exacerbated by this President’s administration.

Paper #3

Title: Scaling a “Bite-Sized Implementation Strategy”: Promoting Educational Equity and Social Justice through a Farm to School Food Program

Background to Paper Three

Paper two focused on the interplay of policy, people, and place at the federal level. Specifically, it examined how the discourse of policy-makers shaped the construction of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010. Paper three will demonstrate the ways in which implementation actors (people) make sense of policy (the HHFKA) and appropriate/adapt policy to local level implementation contexts (place).

Abstract

While the farm to school movement has been growing since the 1990s, it was officially incorporated into federal child nutrition programs through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010. In 2013, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) received a \$100K farm to school grant via the HHFKA to pilot “California Thursdays” (CT). CT was developed through a partnership between the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) and OUSD to increase students’ access to local, fresh, and healthy school meals procured entirely from California. As of January 2017, through the efforts of and leadership provided by CEL, CT has been implemented across 84 districts in California, which together serve over one-third of the one billion school meals distributed in the state each year. CT is an excellent demonstration of the agency of local level actors to respond with innovative action to implement federal policy. The network of CT schools is using farm to school food programs to address a primary goal of the HHFKA: the amelioration of childhood hunger and obesity. Informed by the theory of policy-implementation as a “co-constructed” process, and drawing on data from both a case study of the implementation of CEL’s Rethinking School Lunch planning framework in OUSD and a three-year (2013-2016) ethnographic study of OUSD’s implementation of the HHFKA, this paper examines the factors and enabling conditions that allowed CT to go to scale across 84 districts in California. CT went to scale for three specific reasons: the use of (1) a scaffolding approach to the CT initiative that was implemented through a “collective impact model,” (2) implementation practices that were scalable across different district contexts (urban, rural, large, small), and (3) CEL’s cultivation of positive discourse around the narrative of school lunch. The creation and scaling of CT reflect the ways that local level actors use their agency to develop innovative solutions for promoting educational equity and social justice across various contexts – despite numerous constraints. While CT cannot address the structural inequities that produce childhood hunger and obesity in the first place, it has reshaped the school food landscape in California.

Introduction

During one of my participant observation sessions in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), I watched as Alex Emmott,¹⁷ OUSD's Farm to School Supervisor, led a professional development session for about 80 of the District's food service staff in preparation for an upcoming California Thursdays meal: fish tacos, using grenadier (a fish from a local company called "Real Good Fish," which engages in sustainable fishing practices), and organic strawberries from ALBA Organic Farms in the Salinas Valley. California Thursdays is an innovative farm to school initiative created in 2013 by the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL)¹⁸ and the OUSD Nutrition Services (NS) department to increase students' access to local, fresh, and healthy school meals procured entirely from California. As of January 2017, California Thursdays has been implemented across 84 other districts in California, which together serve over one-third of the one billion school meals served in the state each year (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2016). The California Thursdays model has also been adopted in other states by school districts like New York City (New York Thursdays) and Minneapolis (Minnesota Thursdays) (School Food NYC, 2016; Minneapolis Public Schools, 2016).

As Emmott continued with the training, she told the staff, mostly women of color and immigrants, "ALBA is cooperatively owned, meaning that it is owned by everyone that works there, and helps immigrants, has internship programs, and farms organically." As the staff responded with facial expressions and nods that conveyed that they were impressed with this information, Alex then discussed how strawberries, being a highly perishable crop that grows close to the ground and inviting of pests, are heavily sprayed with pesticides as part of conventional farming practices, and she noted that they are also a fruit that requires hand picking. She then asked, "Who do you think mostly picks strawberries? Men or women?" To which the staff responded in unison "Women!" Emmott replied, "Yes, it is mostly women that pick strawberries, and this has child and maternal health consequences, it affects babies, so by us purchasing our strawberries from ALBA we are supporting moms and kids."

Not only is OUSD's California Thursdays initiative supporting sustainable agricultural and fishing practices, and child and maternal health, it is also promoting what the National Farm to School Network has called "cross-sectoral benefits" of farm to school programs (National Farm to School Network, 2016a). According to the National Farm to School Network (2016a), California Thursdays, and Farm to School programs like it, positively impact and shape public health (through boosting child health and reducing health care costs associated with diet-related diseases, like childhood obesity), local economies (through school food dollars being used to support local farmers and food systems), the environment (through reduction of packaging and food transportation miles), and education (through experiential learning within school garden and nutrition education programs associated with Farm to School).

While the farm to school movement has been growing since the 1990s (National Farm to School Network, 2016b), in 2010, farm to school became embedded within federal policy through the enactment of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) (USDA, 2016). The

¹⁷ Due to the public nature of leadership roles in OUSD's Nutrition Services (NS) Department and central office, as well as its community partner organizations, such as the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL), real names of these individuals are used with permission from the study's participants. However, OUSD school sites and their food service staff are not named to protect confidentiality.

¹⁸ CEL is a non-profit organization in Berkeley, California, which has been working in partnership with OUSD NS on various school food projects since 2009 and has been working to implement farm to school programs and local food programs for schools since 1995 (Z. Barlow, personal communication, December 10, 2016).

HHFKA is the most recent reauthorization of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)¹⁹, and endeavors to “reduce childhood hunger, [and] improve the nutritional quality of meals to promote health and address childhood obesity” (S. Rep. No. 111-178, 2010, p. 2). Both childhood hunger and obesity are preventable health threats that significantly and negatively impact children’s overall health, long-term well-being, and quality of life (Holben & Taylor, 2015; Pyle, Sharkey, Yetter, Felix, Furlong, & Poston, 2006). As part of Congress’ efforts to redress these problems, the HHFKA established a Farm to School program within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (which administers the NSLP/HHFKA at the federal level) and mandated the USDA to “assist eligible schools, State and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and nonprofit entities through grants and technical assistance to implement farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in eligible schools” (Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, 2010, Sect. 243, 2010).

The case of California Thursdays is an excellent demonstration of the agency of local policy implementation actors²⁰ and their role as change agents through their translation of federal level policy goals (outlined in the HHFKA) into meaningful actions that can advance educational equity and social justice at the local level. As stated by USDA Secretary Vilsack, “Children’s ability to learn in the classroom and reach their fullest potential depends on what we do right now to ensure their health” (as quoted in USDA, 2016d). Several studies have demonstrated that insufficient access to healthy food has a negative impact on students’ health, cognitive development, and academic outcomes (Holben & Taylor, 2015; Taras, 2005; Nestle, 2002). And others have shown that healthier students learn better (Basch, 2011). Moreover, childhood hunger and obesity disproportionately impact children along intersecting lines of gender, race, and class with rates of prevalence being substantially higher than the national average among Black and Hispanic households, single-parent families, and households with low educational attainment and incomes near or below the federal poverty line (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014; Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014).

School food policies (such as the HHFKA) and programs like Farm to School and California Thursdays, which increase students’ access to nutritious food, are especially significant in districts such as OUSD where 71.4 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (OUSD, 2016). These initiatives are also a critical resource for all students who experience food insecurity at home and rely on the school meal program for a substantial portion of their daily caloric intake and nutritional needs (Cullen, 2016; USDA, 2016d). Therefore, I argue that the amelioration of childhood hunger and obesity through school food programs promotes educational equity and is thus a form of social justice.

This study asks: What factors and enabling conditions allowed California Thursdays to go to scale across 84 other districts in California? Before answering this question, I first situate the case of California Thursdays in relationship to the broader context of education reform by providing a brief history of scholarship on education policy implementation. I then introduce the

¹⁹ The NSLP, also known as the Child Nutrition Act (CNA), is reauthorized every five years with the HHFKA being its newest iteration. The HHFKA was due to be reauthorized on September 30, 2015. However, Congress allowed that deadline to pass, which means that child nutrition programs will continue operating under the 2010 legislation guidelines until they complete the reauthorization process. On December 6, 2016, U.S. Senator Pat Roberts, and Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, announced in a press release that the reauthorization process will not happen under the 114th Congress (Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, 2016). As of November 2017, it has not been reauthorized, which means that HHFKA still stands.

²⁰ “Local actors” includes both OUSD and CEL staff.

“co-construction” theory of policy implementation (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002) as a useful analytic framework for explicating my findings regarding the factors and enabling conditions that allowed California Thursdays to scale across 84 other districts in California. Finally, while the case of California Thursdays has encouraging implications for the role of education policy and schools in the promotion of educational equity and social justice, I conclude on a critical note. Specifically, I argue that the larger issue of childhood hunger and obesity that the HHFKA, and, subsequently, California Thursdays and Farm to School programs attempt to redress reflects a larger problematic of the “educationalized welfare state” (Kantor & Lowe, 2013), or the American predilection for using and relying on education reform as a substitute for public policies that attend to poverty and social inequality.

Education Policy Implementation: A Brief Review

Early education policy studies (1960s-1970s) conceptualized the policy process as a techno-rational endeavor and top-down, unidirectional process (Honig, 2006). Policy outcomes were evaluated along the criteria of “fidelity to design”—that is, how closely subjects followed policy-makers’ guidelines (Odden, 1991). And policy failure was largely understood as the result of conflicts of interest between policy-makers and local level implementation actors, or “street level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980), and inadequacies or disinclinations to carry out policy makers’ intentions in a faithful manner (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). However, these perspectives “assume a relatively direct relationship between federal policy ‘inputs,’ local responses, and program ‘outputs’” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 11); and they lack capacity to explain the “multi-dimensional character of the policy process” (Hupe & Hill, 2016, p. 104), and the way that variation is produced when a policy moves from text to enactment at the local level (Hupe, 2014; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012).

During the 1970s-1990s, scholars began to have more dynamic understandings of the policy process; for example, as one of “mutual adaptation” (McLaughlin, 1990) between a policy and sites of implementation. More specifically, “. . . a two-way process of adaptation, in which the [policy] is modified to suit the institution, and the institution changes in some degree to accommodate the [policy]” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974, p. 10). Furthermore, scholars also started to consider the ways in which context (local level variation) matters to the implementation process. Specifically, policy studies began to account for how factors such as “size, intra-organizational relations, commitment, capacity, and institutional complexity molded [different] responses to policy” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 10). However, this era of policy scholarship did not engage questions regarding what “dimensions of context...mattered, under what conditions they mattered, whether context could be attended to, and if it could, how policy makers should do so” (Honig, 2006, p. 7).

Policy implementation studies from the 1990s to the present have engaged in explicit considerations of the ways that context matters to implementation through analyses that have explored the ways that “policies, people, and places” (Honig, 2006) influence implementation in specific ways and interact to produce variability in policy outcomes. The most salient aspects of this body of scholarship have been the use of sociocultural approaches to the study of education policy (for example, studies that investigate the policy process through an anthropological lens and that use qualitative methods, such as ethnography) (Levinson & Sutton, 2001); and scholarship that has broadened our understandings about who counts as actors and stakeholders in the implementation process and the ways in which they influence outcomes in substantive

ways (McLaughlin, 2006). For example, Coburn (2005) has explored how “nonsystems actors,” such as “independent professional development providers, reform organizations, publishers, and universities...promote, translate, and even transform policy ideas as they carry them to teachers” (p. 23). And Honig (2004) has investigated the role of “intermediary organizations”²¹ in their “operat[ion] between policy makers and implementers to affect changes in roles and practices for both parties” (p. 65).

Taken together, contemporary policy studies have illuminated the ways in which the implementation process is a “complex social practice” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 1) and draw attention to the fact that although federal policies provide authoritative statements to guide enactment at the local level, “policy still has to be negotiated and implemented through interaction” (Hargreaves, 1985, p. 43). Policies are therefore mediated by actors through their daily work activities, or implementation practices, which involve “sensemaking” (Spillane, 2004; Coburn, 2001), meaning that actors’ interpret policy texts from different positionalities, which subsequently influences how policies are adapted (through interaction and negotiation) to local contexts in distinct ways; furthermore, these variegated policy spaces reflect different regional and institutional histories and cultures – all of which mediate policies to produce variation of outcomes across contexts.

The development of California Thursdays reflects the complex nature of the implementation process and illustrates what Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead (2009) refer to as policy “appropriation.” OUSD NS actors, in partnership with the Center for Ecoliteracy, appropriated federal school food policies and programming at the local level as is evidenced by their creation of an initiative that is unique to their context and implementation process. The emergence of California Thursdays in Oakland demonstrates that implementation actors are not just passive receivers of top-down policy directives; instead they are “active agents [of change], not just responding to but making policy” (Datnow, et. al., 2002, p. 13). In fact, CEL had been working on farm to school programs for fifteen years prior to the passage of the HHFKA in 2010 and thus helped create the larger context that led to the inclusion of farm to school in federal policy. Therefore, accounting for the ways that context mattered for producing California Thursdays is important for extending knowledge regarding “what works for whom and under what conditions” (Honig, 2006; Means & Penuel, 2005).

²¹ The Center for Ecoliteracy, and its role as an intermediary organization and in the scaling of California Thursdays beyond Oakland, will be discussed in the findings section.

However, my case study of California Thursdays also extends this knowledge in that the initiative has successfully²² traveled and been implemented across a diverse array of contexts²³ (84 different districts²⁴) (Cohen-Vogel, Tichnor-Wagner, Allen, Harrison, Kainz, Socol, & Wang, 2015). Given this success, what factors and enabling conditions explain California Thursdays ability to scale across the state? The theory of education policy implementation as a process that is co-constructed across interrelated contexts (Datnow, et al., 2002) provides a useful framework for exploring and answering this question.

Education Reform: A Co-Constructed Process

The theory of “co-construction” was developed by Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan (2002) in their study, *Extending Educational Reform from One School to Many*, which explored the process of “scaling up,” or the intentional replication of education reforms across school districts with different implementation contexts. The theory is based on four separate longitudinal qualitative studies that took place during the time frame of 1996-2000, throughout different locations within the United States, and in which the authors investigated the scaling up of seven “externally developed reform designs.”²⁵ These external reforms, which Datnow, et al. (2002) define as “model[s] for school improvement that [were] developed by an organization external to the school or district” (p. 2), were “whole-school” reform models that focused on changing pedagogical practices, school culture, or the organizational structure of school districts. The design teams that constructed the models also operated “somewhat according to a ‘franchise approach’ [in that they] grant a school the right to the reform design and assume that the school

²² Success is being defined here as a district’s commitment to implement California Thursdays per the letter they are asked to sign by the Center for Ecoliteracy when joining the California Thursdays network. As discussed later on, CEL assesses districts first to gauge their capacity before inviting districts to join. Those that accept the invitation agree to serve a California Thursdays meal (reimbursable meal, freshly prepared with CA-grown ingredients) in at least 25% of district schools at least one Thursday per month for the first school year’s participation, and every Thursday for the second school year’s participation in the implementation of California Thursdays. Participating districts also commit to working toward increasing the frequency or offerings of California Thursdays meals throughout the week (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2016b). While an analysis of the specific district implementations is outside the scope of this paper, some districts have moved from just serving produce to adding local proteins and/or grains, and some have moved from serving it once per month to once per week. Because California Thursdays is an initiative that is meant to meet districts where they are at and supports a “progress-based journey” towards serving a meal in which all items on the plate are fresh, healthy, and procured entirely from California, the initiative is more about incentivizing districts rather than punishing them if they cannot meet the agreed-upon commitment. As relayed to me by Jonathan Foley, CEL’s California Thursdays Network Coordinator, CEL “understands that occasionally there can be roadblocks or delays in implementation or growth, and that each school district is unique and that change takes time. The program is certainly not about pressuring districts to conform to an exact course of action, rather to offer the support and resources of a connected network to help us all to progress together. We understand the importance of being flexible” (personal communication, November 22, 2016).

²³ Since 2013, California Thursdays has expanded from OUSD to “15 [other] school districts in 2014, to 42 districts in 2015, and to 58 districts in 2016” (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2016). It is now in 84 districts in California as of November 2016.

²⁴ Districts participating in the implementation of California Thursdays “reflect the tremendous diversity of California and represent different regions of the state (from San Diego to Sacramento), different scales (from Los Angeles to Turlock Unified School Districts), and different communities (urban, suburban, and rural)” (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2015c, p. 3).

²⁵ The externally developed reform designs studied by Datnow, et al. (2002) include Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Audrey Cohen College System of Education, The Coalition of Essential Schools, Comer School Development Program, Core Knowledge Sequence, Modern Red School House, and Success for All.

will use the entire package of standardized components, including manuals, materials, and training” (Datnow, et al., 2002, p. 5).²⁶

Datnow, et al. (2002) illuminate how the enactment of external reforms across multiple contexts involves much more than “mutual adaptation” between policies and institutions (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Instead, the authors demonstrate that “educational innovations play out as social, negotiated features of school life” (Datnow, et al., 2002, p. 11) on a “contested terrain” (Ogza, 2000) whereby the implementation process is shaped by local politics, power (along intersections of gender, race, and class), and by the interrelationship of local level and macro sociocultural and structural forces. Their theory of co-construction attempts to capture the complex and dynamic nature of the policy implementation process through an analytic framework, or heuristic, that accounts for three dimensions of education reform/the change process: (1) a relational sense of context, (2) perspective and power, and (3) the interplay between structure, culture and agency.

After describing my methods of data collection and analysis, I will provide a brief description of each dimension of the theory of co-construction. However, this paper is primarily informed by the relational sense of context dimension in that it best explains the factors and enabling conditions that facilitated the process and enabling of California Thursdays going to scale: the case highlights “how the scale up of reforms, and school improvement more generally, is constructed through the interaction of multiple institutions and individuals” (Datnow, et al., 2002, p. 2). I return to this point later in my findings section to explain how the emergence and scaling of California Thursdays is the product of co-construction between the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) and OUSD, and the role that CEL plays as an “intermediary organization” (Honig, 2004) for a statewide network of 84 school districts that are implementing the initiative across California.

Methods

Data Collection

This paper asks: What factors and enabling conditions allowed California Thursdays to go to scale across 84 other districts in California? To answer this question, I used data from both a case study of the implementation of CEL’s Rethinking School Lunch planning framework in OUSD, for which I was a research associate²⁷ and a parallel, three-year (2013-2016) qualitative case study of the implementation of the HHFKA in OUSD, which I conducted.

²⁶ California Thursdays also takes somewhat of a franchise approach in that participating districts use open source, trademarked materials that promote the California Thursdays brand. However, a key difference is that rather than California Thursdays being an externally developed model, it was co-developed by both OUSD and the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL). The model also continues to evolve as part of a partnership between CEL and the 84 districts that are implementing the initiative and part of the California Thursdays network.

²⁷ The official name of the case study of the implementation of Rethinking School Lunch (RSL) in OUSD is *Rethinking School Lunch Oakland: Comprehensive School Meal Program Reform to Increase Equitable Access to Healthy Food, Establish Career Pathways in Sustainable Agriculture, and Improve Local Food Systems*. For this paper, I drew data from three key informant interviews (two of which were conducted by one of the Principal Investigators of the RSL Oakland (RSLO) case study, Moira O’Neill, and one of which I conducted). For quotes drawn from RSLO interviews, I include an “RSLO Case Study, 2016” citation. Finally, I also drew on data from documents collected from CEL under the RSLO case study: one internal report and CEL’s two USDA Farm to School Grant applications for Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016. The RSLO case study was funded by the Berkeley Food Institute and the TomKat and Stupski Foundations. More information regarding the RSLO case study can be found

The three-year qualitative case study employed ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, to observe and document the unfolding of the policy implementation process at the local level and over time (Yin, 2014; Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). As stated by Datnow, et al. (2002), actors' participation in "school reform [is] found in the mundane details of the everyday life of the school – getting meetings set up, assigning tasks, [and] carrying them out" (p. 11). These "mundane details" as well as implementation actors' sensemaking processes were documented within ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) collected from 60 hours of participant observation at OUSD cafeteria sites and staff professional development and other meetings, as well as informal conversations with key informants. I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 key informants²⁸ (some of whom were interviewed multiple times) involved with the implementation of the HHFKA in OUSD and the creation and development of California Thursdays.

In addition to the field notes and interview transcripts, the full study draws data from over 700 pages worth of documents (the bulk of which were Congressional documents regarding the reauthorization of the HHFKA); this paper focuses on over 100 documents specifically related to California Thursdays. These documents include marketing materials, local media articles and press releases, OUSD NS and CEL's USDA Farm to School grant applications, OUSD NS and CEL's internal and public reports, and emails from the California Thursdays Network, which is a listserv that serves as an online forum for districts that are participating in the implementation of California Thursdays. These documents illuminate various implementation practices and the factors and enabling conditions that led to California Thursdays going to scale.

Data Analysis

MAXQDA software was used to perform a content analysis of these data using deductive and inductive codes that identified cross-cutting themes, patterns, and anomalies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). My focus was actors' policy implementation practices, which "indexed" (Ochs, 1992) the "processes of interpretation and recontextualization – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualized practices" (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 3); practices include local level actors' expressed beliefs (in interviews, press releases, internal reports, and emails on the California Thursdays Listserv) about the role of school food in addressing broader intersecting social and educational issues, values (commitments and priorities), sensemaking (interpretations of the HHFKA and California Thursdays and their application to the local level as reflected in programmatic practices), negotiation of interpersonal/institutional and geographical constraints (for example, facilities limitations or balancing the cost of food and labor), and tools and strategies used to enable California Thursdays to go to scale (for example, professional development, recipe development, sharing of best practices, coordinated events, trademarking, branding and marketing).

Dimensions of Co-Construction

Relational Sense of Context

at <http://ced.berkeley.edu/events-media/news/uc-berkeley-faculty-to-study-oakland-schools-lunch-program>

²⁸ Key informants included OUSD NS administrative and school site cafeteria staff, FoodCorps service members (an OUSD partner organization that places members at school sites to engage in school food procurement, nutrition education, and garden education), and CEL's co-founder and leadership staff.

A relational sense of context accounts for the interrelationship between the broader social context in which reforms are produced and the local contexts in which policies are implemented. This means that policy implementation actors are situated within a larger social context, which both impacts the local level conditions in which they work and influences how they interpret policy texts that, in turn, shape their implementation practices and mold their responses to policy directives. As argued by Datnow, et al. (2002), implementation actors are “part of a complex dynamic, shaping and shaped by the structural and cultural features of school and society” (p. 13). This dynamic is reflected in the case of California Thursdays: it is both a local level response to federal policy (HHFKA) and a “bottom-up” initiative that has gone to scale that, as my findings will show, is reshaping the school food landscape in California. The initiative also demonstrates how contexts or different levels within a policy system are interrelated and mutually constitutive of one another. More specifically, California Thursdays (as an outcome of the implementation of the HHFKA in OUSD) reflects how “interactions in one policy context generate ‘outcomes,’ such as policy statements, new rules or procedures, which in turn potentially condition the interaction of other actors in other contexts in the policy chain” (Datnow, et al., 2002, p. 12).

Perspective and Power

Local level actors are “not just passively responding to directives mandated from higher levels of bureaucracies....” (Datnow, et al., 2002, p. 13). Instead, they play an active role in the implementation process through their appropriation of policy to the local level and are therefore makers of policy as well (Levinson, Winstead, & Sutton, 2009). However, implementation actors are differentially positioned within social hierarchies along lines of gender (Datnow, et al., 2002), race and class (Dumas & Anyon, 2006), which both influences interpretations of policy and enables or constrains actors’ implementation practices.

In the context of the HHFKA and in relationship to California Thursdays, OUSD’s NS Department and its food service workers are in a marginalized position within the district (meaning they lack power in the OUSD system).²⁹ This issue of marginalization is the consequence of how school meal programs are funded (at the federal level through meal reimbursements rather than integrated into a district’s general fund, which means they must operate as self-sustaining enterprises). Furthermore, key informant interviews revealed that OUSD NS and its food service workers do not think they are viewed by staff (principals, teachers, and other school site staff) as playing an important role in the educational mission of schools – even though both the OUSD NS administrative and school site staff felt that they play a significant role in ensuring that children are not hungry and have the nutritional foundation they need to engage in the learning process. The success of California Thursdays reflects the agency of OUSD NS employees (at the administrative level) despite these constraints. However, because of the school meal program and its employees’ marginal position in OUSD, to achieve the broader goals of the HHFKA, OUSD NS had to secure outside private and public funding as well as assistance from community partners to achieve the broader goals of the HHFKA (redressing childhood hunger and obesity). This marginal position of OUSD’s school meal

²⁹ Key informants (in interviews and informal conversations) stated on numerous occasions that OUSD NS’ food service workers (primarily comprised of women of color and immigrants whose primary language is not English) are the lowest paid in the district.

program and its food service workers reflects the ways that perspective and power operate within the school food context.

The Interplay between Structure, Culture, and Agency

This dimension of the theory of co-construction highlights the way that broader structural and cultural forces both constrain and enable implementation actors' work, but do not determine outcomes (as reflected by the creation of California Thursdays). Implementation actors have agency through the mediating influence of the local context. Taking the case of school food as an example of this dynamic, a policy, specifically, the HHFKA, seeks to address the issues of childhood hunger and obesity. The problem of childhood hunger and obesity reflects larger social structural problems, while the use of schools and education policy to ameliorate these issues reflects a cultural one. Critical food systems scholars have argued that diet related issues, such as childhood hunger and obesity, are manifestations of structural inequality, or the unequal distribution of resources in society, such as access to nutritious food and healthy built environments (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Guthman, 2011; Paarlberg, 2010; Larson, Story, & Nelson, 2009; Patel, 2008; Poppendieck, 1998).

Regarding the cultural component, the HHFKA is a quintessential example of the American inclination for employing education policy as a mechanism for improving education and society (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), as well as making use of public schools as "agencies of broad social welfare" (Tyack, 1992, p. 28). Childhood hunger and obesity impact students' academic experiences and outcomes (Basch, 2011; Taras, 2005). And because the HHFKA places the resolution of these issues in the realm of education policy and schools (a tall order), the development of California Thursdays reflects the agency (albeit constrained) and ability of implementation actors to develop local level responses to larger structural and cultural issues.

Findings

How Context Mattered in OUSD: The Emergence of California Thursdays

School food reform is not separate from school reform; it's part of the basic work we have to do in order to correct systemic injustice, pursue equity, and give our children the best future possible. We are committed to building a school district that provides quality education and equitable outcomes for all children—and to make this goal a reality, we have to create conditions that allow children to grow and learn at high levels. This starts with taking care of our students' most basic needs, such as nutrition, so they can develop and reach their full potential. (Tony Smith, as quoted in OUSD, 2012, p. 47)

In 2011, under the leadership of then OUSD Superintendent Tony Smith, the district adopted Community Schools, *Thriving Students: A Five-Year Strategic Plan (2011- 2016)*. The mission of the strategic plan was to address out-of-school factors that impact students' academic achievement through the creation of "a Full Service Community District that serves the whole child, eliminates inequity, and provides each child with excellent teachers for every day" (OUSD, 2011, p. 1). During the 2010-2011 school year, the OUSD Nutrition Services (NS) Department partnered with CEL to conduct a Rethinking School Lunch Oakland (RSLO) Feasibility Study (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2011). The study evaluated OUSD's school food

program using CEL’s “Rethinking School Lunch” (RSL) planning framework³⁰ to assess the district’s capacity for implementing comprehensive school food systems change – an essential component of the district’s transition to a full-service community school district³¹ (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2013a). As stated by OUSD’s communications officer at the time, Troy Flint,

We are trying to build America’s first full-service community school district where every public school in Oakland provides not only high quality instruction and rigorous academics but also a full range of wrap-around services that promote high achievement.... Wrap-around services include access to health care, mental health care, dental and eye care, language acquisition courses, nutrition and recreational services.... We expect a lot of our kids and if we want them to achieve at high levels we need to ensure that the conditions exist that can promote achievement.... A student who is not healthy or is not well-fed is most likely going to be inattentive and a less effective student. One way to address this social need and make progress toward our academic goals is to make sure every child is well fed and not just that they are full but also that they are fed with nutritious offerings. (as quoted in Adams, 2012, para. 8-10)

The findings of the feasibility study revealed that the greatest barrier to OUSD’s transformation of its school food system is decaying and inadequate cafeteria facilities. OUSD has 89 schools that are served by the NS Department, of which 25 have “cooking kitchens” where meals are cooked and prepared on site. Three of these kitchens are “central kitchens,” which cook, prepare and package both breakfast and lunches for delivery to OUSD’s 64 “satellite kitchens” (school sites without kitchens or facilities to do any cooking). The district serves 6.6 million meals a year: 73 percent of those meals are prepared by these three central kitchens (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2011, p. 6). The high need for school meals (84.4 percent of OUSD’s students qualify for free and reduced-lunch) coupled with a lack of adequate facilities has placed a strain on OUSD’s central kitchens. The district’s main “Central Kitchen, at Prescott Elementary School, was designed to serve 8,000 meals a day [and] it is currently preparing 20,000” (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2011, p. 6).

Moreover, the study also found that most of the equipment across the District’s 25 cooking kitchens is outdated or lacking in functionality. I observed this issue during one of my participant observation sessions at the Prescott central kitchen where I watched a food service staff member work with an industrial sized can opener. As I observed the staff member’s process of having to continuously reposition and adjust a large can of tomato sauce to get it open, I was told that the device was basically broken. Hence, a task that should only take a few seconds required a minute or more (an inefficient and time-consuming process that adds up when needing to prepare 20,000 meals a day).

The study also detailed how inadequate facilities and lack of functional equipment were limiting OUSD NS’ ability to engage in extensive “scratch cooking” and serving of freshly prepared food procured from local suppliers – a situation that required a heavy reliance on pre-

³⁰ The RSL planning framework presents ten interrelated pathways to address school food system reform in a comprehensive way (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2010).

³¹ In a press release from CEL regarding the implementation of California Thursdays in Oakland schools, the work of OUSD’s school food transformation was specifically linked to the Strategic Plan: “The Center for Ecoliteracy is working closely with [Jennifer] LeBarre to transform the district’s meal program in support of Superintendent Tony Smith’s strategic plan to overcome inequities and raise academic achievement in Oakland schools” (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2013a).

made meals purchased from Sysco (a global distributor of food products), such as frozen burritos that OUSD cafeterias can just heat and serve (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2011). As stated by a FoodCorps service member, “School food is so industrialized. A lot of the food products are packaged, they’re frozen, they’re preserved. We [used] to buy everything through Sysco [which means] that [the food we purchase has] already gone through a massive transit process to get to [OUSD]”. These conditions are the result of stretching “limited federal dollars [over] a long way for school meals, [and thus] many districts have had to rely on big, out-of-state food manufacturers and processors, even as California grows the most fruits and vegetables in the country” (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2013b). This situation has greatly limited the opportunity for NS school site staff to cook school meals and has also diminished the quality of their work environments (as reflected by the can opener example), which, by extension, impacts the mealtime experience for OUSD’s students.

The cafeteria experience for students is an important consideration for school meal programs because they are primarily funded by a federal reimbursement for each qualifying meal served. “Full-priced lunches” are somewhat of a misnomer since they are also subsidized through the NSLP, with paid, reduced-price, and free lunches being reimbursed at a rate of \$0.44, \$2.99, and \$3.39, respectively (USDA, 2016c). This amount, together with a California state reimbursement rate of \$0.23 (California Department of Education, 2017) and fees paid for lunches by students, is used by school meal programs to cover the cost of labor, facilities, equipment, and food. In the case of OUSD, as relayed to me by Alex Emmott, this leaves the NS department with about \$1.25 to spend on the ingredients for a five-component meal that includes a serving of milk, fruit, vegetable, protein, and whole grains that must adhere to the HHS’s nutritional guidelines. Therefore, driving student participation is an important component of not only maintaining the fiscal solvency of districts’ school meal programs but also meeting the goals of the HHS: mitigating childhood hunger and obesity, which negatively impact students’ educational experiences and academic achievement.

My participant observation sessions across school sites and informal conversations and interviews with food service staff revealed frustration with the way that deficient facilities and equipment impeded their ability to do their jobs. The quote below illustrates this frustration:

So, as staff we may be asked to, for example, make a parfait and are told to use a fourth of a cup of granola, but we don’t have a fourth of a cup. We don’t have a scoop that’s a fourth of a cup, so we are asked to do things that we can’t do because we don’t have the right equipment. And I think that’s beyond frustrating because when we ask [NS] for equipment, we’re told it can’t be bought because there’s not enough money. So, that’s difficult. There was a professional development session last week regarding salad bars. And this woman said that she can’t follow a recipe because she doesn’t have a can opener. So basically, she’s never put beans on her salad bar because she doesn’t have a can opener. And I guarantee you, like she would get written up for that but like how’s she supposed to open it if she doesn’t have a can opener? So, I think that that’s frustrating for people. We get asked to do things and don’t have the tools or equipment we may need to do it.

Another critical finding from the feasibility study was that even though OUSD NS had developed a Farm to School plan during the 2009-2010 school year, which developed criteria and goals for sourcing local ingredients for school meals, the District’s facility limitations

(specifically, a lack of an adequately-sized central kitchen) prevented the department from achieving those goals.³² As a result of these findings, the RSLO Feasibility Study created a plan of action, which included a budget and timeline, for a comprehensive reform of OUSD's school food system. A central component of the plan was a recommendation that the district renovate its facilities as the primary effort in advancing the NS Farm to School plan and OUSD's vision of becoming a full-service community school district. Specifically, the study provided detailed recommendations for the development of a district-wide network of school kitchens, gardens, and produce markets, with a central kitchen and one-acre instructional farm at the core of this network. OUSD adopted the study recommendations into a Nutrition Services Master Plan, as part of the OUSD 2012 Facilities Master Plan (OUSD, 2012), and received unanimous approval from the Board of Education.

OUSD then used the proposed central kitchen project as the centerpiece of its Measure J campaign (which was co-chaired by Zenobia Barlow, CEL's Executive Director). Measure J was a 2012 bond measure of \$475 million to finance facilities improvements in OUSD,³³ outlined in the District's 2012 Facilities Master Plan, of which \$44 million was earmarked for the central kitchen project (OUSD, 2012) (now referred to as "The Center") (for further information regarding The Center, see OUSD, 2016b). The Center was supposed to be completed and operational by the 2016-2017 school year, but construction did not officially begin until April 7, 2016 (OUSD, 2016c) and is now slated to be completed by sometime in 2018 (OUSD, 2016d). Among one of the reasons for the project's delay was that in April of 2013, Tony Smith, the central kitchen project's key champion, resigned from his position as OUSD's Superintendent. His departure in June of 2013 created a lack of continuity in advancing the vision and support needed within OUSD to keep the project moving forward as planned (O'Neill, 2016). Data drawn from interviews for the RSLO case study showed that the District's leadership transition between Tony Smith (2009-2013), former OUSD Board Member and Interim Superintendent Gary Yee (2013-2014), and Superintendent Antwan Wilson (July 2014-December 2016)³⁴ left the central kitchen project in somewhat of a limbo state as key players involved with its implementation left OUSD during the leadership changeover process (O'Neill, 2016).

Taking California Thursdays to Scale

This study explores the factors and enabling conditions that allowed California Thursdays to go to scale across 84 other districts in California. This research finds that California Thursdays

³² The OUSD Farm to School Plan was developed in partnership with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) through a series of community engagement sessions in Oakland (Emmott, 2013, p. 2) that brought stakeholders together, such as parents, students, community activists and public health administrators to discuss what, exactly, the Farm to School movement is; and to find out what the community wanted in a Farm to School program (Mason, 2010). The final plan prioritized 25 percent of all produce purchases being procured from local sources by the end of the 2012-2013 school year and defined "local" as within a 250-mile radius of Oakland. It also set forth goals regarding purchasing fresh, sustainable, and organic/pesticide free produce, an increase in purchases from small and medium-sized family farmers and the labeling of farm name and location of all produce purchased from distributors; and finally, the implementation of Farm to School education programs in schools (Emmott, 2013, p. 1).

³³ Measure J only needed a 55% voter approval rate and passed by 83.49% approval from Oakland voters (League of Women Voters of Oakland, 2012).

³⁴ In November of 2016, Superintendent Antwan Wilson announced that he had accepted a new position as Chancellor of Washington, D.C., public schools and left OUSD before the end of the 2016-2017 school year (Tsai, 2016).

went to scale for three specific reasons, which I will explain briefly here and return to in more detail in the remainder of the paper. First, actors employed the use of a “bite-sized implementation strategy” and “progress-based journey,” terms used by CEL to describe what is essentially a scaffolding approach to policy implementation. Specifically, CEL met districts where they were at (baseline level) and then guided them through an implementation process made up of actions (small, manageable tasks) that were the component parts, or building blocks for the co-construction of a desired outcome – in this case serving freshly prepared meals from California grown food in a California Thursdays meal across various districts in the state of California. As defined by Jonathan Foley, CEL’s California Thursdays Network Coordinator,

A California Thursdays meal is a meal that is completely sourced from California-grown ingredients, which is as fresh and as healthy and as nutritious as possible. It’s one thing to serve like a fish stick from California but at the same time that’s not ultimately what the program is about. The program is about trying to improve the nutritional quality of a meal to its ultimate place. We have school districts that are really taking on the challenge of localized and Farm to School purchasing. We have a number of school districts that are purchasing from growers and like fishermen actually that are completely local to their region, and are providing products that are really cleanly sourced. They’re not processed products. We’re trying to move away from processing. Everything should be as fresh as possible, focus on whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and lean protein that’s produced in the most ethically and cleanest way possible. So, while [CEL has] broad definitions of the California Thursdays meal, there’s also a real intention and goal to move California Thursdays to its furthest logical place in terms of quality and procurement.

This scaffolding process, or completion of small, manageable tasks that lead to an ideal California Thursdays meal add up over time to produce a larger impact that results in systems change – specifically, the transformation of school food systems into ones that promote educational equity and social justice.

I refer to these small tasks as “scalable, transformative implementation practices” because when they are used by any district they enable positive, systemic transformation of school meal programs – despite variations in contexts (districts) in which California Thursdays is implemented. These scalable, transformative implementation practices include recipe development and professional development, both of which serve as important drivers of programmatic transformation. And while their evolution in OUSD speaks to the ways that context matters for understanding particular policy outcomes, their transfer to and adaption in other contexts and the way that these practices produce a desired outcome illuminate the ways in which context can be intentionally moderated through transferable approaches to policy implementation.

The second reason California Thursdays went to scale is because the Center for Ecoliteracy served as an “intermediary organization” that took the “bite-sized implementation strategy” and “progress-based journey” approach to implementing California Thursdays and structured it into a “collective impact model.” This model served as a framework for CEL to transplant the transformative implementation practices piloted in OUSD across the districts participating in the scaling of California Thursdays. The model also informed CEL’s recruitment, onboarding and orientation, and organizing of other districts’ participation in the implementation of the initiative through the creation and use of a “California Thursdays Network Listserv.” The

listserv is a communication tool that digitally enables co-construction through learning and the sharing of best practices and resources across CEL and participating districts. The collective impact model also provided the rationale for CEL's use of "Collective Action Days," which were coordinated California Thursdays events across the state that served as "mutually reinforcing activities" – the purpose of which was to strengthen ties across the California Thursdays Network, and the visibility and impact of the initiative across the state.

Finally, another factor that enabled California Thursdays to go to scale was CEL's cultivation of positive discourse through the California Thursdays Network listserv. This cultivation of positive discourse is an intentional activity on the part of CEL and participating districts in the California Thursdays Network to encourage superintendents, principals, teachers, families, students, and the communities in which they are situated to "rethink school lunch." More specifically, the use of positive discourse was a purposeful reframing of the narrative of school lunch from negative and stereotypical associations of the "lunch lady" and the kind of food being served in schools through the fostering of positive images of and experiences with school food programs and food service workers. CEL also trademarked California Thursdays and used branding techniques and marketing campaigns to create a movement for spreading awareness of and excitement about California Thursdays. These three factors and enabling conditions facilitated California Thursdays going to scale and are key to understanding how the initiative is reshaping the school food landscape with the goal of promoting educational equity and social justice in California.

Co-Constructing Solutions from Constraining Conditions. While the limbo status of the building of the central kitchen was a contextual constraint for other changes in OUSD school food, in an interview with Jennifer LeBarre, Executive Director of OUSD NS, it became apparent that the delay ended up being an enabling condition for the creation of California Thursdays. In our discussion, LeBarre told me that CEL and OUSD NS began to brainstorm "what the next thing was that [they] could be doing while waiting for the central kitchen to be done." LeBarre explained,

The Center for Ecoliteracy and I were playing with ideas about how we might extend the Farm to School work that we had already been doing beyond produce, to center of the plate type of things [such as proteins and grains]. And to work on recipe development in preparation for the new kitchen. We still needed to do constant improvement [to the school meal program] and milk it. [OUSD] kids are going to be eating these meals for the next two to three years while we're getting ready to build this kitchen. What can we do to keep tweaking what we're doing?

As Jennifer LeBarre's thinking shows, California Thursdays emerged as part of OUSD NS and CEL working together to resolve local level constraints that were hindering programmatic and policy implementation goals, as well as OUSD NS' school food reform efforts. Furthermore, the idea for California Thursdays, which drew on OUSD NS' other farm to school efforts and CEL's *Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools: A Cookbook and Professional Development Guide*³⁵ (Brennan & Evans, 2011), reflects the beginnings of the co-construction of a solution across multiple individuals and institutional contexts.

³⁵ The *Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools* (2011) is an "open source" cookbook that is freely available online as a PDF for download. It is part of "a suite of publications and projects created by the Center for Ecoliteracy

Taking Root to Grow: Co-Constructing Scalable, Transformative Implementation Practices. California Thursdays began to take root when in May of 2013, Alex Emmott, OUSD NS' Farm to School Supervisor, submitted a USDA Farm to School grant proposal in which she described the purpose of California Thursdays as follows:

As a district serving almost 7 million meals every year, Oakland has an important opportunity to partner with local agricultural producers to make positive systems change, support student well-being, build healthy life-long habits, and promote our economy and environment. The “California Thursdays” program will accomplish this by sourcing an entire school lunch from California once a week at all schools across the district. The meal will meet the USDA guidelines for a reimbursable school lunch and include a protein, grain, and fruit or vegetable. (Emmott, 2013, p. 4)

Five months later, in October 2013, the USDA awarded OUSD NS with a \$100K Farm to School grant for fiscal year 2014 to implement California Thursdays in Oakland. That same month, and coordinated to happen on “Food Day”³⁶ (Thursday, October 23, 2013), OUSD NS launched its first California Thursdays pilot meal: “Chorizo & Greens over Penne Pasta.”

In a press release regarding OUSD receiving the USDA Farm to School Grant for California Thursdays, OUSD NS stated, “In our first pilot CA [*abbreviation in original*] Thursdays menu this year, we served 1200 pounds of organic dinosaur kale; 875 pounds of chorizo; and 2,000 pounds of organic chopped tomatoes—all from California and in one day. We look forward to using the USDA grant to develop and expand this program so it is a weekly institution at OUSD” (OUSD, 2013).

Recipe development. From October 2013 to March 2014, OUSD NS served a California Thursdays meal once a month and piloted dishes such as “Kung Pao Chicken with Bell Peppers,” and “Sesame Noodles with Tofu and Bok Choy”³⁷ (OUSD, 2014b). Through these meals, OUSD NS began to develop co-constructed, transformative implementation practices. For example, OUSD NS, CEL, and OUSD youth participating in the Hope Collaborative³⁸ program partnered to facilitate: “...peer-to-peer taste tests and student-led conversations about what students liked about a meal – how it looked or tasted – and whether or not it would land them in the lunch line to order it. When recipes weren’t drawing students in, [Jennifer LeBarre] and her staff tweaked them until they worked” (Leschin-Hoar, 2014, para. 10).

under the title Rethinking School Lunch.... These productions include ideas and strategies for improving school food, teaching nutrition, supporting sustainable food systems, and designing education programs focused on understanding the relationships between food, culture, health, and the environment” (Brennan & Evans, 2011, p. 11).

³⁶ “Food Day” is a national day of action whereby “thousands of events all around the country bring Americans together to celebrate and enjoy real food and to push for improved food policies.” It is “a day to resolve to make changes in our own diets and to take action to solve food-related problems in our communities at the local, state, and national level” (Food Day, 2016).

³⁷ Both recipes, which are scaled to serve 50 and 100 people, can be found in the Center for Ecoliteracy’s cookbook “Cooking with California Foods in K-12 Schools” at <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/download/cooking-california-food-k-12-schools>.

³⁸ HOPE Collaborative (Health for Oakland’s People & Environment) “is a community collaborative working to support community-driven, environmental changes which will reduce health inequities within the most vulnerable communities of the Oakland flatlands” (HOPE Collaborative, 2016).

This iterative process of recipe co-development—between institutions and individuals, and with a focus on California food—led to increased fortification of local supply chains (through procurement of ingredients for recipes featuring California food); Furthermore, these implementation practices strengthened OUSD NS’ capacity to transform its school food system – even though NS staff were still navigating the constraining condition of inadequate kitchen facilities. As relayed to me by Alex Emmott, OUSD NS Farm to School Supervisor,

Since implementing California Thursdays, we’ve increased [our] humane and sustainable purchases. We’re now procuring local chicken raised without antibiotics. Two times a month we buy about 11,000 pounds every time we menu it. We’re buying local, organic, grass fed ground beef once a month. And we’re buying about 4,000 pounds every time we menu it. We’re now buying organic Community Grains pasta, which is a local Oakland-based company. We’ve been buying Sun West organic brown rice, too, and switched that out from Uncle Ben’s. (RSLO Case Study, 2016)

Professional development. The transformation of OUSD NS’ school food system was further demonstrated on April 24, 2014 when, on “Earth Day,”³⁹ the District launched California Thursdays on a weekly basis with a lunch of “Roasted Lemon Oregano Chicken with California Brown Rice,”⁴⁰ which featured chicken drumsticks raised without antibiotics from Mary’s Chicken in Sanger, CA (OUSD, 2014c). The ability for OUSD NS to procure and serve chicken raised without antibiotics was also an important leverage point in OUSD’s continued effort to transform its school food system (while also evidencing that transformation). As explained by Emmott:

A big piece of California Thursdays was looking at, if we’re going to get better quality meat, and local meats for the menu, what’s needed to really make that happen? We found the missing piece was professional development for our staff, because our staff hadn’t prepared and cooked raw poultry for over a decade. We needed to do that capacity building. To be able to afford high quality pre-cooked local protein was just way outside of our price point. But with some creative recipe design, and creative procurement, we found that we are able to afford locally sourced raw protein. The USDA farm to school grant funded a lot of our professional development so we could make that investment, and make sure that our staff could handle raw chicken safely.

As this statement from Emmott highlights, moving to what NS staff refer to as “center of the plate items,” specifically proteins, required OUSD NS to increase the culinary capabilities of its staff, which was done through professional development in partnership with CEL (another example of the co-construction of California Thursdays). For example, Adam Kesselman, CEL’s former Rethinking School Lunch Program Manager, helped train staff to cook recipes that were developed by OUSD NS and CEL for California Thursdays, such as “Oven-Fried Mary’s Chicken Drums”; Kesselman also worked with 60 of OUSD NS’ cafeteria managers on essential

³⁹ “Earth Day” is a national day of action whereby individuals participate in events, e.g., tree plantings across the nation, to move forward an environmental movement through “channeling human energy toward environmental issues” (Earth Day Network, 2016).

⁴⁰ This recipe can found in the Center for Ecoliteracy’s cookbook “Cooking with California Foods in K-12 Schools” at <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/download/cooking-california-food-k-12-schools>.

knife skills (one of several types of professional development activities) needed for processing ingredients for California Thursdays recipes (California Thursdays Listserv, 2014a).

These new culinary skills served as part of a positive feedback loop whereby OUSD NS staff now had the ability to work with locally procured, fresh ingredients (rather than pre-cooked, processed meals) to make school lunches that kids would find delicious, and therefore, eat. This is important for two reasons. First, driving participation in the school meal program increases the funds that OUSD NS can work with to maintain their services. As articulated by Joyce Peters, OUSD NS' Dietician and Nutrition Educator,

The managers at the school cafeteria sites, they're almost like mini-business people too, because they have to watch the bottom line. If participation goes down, then eventually they're going to lose an employee. Ultimately, if enough kids decide they don't like our lunch entrees, participation goes down. And that impacts our income and the hours for the employees. So, we need to get participation up because we only get paid for the meals that are taken by students.

Second, boosting participation also allows OUSD NS to fulfill its mandate of increasing students' access to nutritious food and fulfilling the larger goals of the HFFKA to address childhood hunger and obesity, which promotes educational equity and social justice. Furthermore, the transformation of OUSD's school food system also extends beyond the district, which speaks to the cross-sectoral benefits of Farm to School programs, like California Thursdays. During the 2014-2015 school year, OUSD bought "approximately \$20,000 worth of chicken each month from Mary's" (Tsai, 2014), which benefited the California economy. This purchase also supported public health efforts in that procuring antibiotic-free chicken contributes to ameliorating increasing antibiotic resistance in the U.S.

As the development of California Thursdays in OUSD illustrates, the initiative enabled a multi-pronged approach for OUSD NS to build out implementation practices that would be transformative of their school food system, specifically, recipe and professional development. These transformative implementation practices also sparked CEL's consideration of how other districts might also benefit from implementing California Thursdays in their own contexts. Chris Smith, CEL's Communications and Development Director, described California Thursdays as: "...one effort, one tool in the toolbox to prepare for the new operations as the District-wide integrated Rethinking School Lunch [Oakland] really took root. However, that particular tool was so impactful that there was a decision made to see if [CEL] could pilot [California Thursdays] statewide" (RSLO Case Study, 2016).

Scaling a "Bite-Sized Implementation Strategy" through a "Progress-Based Journey"

While California Thursdays emerged in OUSD as a response to local contextual constraints, CEL quickly intuited that the initiative would be relevant to other districts engaging in school food reform. As noted by Zenobia Barlow, CEL's Executive Director,

Oakland is not an atypical condition. Out of sheer need, the conditions [in OUSD] created a model that could operate in so many other districts. [California Thursdays] wasn't something we dreamed up in an ivory tower. Something about the aliveness of that process [i.e., creating California Thursdays as a way to reconcile constraints in OUSD]

turned out to be something that many school districts could replicate. (RSLO Case Study, 2016)

This recognition of the initiative's relevance to other districts was based on CEL's experience working in the arena of school food reform since the early 1990's. During that time, CEL was engaging in "statewide efforts to provide Rethinking School Lunch (RSL) seminars to teams from more than 400 cities/towns from 28 states and 11 countries that featured CA leaders in food service" (Z. Barlow, personal communication, December 10, 2016). OUSD's use of California Thursdays demonstrated that it was an effective implementation strategy because of the way that it breaks down the task of serving locally procured, freshly prepared, and healthy school meals into "bite-sized," manageable components, or tasks through recipe and professional development (or scalable, transformative implementation practices). As further elaborated by Chris Smith, California Thursdays is "intended as a bite-sized implementation program designed to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables and freshly prepared food on students' plates. We understand there are complexities and challenges to doing that. We figure one day a week gives us an opportunity to address those" (as quoted in Breier, 2014, para. 18).

The initiative is also an effective systems change strategy in the way the tasks combine to engage specific levers that make up, and can be used to transform, a school food system (such as procurement of local ingredients to develop local supply chains, creating menus featuring fresh and local ingredients to meet nutritional standards set by the HHFKA as well as making food that kids will eat, and increasing staff capacity to prepare a California Thursdays meal, etc.). As described by Kesselman, "California Thursdays is a catalyst for the other days of the week. It's not about changing one thing. It's about looking at the system. Policy changes need to be tied to all the other pieces of systems change. Policy change without a vehicle for it is not necessarily going to be effective. The vehicle needs to bring a very complex system forward."

OUSD NS' success with implementing California Thursdays demonstrates how the initiative is a vehicle for transformative systems change through a scaffolding approach to implementation. OUSD NS showed that serving locally procured, freshly prepared, healthy, and delicious school meals can be broken down into a process of smaller tasks that add up to big changes. This scaffolding process, or "bite-sized implementation strategy" and "progress-based journey," or "PBJ,"⁴¹ was first shown to work in OUSD NS, which started with just one meal, one day, then moved to once per month, and then once per week. This scaffolding process simultaneously built the capacity of OUSD to positively transform its school food system. And it is a process of policy implementation that was transferrable to other contexts and enables the possibility that "someday, maybe every day can be California Thursdays."⁴² As further elaborated by Jonathan Foley, CEL's California Thursdays Network Coordinator,

The California Thursdays model is not a highly pressurized system. It allows for districts to enter into the process at various stages. So, for example, maybe there's a way to incorporate a local ingredient from a farm that is regional or local to a school district; or

⁴¹ The use of the acronym of "PBJ," is an intended pun on Kesselman's part since "PBJ" is a common acronym for peanut butter and jelly. Kesselman coined both "bite-sized implementation strategy" and "progress-based journey" to describe the California Thursdays initiative.

⁴² "Someday, maybe every day can be California Thursdays" is drawn from the last statement in an animated California Thursdays commercial, which can be accessed on the landing page of CEL's California Thursdays website (<http://www.californiathursdays.org/>).

maybe [a district can't do] the entire entree but there's a way that [they] can start with one of the ingredients, or one meal they repeat every month, and then scale up from there. That's happened in a number of the districts, where they really open the door in one direction, and then a couple more have opened behind it, and then it kind of snowballs into a larger chain of success. I think that it's like once they take the first step, it's kind of like the hardest step, but then they have the ability and the know-how of how to source a bit more locally, how to do the procurement. And if they have to do professional development or train staff, that may only have to happen once or twice or three times and then they have all these new skills that they're able to utilize in the kitchen.

The concept of California Thursdays as a “bite-sized implementation strategy” and “progress-based journey” was extended to other districts through CEL and reflects the co-constructed evolution of the initiative across multiple contexts. This is illustrated in an email message from CEL to districts participating in the implementation of California Thursdays:

Some districts expressed concern with their ability to serve a fresh meal featuring 100% California-grown ingredients. So, I want to take this opportunity to remind us that California Thursdays is a journey - in fact, it is a progress-based journey; we are starting with one Thursday a month, expanding to every week, and in time, maybe every day will be California Thursday! We want to focus on doing the best we can, telling the success story of feeding students fresh, healthy California food. For some, maybe success looks like working with one new local vendor and building a relationship between them and your district; for others it might look like featuring a new, fresh entree in elementary schools with plans to expand from there. You may not hit your goal for the program [at first], but you have [time] to continue to innovate by exploring new vendors and ingredients, responding to feedback from students and staff, and building on a successful marketing strategy. Change does not happen overnight, it takes time, and we are excited to support the network through this exciting evolution. (Kesselman, 2015a)

As this section illuminates, the conditions that led to the emergence of California Thursdays in OUSD have had implications for other, interrelated contexts (different districts) and demonstrate how the relational sense of context dimension, outlined in the theory of co-construction, is operating within the case of California Thursdays going to scale.

The Center for Ecoliteracy: An Intermediary Organization

In addition to transformative implementation practices used to engage districts in a “progress-based journey,” another key factor that enabled California Thursdays to go to scale was the role of CEL as an intermediary organization. As defined by Honig (2004), intermediary organizations “occupy the space in between at least two other parties” and “primarily function to mediate or to manage change in both those parties” (p. 67). More specifically, intermediary organizations can “play a crucial role as translator between the top and the bottom of the policy system, and [as discussed in the brief review of education policy implementation literature] suggest a response to a policy implementation dilemma of longstanding, the uneven and unpredictable relationship between policy and practice” (Wechsler & Friedrich, 1997, p. 386).

In Wechsler & Friedrich's (1997) article regarding the role of mediating organizations for school reform, the authors describe the ways that intermediary organizations help facilitate the implementation process through the provision of external resources such as funding and materials, programmatic assistance through on-site support such as consulting and professional development, organizing implementation actors around a common goal (such as serving California Thursdays meals), and fostering a "learning community" through facilitation of information sharing across contexts. CEL's work with OUSD and the other 84 districts participating in the implementation of California Thursdays across the state embodies many of these characteristics in how it recruited and partnered with districts to scale the initiative.

Proving the Concept: Building on Foundations and Strategic Recruitment for Going to Scale. As part of the foundation for taking California Thursdays to scale, CEL was strategic in its effort to demonstrate proof of concept, or the replicable viability of California Thursdays. First, Zenobia Barlow noted that CEL's past "Rethinking School Lunch" (RSL), or intermediary work with food service directors – including three statewide "California Food for California Kids" conferences – had "already forged essential relationships in order to create the underpinnings of a statewide network of skilled innovative food service directors in high performing districts into which to embed the program" (personal communication, December 10, 2016). Second, CEL was also very intentional in recruiting districts that both "demonstrated a level of readiness to take [California Thursdays] on" (Kesselman, as quoted in Breier, 2014, para. 21) and were "the highest performing and most innovative, creative food service directors in the state that could run with [California Thursdays]" (Z. Barlow, RSLO Case Study, 2016).

CEL identified these food service directors through their participation in three of CEL's statewide "California Food for California Kids" conferences,⁴³ where CEL "engaged those leaders in pop up kitchens in which [they] collectively cooked recipes from [Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools (2011)] and carefully constructed professional development experiences that served as the foundation for later scaling the California Thursdays program" (Z. Barlow, personal communication, December 10, 2016). This meant that these districts had the necessary will, leadership, and foundational capacities to take on and adapt California Thursdays to the needs of their districts.

The California Thursdays Network and Listserv: Implementing a "Collective Impact Model." In preparation for taking California Thursdays to scale, in August of 2014, CEL brought together the 15 food service directors they recruited, who as leaders of school meal programs in their districts "collectively serve 190 million meals annually and represent large and small, urban, rural, and suburban districts across the state – to prepare for a statewide rollout of California Thursdays on October 23, 2014" (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2014a). These districts became CEL's first cohort and the "California Thursdays Network" and were the pioneers for CEL's effort to scale California Thursdays.

⁴³ The *Cooking with California Food in K-12 Schools* (Brennan & Evans, 2011) "was the basis for a statewide conference [called "California Food for California Kids"] and cooking school for nutrition services directors and other school reform advocates that included practice with scratch cooking from fresh ingredients, as well as presentation of a range of strategies for change" (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2012). The goal of the conferences is to cultivate "innovative ways to make the 900 million school meals served each year in the state healthier for our kids" (Larson, 2012).

The first cohort of districts committed to collectively implementing the initiative in their districts at the same time. To support the planned statewide rollout, CEL held a California Thursdays day-long orientation session on August 7, 2014, in Berkeley, CA. The agenda for the day included (1) a presentation from Jennifer LeBarre and Alex Emmott regarding their piloting of California Thursdays in OUSD; (2) a session called “Learning from Parents and Kids”⁴⁴; (3) an activity for “How to Run a Taste Test”; and (4) sessions in which participants were walked through a “toolkit”⁴⁵ of resources that [CEL] provided to implement their own California Thursdays programs” and were given “media training” to “prepare [participants] to maximize media coverage and effectiveness” (A. Kesselman, personal communication, December 10, 2016). Participants were also walked through a “detailed statewide rollout calendar” (A. Kesselman, personal communication, December 10, 2016). The calendar was a detailed action plan (and an artifact of the “bite-sized implementation strategy” and “progress-based journey”) that included specific tasks that the districts needed to accomplish in preparation for implementation of California Thursdays. The plan included social media campaigns in addition to the logistics of procuring and preparing staff to serve their launch California Thursdays meal.

After the convening, CEL created a California Thursdays listserv named “A Network of School Food Innovators” to enable communication and coordinated efforts between CEL and the network. This coordinated effort was key in that it structured the scaling of implementing California Thursdays across the state into a “collective impact model.” As relayed to me by Barlow, “collective impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration” (personal communication, December 10, 2016). The concept of “collective impact” was drawn from an article, “Collective Impact” (Kania & Kramer, 2011), that articulates five criteria that organizations must meet to be considered engaging in a collective impact approach to implementation: (1) a common agenda (such as the transformation of school meals into ones that are healthier); (2) a shared measurement system (tools used to measure progress toward the common agenda); (3) mutually reinforcing activities⁴⁶ (such as events that CEL organizes for the California Thursdays Network⁴⁷); (4) continuous communication (frequent communication between actors engaged in a collective impact endeavor, such as CEL’s use of a listserv); and (5) a backbone organization (an organization that operates as an intermediary in its dedication to the

⁴⁴ This session presented results from three different focus groups conducted in July 2014, with parents of children in school districts in Riverside, San Diego, and Berkeley, CA. The focus groups were held to “understand parents’ perceptions and attitudes about their children’s school meal program and the impact of serving more fresh California fruits and vegetables” (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2014a).

⁴⁵ In an interview with Kesselman, he told me that the “tool kit” given to districts initially included “high-resolution graphics to be used to make stickers, posters, shirts, etc.; a design guide on how to use the marketing materials; print-ready posters; press release templates; recipes; student tasting templates; and a strategic timeline leading to their collective launch [of California Thursdays on October 23, 2014].”

⁴⁶ “Mutually reinforcing activities” are any activities that strengthen the bonds of a group that is engaging in collective action.

⁴⁷ One example of these types of events was held on March 16, 2016. The “California Food for California Kids Lunch” was hosted in San Diego in partnership with Supervisor Ron Roberts. The event was “held underneath a white tent in beautiful Waterfront Park, the event brought together regional, state, and national stakeholders from the farm to school community to celebrate our theme *‘what local looks like’*. Nine San Diego school districts were paired with local producers at tables along the periphery of the tent to offer samples of their California Thursdays meals, and insight into the local partnership that made it all possible. The location, showcase tables, and speakers all came together to create a fun and lively atmosphere, highlighting the success of the California Thursdays network” (Foley, 2016).

provision of support for the group participating in a common agenda for a collective impact – case in point, CEL’s role as an intermediary organization for the California Thursdays Network).

In a review of the Network’s listserv archives, there are several instances where this model is articulated to participants in the network. For example, in an email to the listserv from Kesselman regarding the October 23rd rollout of California Thursdays, he announces:

We are excited to work as an innovative network of school districts to promote healthy, freshly prepared meals featuring California ingredients with a **collective voice**, through **collective action**, to achieve a **collective impact** [*emphasis in original*] on the food we serve to California’s children. We want this incredibly innovative and powerful network of schools to shift their procurement more towards California and more towards fresh, and we want to do it collectively. By working together, we can share best practices and form a collective voice that speaks to the importance of serving our children freshly prepared meals made with fresh, California-sourced ingredients; important for the health of our kids, our schools, and the health of our communities. (Kesselman, 2014a)

This collective impact model, expressed in and nurtured by the listserv managed by CEL, was a significant factor in the scaling of California Thursdays. The listserv provided a forum for a process of co-construction since participating districts, including OUSD, and CEL co-developed the initiative for scale through the sharing of best practices and resources.

During the first year of the statewide launch of California Thursdays, as relayed to me by Alex Emmott, districts would reach out to her through personal email communication with programmatic questions and requests for recipes and procurement resources. This is also reflected on the listserv. For example, soon after the first cohort’s orientation, Emmott sent the following email to the listserv:

I’ve had a couple of requests for materials from some folks and thought I would share via the listserv. Here’s a link to my presentation from 8/7, which lists how we define Level 1 and Level 2 California products: [link removed]. Second, here’s a link [link removed] to OUSD’s garden to cafeteria materials. We piloted a garden to cafeteria program last year at a handful of sites - really token amounts of product to start, but it’s something we’re hoping to expand. (Emmott, 2014)

A few days later she received the following request from one of the districts in the network:

“Would you be able to provide the information on the Asian Slaw and the Carrot salad?” (California Thursdays Listserv, 2014c) To which Emmott responded: “Hey Everyone – Here’s the recipes for 3 salads (carrot + two corn salads) attached in excel form. We’re finalizing the Asian slaw recipe & can send that out along with the updated carrot salad recipe shortly. Thanks!” [*formatting in original*] (California Thursdays Listserv, 2014c)

Other best practices shared within the California Thursdays network that shape the continuous co-construction of the initiative include districts, through the encouragement of CEL, sharing innovations to promote their California Thursdays programs. For example, in February 2015, Adam Kesselman discusses the purpose of the network and the listserv (and expresses its role as an intermediary organization in its facilitation of communication and sharing across districts):

The strength of a network is in its ability to aggregate ideas, effort and resources, and to speak and act collectively - in this case, about freshly prepared meals made with California grown ingredients. In order to jumpstart the connecting and sharing of resources, I would like to request that each member district **contribute one resource or idea to the listserv in the next week** [*emphasis in original*]. This might look like a recipe your district enjoys, a training resource, or a product or grower you like to use. (Kesselman, 2015c)

Responses to this type of request include a district sharing their idea of holding a “California Thursdays barbeque” for their students. As described by the district:

We had our kick-off barbecue event on our high school campus last Thursday. We offered a choice of Grilled Chicken Tacos or Grilled Teriyaki Veggie Kabobs, recipes courtesy of one of our district employees and of a local restaurant, respectively. Each meal we served that day was reimbursable, and participation at there [sic] was up by over 300%. We had students come through who had never before stepped foot inside the cafeteria. We built our own little produce stand to feature samples of local tangerines and freshly-picked strawberries that was made available for free to the entire student body. The students went after the fruit like it was candy! We had great feedback from faculty, parents, and students. We are so grateful to be a part of this amazing initiative. (California Thursdays Listserv, 2015a)

In another example of sharing practices, an email from CEL to the network regarding “What the California Thursdays network is up to...”, discusses another district’s use of automatic “robo-calling” tactics to inform parents about California Thursdays being served at their schools:

Hello families! Tomorrow October 15th is Thursday, but not just any Thursday...It’s California Thursday. That means Child Nutrition will be serving up California food for California kids! We are proud to be offering our students Rotisserie Chicken with Cilantro Lime Rice or a whole-grain Bean and Cheese Burrito. Our Farm to School Salad Bar can’t be beat, with fresh, seasonal and local fruit and vegetables. We are also featuring a brand new all locally sourced item at our Middle and High Schools: Margherita Pizza, with sauce made in our own Central Kitchen topped with fresh local sliced tomatoes and basil. We hope to greet your student at lunch tomorrow! (California Thursdays Listserv, 2015b)

Fostering a Learning Community Through the Listserv. As the “robo-call” example illustrates, the sharing of best practices on the listserv shows how districts within the California Thursdays network are a learning community, or a “community of practice”⁴⁸ (Wenger, 1998)

⁴⁸ In Wenger’s (1998) book, *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*, he defines a community of practice as “a living context that can give newcomers access to competence and also can invite a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation. On the other hand, a well-functioning community of practice is a good context to explore radically new insights without becoming fools or stuck in some dead end. A history of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise is an ideal context for this kind of leading-edge learning, which requires a strong bond of communal competence along with a

that enable the co-construction of the initiative across multiple contexts. While CEL facilitates this community of practice, the listserv also provided an opportunity for CEL to learn from approaches, or the implementation processes of each district to adapt California Thursdays to their contexts. This co-learning between CEL and districts is documented within the listserv. CEL often sent email requests to the network requesting an information share to the listserv regarding districts' implementation of California Thursdays. For example, in an email from Kesselman to the listserv he asks for districts to "share three bits of information that will help [CEL] build a better program, and support each other" [*sic*] (Kesselman, 2014b) through the following request:

Successes – can you name some new vendors you found, new products or recipes you used, new methods of serving, or successful presentations and/or marketing efforts?

Challenges – what challenges did you have to overcome in serving a California Thursdays meal, and how did you overcome them? Are you still trying to find solutions to challenges that the network might be able to facilitate?

Where do you look for procurement help? – Many of you have robust farm-to-school programs, others are building stronger local procurement strategies. To what organizations - non-profit or for-profit – do you look to help you put locally sourced, fresh meals on the plates of your students? [*formatting in original*] (Kesselman, 2014b)

While the listserv archives provide several responses to this type of request, one response from a district in the Northern Sacramento area is particularly informative. In this email, the Director of Nutrition Services writes about how their school food program "combined the imagination and innovation of [the district's] kitchen staff and Culinary Club to develop a recipe for Quinoa-Tabbouleh to pair with their locally-sourced rotisserie chicken" (Kesselman, 2016). In the Director's own words:

Our approach towards menu items has changed this past year, prioritizing a shift towards focusing on the customer experience first and working backwards to make it compliant. This menu item, which we serve with our locally sourced rotisserie chicken, is special because it wasn't created by me, but by the kitchen staff and the [district's] Culinary Club. I found that when you get the buy-in from staff of all levels and input from a diverse student population, you end up with a dish that is truly reflective of the community. By myself, I could not come up with an idea like this, but after the student club and kitchen staff worked on it I have come to realize how the dish has taken on the personalities of staff and students. (California Thursdays Listserv, 2016)

As this portion of the email documents, the Director of Nutrition Services shares what they learned from the process of co-constructing recipes through teaming up with the district's student culinary club and its food service staff. The note also highlights the importance of this co-construction for the development of a meal that is "reflective of the community," which the

deep respect for the particularity of experience. When these conditions are in place, communities of practice are a privileged locus for the creation of knowledge" (p. 214).

Director felt was primary to the task of making the meal “compliant”⁴⁹ since it was a “customer service oriented approach” (which reflects the need to drive participation by appealing to a school meal program’s customer base: students). As the Director elaborates:

Looking at, and sampling the rotisserie chicken and quinoa tabbouleh together on a plate, I think to myself, *“This is awesome. It works on so many levels.”* [*italics in original*] Naturally, the students love it too. At a recent meeting, I overheard things like, *“I think we should add more lemon juice to make it acidic,”* or, *“Should we try this recipe with Israeli Cous Cous?”* [*italics in original*] But this is not a Michelin star kitchen, these were conversations our students were having with our kitchen staff about how to introduce whole grain items in our school menu. I am a fan of this customer experience approach when it comes to rolling out whole grains and other menu items. I changed the way I think about menuing items. I no longer create a recipe that I think will be successful and hope my staff will willingly serve it. Now, I try to provide this service where staff and students have input on what we offer, which in turn leads to successful menu items. It is truly a win-win situation for all. (California Thursdays Listserv, 2016)

The Director of Nutrition Services’ response to CEL’s request for information demonstrates two things. First, it shows how communication through the listserv is facilitating a process of learning among districts and CEL. And, second, it also makes visible the ways in which co-construction operated across multiple contexts throughout the process of taking California Thursdays to scale and how all members of this community of practice, through their joint effort participated in a model of collective impact. Finally, the email also reiterates the power of recipe development in the way that it serves as a significant lever (or scalable, transformative implementation practice) for systems change across school meal programs regardless of variation in contexts.

Cultivating Positive Discourse: Reframing the Narrative of School Lunch

As a participant-observer, I worked with Alex Emmott, OUSD’s Farm to School Supervisor, to conduct workshops on three different occasions. One of these workshops was a co-facilitation of “Social Justice, Food Justice, Education, and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)” at the 5th Annual Social Justice Forum on Food Justice hosted by Holy Names University in Oakland, CA. Alex Emmott and I began the workshop by asking participants⁵⁰ to write down what comes to mind when someone says, “school lunch.” When participants shared what they wrote, the word “nasty” (and its synonyms) was a ubiquitous response. Moreover,

⁴⁹ The reference to “compliance” is regarding making the meal meet the HHFKA’s nutritional guidelines. As already discussed, the standard for a California Thursdays meal is that it uses fresh ingredients (not processed ones) and is healthy. Under the HHFKA, a chicken nugget can meet the nutrition standards by, for example, using whole grain breading, and complying with sodium level and calories from fat limits. This does not mean that the chicken nugget is healthy. Therefore, when the Director of Nutrition Services states that they will work backwards to make their California Thursdays meal compliant, the context of this statement is likely about, for example, how to meet serving size requirements for, e.g., proteins, whole grains, etc., for each grade level.

⁵⁰ Approximately 25 people attended the workshop. Participants were from the Bay Area (specifically, Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and San Francisco) and included individuals of various ages (from 60 to 15 years-old), genders, and positionalities (teachers, OUSD students, community members, individuals from non-profit organizations that work with youth and in community health) that were interested in the topic of food justice and its relationship to the school meal program.

statements like “not fresh, “cold,” “packaged,” “fake,” “preservatives,” “not culturally appropriate,” “only option many have,” and “ketchup as a vegetable” expressed the negative associations that people can have with school food.

These negative associations, or descriptions, of school food reflect a form of discourse in the way that they attribute contextual meanings to school lunch beyond the food itself. For example, the “ketchup as a vegetable” statement harkens back to the Reagan era, specifically, the President’s Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, which cut subsidies to many social programs such as the NSLP. One of the ways that the administration tried to save money was to allow ketchup to be counted as a vegetable under the school lunch program’s nutrition standards (see Poppendieck, 2010 and Levine, 2008 for a more detailed history of the impacts of the Reagan administration on the NSLP). Likewise, the statement that school lunch is “the only option many have” reflects a larger social issue of inequitable access to food in the U.S. These statements constitute a type of narrative about school lunch. California Thursdays offers an alternative discourse, one that is positive and that is reframing how individuals in districts exposed to the initiative might think about and characterize school lunch.

This positive discourse has been intentionally cultivated by CEL in two ways. The first is what I refer to as “internal positive discourse” to describe the empowering and affirming ways in which CEL communicated with districts, and the ways in which districts in the network communicated with one another internally through email exchanges on the California Thursdays network listserv. The second form of positive discourse cultivated by CEL – through trademarking and branding of California Thursdays, and marketing of the program through multiple forms of media such as press releases, local television, online newspapers, and social media campaigns – is what I refer to as “external positive discourse.” This term is used to describe the ways that CEL engaged in efforts to influence external public perceptions of school meal programs.

Internal Positive Discourse. CEL’s use of internal positive discourse through the listserv appears to have positively influenced the way that food service workers are thinking about and describing their work. For example, after the first cohort’s orientation for the statewide roll-out of California Thursdays, one Director of Food Services from a district in the network emailed the listserv to say:

Center for Ecoliteracy,

I just wanted to say thank you for a wonderful event, jam packed full of information and inspiration. It is an honor to be included with such a great group of forwarding [*sic*] thinking Districts that are truly changing the plate. (California Thursdays Listserv, 2014)

To which Barlow responded, “We were thrilled to convene the great group of forward thinkers who are truly changing the plate in California (and influencing the country)” (Barlow, 2014). The name of the listserv, “A Network of School Food Innovators,” also reflects CEL’s intentionality with which it communicates with the California Thursdays network. CEL often sent emails to districts that used positive discourse to emphasize the transformative work that members of the network were engaging in. For example, in an email welcoming the second cohort of districts to the California Thursdays network, Adam Kesselman expresses his gratitude to the districts stating, “Thank you for inspiring us, and leading the movement for fresh, healthy meals in schools. We are excited to be your partners! (Kesselman, 2015c). An additional email

below from Kesselman highlights this positive discursive approach to communicating with the network:

As members of the California Thursdays network of participating school districts you are part of a cohort of innovative school districts pushing the boundaries of what is possible in school meal programs; you are committed to serving FRESH food, LOCALLY SOURCED [*emphasis in original*] from California (and most likely very near to your district), and of a high quality. Perhaps you will find it encouraging to know that the work you are spearheading is on the cutting edge of food trends in the U.S, as I am sure you are already aware. (Kesselman, 2015b).

Positive discourse was also exchanged between districts through the listserv. For example, a Director of Nutrition Services sent an email to the listserv in which they share a San Francisco Chronicle article entitled, “‘Ugly’ fish a prized catch for Bay Area school cafeterias.”⁵¹ In the email the Director states, “Sharing this article that came out in the SF Chronicle yesterday - you can see the connections through this network and how it helps us to make a larger impact. I feel so fortunate to be a part of it with you all!” (California Thursdays Listserv, 2015c). The examples of positive affirmations provided in this paper are representative of both CEL and districts’ postings on the listserv. While many education reform projects are met with contestation at the local level, the California Thursdays model has been and continues to be eagerly embraced by participating districts. While this embrace can be seen in the internal positive discourse, it is also likely shaped by the external positive discourse.

External Positive Discourse. CEL’s use of external positive discourse started with trademarking the California Thursdays program on March 19, 2014 and the initiative’s logo on July 21, 2015 (Center for Ecoliteracy, 2015). In interviews with both CEL and OUSD NS key informants, I was told by multiple individuals that the purpose of trademarking California Thursdays was essentially to “maintain the integrity of the meal.” An example of maintaining this integrity was discussed with me in an interview with a FoodCorps service member: “One of the companies that makes our breakfast muffins threw a California Thursdays logo on it, and nothing in that muffin is grown in California. And because the logo is trademarked we were able to be like ‘no, take that off.’ So, there is power in having had it trademarked.” As elaborated further by Kesselman, “We started to have the conversation about what is freshly prepared. We also inserted into the conversation like clean-labeled food. Trying to get to a cleaner product, because we had companies like Cheetos, saying Cheetos is a California Thursday food because it’s made in California.”

One key element of external positive discourse in the California Thursdays implementation is branding and marketing. As Adam Kesselman said, “Marketing [the California Thursdays initiative] is a huge piece. That was something I saw very early on in Oakland. It was like, ‘Well, we need a way to tell the story. You can’t just make the change and nobody knows about it.’” The connection of branding and marketing to external positive discourse and thus to successful implementation was articulated in an interview I conducted with Jonathan Foley:

⁵¹ <http://www.sfchronicle.com/food/article/Ugly-fish-a-prized-catch-for-Bay-Area-6465219.php?t=604d166e5b883cbd7b&cmpid=twitter-premium>

The goal is to try and create this larger consciousness around farm to school, and around localized procurement through California Thursdays as a recognizable brand. There have been a lot of successes that have come out of a unified marketing campaign at a school. When you create brand awareness about what California Thursdays can do, there is a recognition and a familiarity among students and community members and an association that allows the program a bit more credibility. And it also ties the food service director in the district to a larger statewide movement. In several of our districts, marketing campaigns have really paid off in terms of [student] participation [in the school meal program]. When you increase participation, you have a higher budget and it allows you more flexibility in terms of recipes and procurement.

Marketing California Thursdays also helps to reframe how students and families are perceiving school food. As further elaborated by Foley:

I think that for a long time there was the school food service and the cafeteria and the lunch break. It was just seen as this time where students are sent away into the lunchroom and something was slapped on their plate and who knows what it is, and there's no real understanding or there's no real almost respect behind it at all. So, the marketing specifically is kind of like one manifestation of what happens when you kind of put more of a spotlight on to school food, and treat it with the attention and respect that it deserves for a bunch of reasons... for the student health and well-being, for nutrition, for environmental reasons, for economic reasons. When you present a product or a food or a service to your community and to your students, it will be reflected in participation or understanding or a recognition on behalf of the student body that there's more to school food than a time to sit in the cafeteria.

Discussion

The emergence of California Thursdays reflects the co-construction of solutions that emerged from local level conditions. Specifically, OUSD's construction of its central kitchen was delayed leaving the project in a limbo state. To work through this issue, CEL, in partnership with OUSD NS, developed the California Thursdays initiative to advance improvements to OUSD's school food program, despite the constraint of inadequate facilities. According to the theory of co-construction, local level constraints also reflect broader, structural constraints that school districts must contend with in the process of educational change and reform (Datnow, et al., 2002). In the case of the factors and enabling conditions that facilitated the process of California Thursdays going to scale, the initiative resolves broader constraints that are common to and shared across school food contexts regardless of variability. Therefore, a significant implication of the case of California Thursdays for policy scholars and practitioners is the need for education reformers to identify constraints that are common across contexts. Once identified, the process of reconciling these constraints should be broken down into small, actionable tasks (a "bite-sized implementation strategy") that scaffold, or build upon one another (a "progress-based journey") to not only produce systems change but to simultaneously build the capacity of implementation actors to sustain and continuously improve upon the system.

As we see from this study, CEL plays an important role as an intermediary organization in supporting the 84 districts that are currently participating in the implementation of California

Thursdays. CEL organizes implementation actors around a specific goal: serving freshly prepared California Thursdays meals to the furthest extent possible (as often as possible and to the highest level possible, i.e., fresh, healthy, delicious, locally procured and ethically sourced ingredients, etc.), and facilitates their collaboration in direct application toward that goal through collective action, sharing of best practices, and by fostering a community of practice where participants learn from one another and co-construct the evolution and expansion of California Thursdays.

At the district level, each participating district is changing their school food system through engagement of transformative implementation practices and through an approach to policy implementation that scaffolds the process of reforming, or changing a complex system. However, because of CEL taking the initiative to scale, this systems change effort is now happening at the state level and is facilitating a significant transformation of California's school food system (as noted in the introduction of this article, the 84 districts participating in the implementation of California Thursdays are collectively serving one-third of the state's annual one billion school meals). This transformation includes not only changes to the meals being served in California, but it is also positively reframing the discourse of school lunch both internally with school food service workers and externally with the broader public.

An analysis of California Thursdays as an outcome of the implementation of federal school food policy at the local level contributes important lessons regarding the role and use of education policy and schools in the promotion of educational equity and social justice. While I have focused on the meso-level of the school, I agree with Powell that childhood hunger and obesity should be understood in the "context of structural inequality" in that these problems are manifestations of "structural marginality" (Powell, 2013, p. 3). The concept of structural marginality, as applied to the issues of childhood hunger and obesity, shifts the focus away from individual actors (families and their diet related choices and physical activities) to the ways in which structures marginalize whole groups of people and "unevenly distribute opportunities [and] depress life chances" (Powell 2013, p. 3). It reframes these poverty and diet related health issues that fall along lines of gender, race, and class as symptoms of an unjust food system that shape and limit people's choices (Paarlberg, 2010; Patel, 2008; Nestle, 2002; Poppendieck, 1998), and as the outcome of inequitable access to healthy food and built environments (Larson, Story & Nelson, 2009). Given that the problems of childhood hunger and obesity are reflective of social inequality (and are a larger public health issue) is it appropriate that schools, through federal policy, are being tasked with resolving what is arguably outside the scope of their educational mission? As argued by Anyon (2005), "Rules and regulations regarding teaching, curriculum, and assessment certainly are important, but policies to eliminate poverty-wage work and housing segregation (for example) should be part of the educational policy panoply as well, for these have consequences for urban education at least as profound as curriculum, pedagogy, and testing" (p. 66).

The U.S. proclivity for using education policy as a mechanism for social intervention, and public schools as vehicles for the delivery of social provision (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tyack, 1992) is an American phenomenon that Kantor & Lowe (2013) refer to as the "educationalized welfare state." This concept is further elaborated by Tyack & Cuban's (1995) statement that "Reforming the public schools has long been a favorite way of improving not just education but society" (p. 1).

The genesis of the American predilection for depending on schools to fix social problems arises out of two historical foundations. The first is a preference for educational rather than social

entitlement programs – a “doors not floors” approach to social provision, meaning the U.S. has “little inclination to provide ‘floors’ – that is, social guarantees for a minimum standard of living, but most Americans are willing to open ‘doors’ of opportunity by providing education” (Cohen, 2005, p. 513). The second condition arises out of the first. Twentieth century social program activists strategically used the nation’s commitment to compulsory, universal education to generate support for social services, specifically, mother’s pensions (the predecessor to Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC]), and child labor laws (Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, during this period the U.S. federal government did not have the right to tax business profits or individual incomes of citizens (until 1914), nor the bureaucratic infrastructure to collect taxes (Berkowitz & McQuaid, 1980, p. 25). Hence, Progressive era welfare advocates built with what they had available and used the public schools, since it was one of the only institutions that had the capacity to implement the development of a welfare state (Steffes, 2012). The evolution and growth of the NSLP is rooted in this history (see Levine, 2008 and Gunderson, 2003) and is a quintessential example of the American educationalized welfare state. And the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, its integration of Farm to School within the legislation, and, thus, California Thursdays (an outcome of the implementation of federal school food policy at the local level) continues this tradition. However, expecting so much from institutions of education has placed a heavy burden on our schools. I will conclude by discussing how the very success of California Thursdays shows the problems inherent in the educationalized welfare state, particularly in the neoliberal era of privatization.

Conclusion

Students’ academic achievement, their health, and overall well-being are negatively impacted by childhood hunger and obesity. I have argued that these problems are symptoms of structural inequality that is converging upon and within the nation’s classrooms. The nation’s school meal program has been one longstanding measure for attempting to ameliorate issues such as food insecurity. However, if we as a nation are interested in eliminating these problems as opposed to simply placing a bandage on them, then we need to engage in careful consideration of the types of policies and programs that truly have ability to address the task at hand. While focused on the impact of social class, Richard Rothstein’s (2004) perspective is relevant to this argument. Rothstein states,

Eliminating the social class differences in student outcomes requires eliminating the impact of social class on children in American society. It requires abandoning the illusion that school reform alone can save us from having to make the difficult economic and political decisions that the goal of equality inevitably entails. School improvement does have an important role to play, but it cannot shoulder the entire burden, or even most of it, on its own. (p. 149)

Using education policy and schools to solve broader social issues is at once deceptive and pernicious. It is deceptive because it obfuscates the extent to which we as a nation should be held responsible for social inequality and accountable for supporting viable solutions to these problems. It is pernicious because the historical trend of placing the responsibility on schools to redress social inequality silently and effectively cuts off the reach that policy can ultimately have in changing the status quo. The use of the HHFKA to address childhood hunger and obesity is an

example of this. As stated by Poppendieck (2010), “hunger is at once a radical and conservative issue: radical because it reveals the depth of the failings of the economic system, conservative because it can be ameliorated without seriously undermining that system through the provision of ‘in kind’ food assistance” (p. 63).

The creation and scaling of California Thursdays reflect the ways that local level actors use their agency and will to develop innovative solutions for promoting educational equity and social justice across various contexts – despite numerous constraints. Clearly, California Thursdays cannot address the structural inequities that produce childhood hunger and obesity in the first place, but it can reshape the school food landscape and create broader impacts. More research is needed into systems change at the macro level, specifically, how Farm to School initiatives like California Thursdays change public health outcomes, local economies, the environment (through reduction of packaging and food transportation miles), and educational outcomes and experiences.

California Thursdays is exciting because it is an initiative that has been scaled across various school contexts; however, in terms of scaling the initiative outside of California context still matters in important, and perhaps unresolvable ways. For example, OUSD NS has progressive and innovative leaders in its Executive Director, Jennifer LeBarre, and Farm to School Supervisor, Alex Emmott. The initiative is situated in California (arguably the bread basket of the nation in terms of agricultural outputs), which makes it much easier for schools to procure locally grown, seasonal produce compared to states with less robust agricultural economies. Finally, not all districts have access to an intermediary organization like CEL, which is supported by philanthropic donations from private foundations. Therefore, school food innovation (California Thursdays) that attends to larger public health issues (childhood hunger and obesity) and, by extension, social inequality, is largely dependent on the hard work and innovation of local actors and relies on the fortunes and good will of private and non-profit organizations. However, educational inequality and childhood hunger and obesity are the outcomes of broader systems of inequity in which schools are situated. Therefore, education reform needs to be reframed as a feature of broader social and economic policy efforts that intentionally attend to social inequality, rather than serving as a substitute for them.

Conclusion to the Dissertation

This dissertation's overarching research question was: "How are education policies and schools both reproducing structural inequality and promoting educational equity and social justice?" Three papers, representing two "planes of analysis" (Rogoff, 1995) – the federal policy formulation and local implementation levels – and structured to focus on the interplay between "policy, people, and place" (Honig, 2006), were used to explore this question. Paper one focused on the historicity of policy through an examination of the historical and contemporary (1930-2010) landscape of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The paper demonstrated how the NSLP has served as a quintessential example of the "educationalized welfare state" (Kantor & Lowe, 2013) – that is, the American preference for using education policy to redress broader social problems and schools as sites of intervention and for the delivery of social provision. Furthermore, paper one also analyzed the tensions between and the affordances and limitations of federal versus local level policy-making. Finally, it considered how the privatization of the NSLP in the 1970s-1990s reflected the dangers of education privatization generally regarding its undermining of the educationalized welfare state and thus, social welfare more broadly.

Paper two focused on policy, people, and place at the federal policy-making level. The paper employed Critical Discourse Analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) and Qualitative Text Analysis (Johnstone, 2008) as methods for analyzing the discourse utilized by legislators and Congressional hearing witnesses throughout the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) that led to the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010. This paper found that legislators and witnesses defined and framed the problems of childhood hunger and obesity as both a consequence of the Great Recession of 2007-2009 and children and parents' bad dietary choices. Furthermore, these problems were considered a moral responsibility of the U.S. government to resolve for the benefit of children's physical and cognitive development, a critical part of health care reform and long-term public health, and as a matter of national security as well as American competitiveness in the world. These legislative discourses led to the construction of the HHFKA as a means for expanding and increasing students' access to healthier school meals through, for example, mandated, science-based nutrition standards and the provision of universal free lunch in high-poverty schools. However, partisan politics and the tradition of placing social provision in the realm of schools also led to legislators taking away funding from the Food Stamp program (a broad food assistance program) to pay for the HHFKA (food assistance in schools).

Finally, paper three focused on policy, people, and place at the local policy implementation level. Drawing on data from a three-year ethnographic case study of the implementation of the HHFKA in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), this paper examined the constraining and enabling conditions that allowed California Thursdays – an innovative farm to school initiative – to go to scale across 84 districts in California. This study found that local level actors developed a "bite-sized implementation strategy" that broke down the process of changing school food systems into small, scaffolding manageable tasks that, through a "progress-based journey," accumulated into larger systems change. This research also found that the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) in Berkeley, CA, played a critical role as an "intermediary organization" (Honig, 2004) in its use of a collective impact model to organize school districts implementing California Thursdays into a network. The California Thursdays network shared resources and best practices through an email listserv, which advanced the initiatives "co-construction" (Datnow, et al.) and ability to scale across a variety of

implementation contexts. Furthermore, CEL also positively shaped the discourse of school lunch through the trademarking and branding of California Thursdays and its use and facilitation of empowering language through the listserv. Finally, this research found that California Thursdays is reshaping the school food landscape in California and creating broader, cross-sectoral impacts.

Across these three papers, there are many reoccurring themes. For example, the use of nutrition standards has always been a component of the NSLP since its enactment in 1946. Due to malnutrition limiting the number of military recruits able to sign on to fight in World War II, the government asked nutrition scientists to develop an ideal American diet. This led to the creation of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) as guidance for what foods would be served in the NSLP (Levine, 2008). However, the NSLP not only could not enforce the RDAs in a standardized way, but the program was also still a major outlet for surplus commodities. The commodities provided to schools were not in consideration of children's nutritional needs. Instead, they were provided based on the need to stabilize farm commodity prices for farmers. At the start of the "obesity epidemic" in the late 1970s early 1980s (Poppendieck, 2010) the government once again turned to nutrition standards. This time the standards were based on the U.S. Department of Health's "Dietary Guidelines for Americans." However, once again, there was a lack of federal enforcement of nutrition standards due to powerful lobbying from the food industry against regulation of school food outside of the USDA's purview of school meals (Nestle, 2011; Poppendieck, 2010; Levine, 2008). For example, in 1983 the National Soft Drink Association filed suit against the USDA in its attempt to regulate food sold in schools that competed with the NSLP's meals. In their suit, the National Soft Drink Association argued that such regulation was "arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion" (Fleischhacker, 2007, p. 150).

It is interesting then, that during the 2008 – 2010 Congressional CNR hearings leading up to the passage of the HHFKA, the food industry was a big proponent of and advocated for nutrition standards. For example, in the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry's (CANF) third CNR Congressional hearing, the Vice President of Research and Development for the Mars, Incorporated, stated:

We've been in business for nearly 100 years and are best known for our high-quality chocolate products, such as M&M's and Snickers, which we believe should be consumed in moderation, as treats, and as part of a balanced, healthy diet. However, across the Mars company, our portfolio includes a diverse set of products including Uncle Ben's Rices.... Mars is proud to participate in this hearing, and we believe it is our responsibility to provide industry leadership on such an important issue for our nation's children. Likewise, we are proud to be one of the first food companies to endorse a national school standard. A new national school nutrition standard will dramatically change the food that children have access to at school. Over time – as schools, distributors and additional companies adopt these guidelines – millions of children will gain access to healthier snacks in schools, with the goal of leading to healthier and more nutritious diets. (Beyond Federal, 2009, pp. 94-99)

In addition to Mars, Incorporated's statement, the American Beverage Association, the American Frozen Food Institute, ConAgra Foods, the Potato Industry Child Nutrition Working Group, the Schwan Food Company, and the Anderson Erickson Dairy Company all provided statements in which they advocated for nutrition standards for all food sold in schools. However,

what is particularly telling about the change in the food industry's position on nutrition standards is revealed in the testimony of a witness, and former Superintendent of Schools in New Orleans, Pat Cooper regarding his efforts to create a healthier school food environment:

We went to the Coke people and we said, look, why don't we redo the contracts and let us sell all water instead of your Cokes. See, I used to think God made water, but then I found out Coke made water. [Laughter.] It is called Dasani. And so, we said, we will put more machines in our buildings. We will put a machine for every 150 kids and we will have a school board policy that says children and staff can buy water whenever they want. And suddenly, our principals were making more money than they ever made because we were filling up those water machines two and three times a day. (Beyond Federal, 2009, p. 6)

Cooper's statement reveals that the food industry can still make a profit while also developing brand awareness and loyalty among children (as his joke about Coke making water instead of God illuminates) by selling healthier product offerings in schools.

Other reoccurring themes involve the argument that the NSLP is vital for maintaining national security. However, this point has shifted from being a consequence of malnutrition and hunger to obesity and kids up growing to be "too fat to fight" (Christeson, Dawson Taggart, & Messner-Zidell, 2010). And while the farm to school program became an official part of the NSLP through the HHFKA, the beginnings of the NSLP were all about farm to school through the delivery of surplus commodities to kids. The goal of increasing farmer income through the creation of a school food market is still there. However, this time, there were more lofty goals involved in the program's focus on nutrition education and supporting local food purchases beneficial to the environment, animal welfare, or immigrant farmers. (As demonstrated by OUSD's school food purchases that support sustainable agriculture and fishing, and other districts' purchases that adheres to the California Thursday standard.)

Finally, paying for the NSLP has always been a challenge. Given that the program and the practice of feeding children meals at school have been around since before the NSLP was signed into law in 1946, it seems that American's think the NSLP has some value. However, given that the program has never been adequately funded (and that the last time it was reauthorized Congress took money from Food Stamps to pay for the first reimbursement increase the NSLP has seen in 30 years) that also says something about American values. From President Truman's presidential signing statement for the National School Lunch Act of 1946 into Law in which he declared:

...the Congress has acted with great wisdom in providing the basis for strengthening the nation through better nutrition for our school children. In the long view, no nation is any healthier than its children or more prosperous than its farmers; and in the National School Lunch Act, the Congress has contributed immeasurably both to the welfare of our farmers and the health of our children. (cite)

To President Kennedy's use of the NSLP to address poverty and hunger in Appalachia (Levine, 2008); and then President Johnson's use of the NSLP to engage in a "War on Poverty." To President Nixon declaring that he would provide every poor child a free school lunch

(Levine, 2008); and, after that, President Reagan's deep cuts to the NSLP, which led to the commercialization of school lunches (Poppendieck, 2010; Levine, 2008). And, finally, to President Obama who expanded and increased children's access to healthier school meals during the Great Recession. The life of the NSLP (from 1946 to the present) not only reflects the educationalized welfare state, but it also exemplifies how "the years that span presidencies constitute episodes in the recurring dialectic of reform and reaction that punctuates American history" (Katz, 1989, p. 4). Therefore, an examination of the NSLP reveals much about "the variety of interests that continually vie for power and authority in American public life" (Levine, 2008, p.2).

In conclusion, and in answer to the question regarding how education policies and schools both reproduce structural inequality and promote educational equity and social justice, I think this is very much, as Labaree (2010) describes, a "zero-sum game." Indeed, after the passage and implementation of the HRFKA, the NSLP has played a crucial role in ensuring that children have access to food that is healthier than in previous years of the program. However, with Trump's weakening of nutrition standards, it will be interesting to see if the industry continues to move the HRFKA's standards forward since much of the work of formulating products that meet those guidelines has been done. However, if the bottom line is corporate profits and it is cheaper for the industry to produce school meals with substandard products, then a lack of federal regulation will likely see NSLP meal quality go downward. Furthermore, and as stated by Poppendieck (2010), "hunger is at once a radical and conservative issue: radical because it reveals the depths of the failings of the economic system, conservative because it can be ameliorated without seriously undermining that system through the provision of 'in kind' food assistance (p. 63).

Ultimately, the CNR hearings revealed that legislators are unwilling to engage in discourse that defines and frames the problems of childhood hunger and obesity as a symptom of structural inequality. They were silent regarding the role of the food industry in producing food that contributes to these problems. And they did not prioritize broader food security as is evidenced by their cuts to the Food Stamp program to pay for the HRFKA. Therefore, the answer to the larger question this dissertation poses is that education policy and schools both reproduce structural inequality while also promoting educational equity and social justice. I am not sure how far that gets us (those of us that are social justice-minded education reformers). However, I close this dissertation out with a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Therefore, we must all continue keeping up the good fight. Onward.

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