

Dr. Cathy Booth
Talking Points
Congressional Briefing, May 10, 2007

Background

- My name is **Dr. Cathy Booth**. I am the Superintendent of Nixon-Smiley Consolidated Independent School District in Central Texas, about 70 miles south of Austin. Since **March of 2006**, the schools in my district have enjoyed the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program.
- Our three schools have a total enrollment of just over 1000 students; Of those, **75% are economically disadvantaged** and **65% are Hispanic**. These demographics are problematic – we are worried about the future health of our children. We know that families in poverty often trade off **food “quality” for food “quantity”**. This results in choices like **a bag of fat-laden potato chips over a healthy bag of oranges**. We also know our Hispanic children are more likely to develop **Type 2 Diabetes** than their peers.
- We are really proud to **provide F/V snack throughout the school day**. A cooler with fresh fruits and veggie snacks is in a **central location in each school**. Students can **help themselves to a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables** whenever they want to.
- There is nothing like watching **children come bursting out of their classrooms** and head to the cooler to see what’s inside.

Benefits to Students

- Our **students have been excited** about the fruit and vegetable snack - this is reflected in the fact that **they are making healthier choices** about what they eat. **Sugary, unhealthy snacks are no longer part of the school day. Instead, they are eating carrots, broccoli, and cherry tomatoes.**
- Clearly, the students have also **increased their consumption** - we have a difficult time **keeping coolers full!** Our **cafeteria manager** noticed a few weeks in to the program that our students are now choosing more fruit at end of lunch line - including apples and bananas. **These had previously been overlooked.**
- It really delights me that **our students are not sitting in class hungry**. Now, **students who have skipped breakfast can have a healthy snack** when they get to school. **With their hunger taken care of, they are better able to pay attention** in class. And, **rather than the unhealthy salty crackers** and sugary cookies **well-meaning teachers** used to share with hungry students, the children are now eating nutritious things like cucumbers and cherry tomatoes.
- Students who have long days have been encouraged to take a baggie of carrots or small **bowl of broccoli on the bus**. This **reduces the need to gorge on** unhealthy fast food when they get home because they are less hungry.

Benefits to Families

- The **families in NS have also been touched** by this program. They are now eating more fruit and vegetables. **The Board president** approached me a few weeks in to the program to let me know that his daughter was insisting they keep blueberries and other fruits at home because she had been eating them at school and “missed” them on the weekends.
- **Parents approach me at events to tell me, “My daughter made me buy those red peppers at home!”** Those kinds of affirmations tell me that this program is impacting the choices that **our families are making in the foods they eat.**
- During our new **“Health and Wellness”** events, we provided literature on nutrition, diabetes, etc. Hopefully, this helps to bring our community together and provides needed educational materials. We also **provide healthy snack recipes** for them based on the fruits in season.

Benefits to the school

- Several things have **really grown from the snack program – it all just snowballed!** For example:
 - We have removed **vending machines** from elementary and middle school. The HS machines are only accessible after school and even in the HS the **bottled water** machines are often empty long before the soda machines.
 - We started a **teacher walking** program
 - We built an **all weather track**, which cost 1/6 of our overall district budget
 - We serve **breakfast** to all students and staff for free
 - **We now serve fruit and veggies at family events instead of cookies and soft drinks.**
 - Our **teachers and staff have now insisted on healthier foods**

Results in Texas

- Texas’s fresh fruit and vegetable snack program reaches **17,344** students in **25** elementary, middle and high schools in both rural and urban settings. More than 50% of these schools have more **than 50% of their students eligible for free and reduced price meals.**
- **To give you an idea of the demand** for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack program, **374** schools originally applied to the Texas Department of Agriculture to participate, however only **25** schools could be funded. Since then, countless **other schools have requested information** about how they can participate. **Texas was funded thru the federal FY’06 Agricultural Appropriations Bill and that funding was not renewed by Congress; all of the 25 Texas schools**

that currently participate do not have enough funding to continue the program without federal dollars, and many of them have already expressed the need for additional resources to continue and enhance their current activities.

- Participating schools have found that their **students are eating more fruits and vegetables and are using the vending machines less often**. The children are **eating a greater variety** of fruits and vegetables. They are excited to learn about the benefits of their new healthy eating habits.
- **Parents are so appreciative** of the program and have **become more involved** at school. Parents are saying that **their kids are more willing than ever to try new** fruits and vegetables because they see other kids at school trying and liking them
- The program has received strong support from all communities. **Many schools are purchasing their produce from local growers, for the first time**.
- **Teachers have embraced the program and are integrating fruit and vegetable messages in their lessons**. They have noticed that the **children are using better manners** and have learned to be more considerate since the program began.
- The Texas State Nutrition Policy encourages all schools to offer more fresh fruits and vegetables daily in school meals. This policy helps send a clear message of support regarding the importance of good nutrition and what we're feeding our children.

Summary

Discontinuation of this program would be a real loss to our children, our families, and our school. We need Congress to permanently fund this program. During the past year, **my District received \$75,000** for the fresh fruit and vegetable snack program.

For this little investment, we know that we are **significantly improving the health and quality of life for our children** as well as **preventing tremendous future health care costs**.

I urge you to insure that the 2007 Farm Bill includes mandatory funding for this program.