

## **Statement**

**Linda Moore**

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### **Effective Strategies to Increase Children's Fruit and Vegetable Consumption**

I am Linda Moore, the Founder and Executive Director of the Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School here in the District of Columbia. Stokes School prepares culturally diverse elementary school students to be leaders, scholars and responsible citizens who are committed to social justice. Eighty-five percent of our young scholars are eligible for free and reduced lunches and nearly all of our students participate in the National School Breakfast, Lunch and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program.

Today I want to talk to you about the work we are doing to improve the health and wellness of our school community. In 2006, Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School launched a Wellness Initiative in response to the growing local and national concern about our children's health. As a result, we have instituted a variety of activities to improve the well-being of our school community. I would like to highlight three of these strategies:

1. Last year Stokes School planted a school-yard garden. On two early spring Saturdays, parents, teachers and students built raised beds, hauled soil and planted greens, beans, peas, beets, tomatoes, and peppers. This summer and fall we feasted on the harvest.
2. This fall, Stokes School installed a salad bar in our school's dining room. The response has been incredible! Students are now actually *choosing* to eat

fresh veggies and fruit. They flock to the salad bar when they come into the dining room for lunch. For our students, the salad bar is something new; it's jazzy; it's like going to a real restaurant. Based on our experience, I think every school should have a salad bar. If you really want kids to eat their veggies, give them a salad bar!

3. For two years, Stokes School has been planning to prepare school meals on-site. Our self-preparation effort will be launched in January 2010. The funding we received for new cafeteria equipment thru the Stimulus will help us achieve this goal. We purchased a new refrigerator, warming oven and freezer. We believe that we can do a better job of improving nutrition, food quality, and freshness by preparing the meals ourselves. Our children will benefit.

**What are the policy implications of the Elsie Whitlow Stokes School experience?**

1. Our three strategies—the school-yard garden, the salad bar, and the self-prep meals—provide students with early opportunities to learn and develop lifelong healthy eating habits.
2. In Washington, DC and in many other locations, lots of students lack access to fresh foods at home and in the community. School Salad Bars, combined with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables so important for our student's health. We can teach kids all we want to about good nutrition but if they lack access, they still won't eat their fresh vegetables.
3. Engaging parents is critical to making these initiatives work. If we put salad bars in schools and invite parents to join their children for lunch, parents will

be amazed at watching their children eat cauliflower and broccoli and will become strong advocates and role models for consuming more fresh fruits and vegetables, both at home and at school.

### **What Congress Can Do in the 2010 Child Nutrition Act to Support Schools?**

Congress can:

1. Increase the reimbursement rate for the National School Breakfast and Lunch Program so that schools can more easily afford to provide more fresh fruit and vegetables to students.
2. Congress can ensure that the Child Nutrition Act includes funding for salad bars and refrigeration so schools can serve more fresh foods. This year's stimulus money was a good start and provided the first federal money for school cafeteria equipment in 25 years. But the stimulus funds were hardly enough. There were \$650M of requests for this funding nationally but only 15 percent of the requests were funded. We are still looking at a huge unmet need.

### **Conclusion**

School nutrition programs have proven to be vital for our nation's well-being. In 2010, Congress will have the opportunity to improve nutritional services for school-age children. My hope is that we will meet this challenge. Our children are worth it!