

Chicago School Bans Lunches Brought From Home

To encourage healthful eating, Little Village Academy doesn't allow kids to bring lunches or certain snacks from home—some parents, and many students, aren't fans of the policy.

Fernando Dominguez is upset and he wants his school to know it. Recently, during lunchtime at his school, Fernando began shouting to his classmates in Spanish and English.

“Who thinks the lunch is not good enough? Who thinks the lunch is not good enough?”

Immediately dozens of hands flew in the air. Other students shouted back. “We should bring our own lunch! We should bring our own lunch! We should bring our own lunch!”

Fernando waved his hand over the crowd. He asked the visiting reporter, “Do you see the situation?”

Why are Fernando and his classmates so upset?

They are tired of the lunch policy at their school, Little Village Academy. The policy says they are not allowed to bring lunch from home. They must eat school lunch. All of the students at Little Village Academy are required to eat cafeteria food.

The principal of Little Village Academy, Elsa Carmona, created the policy six years ago. She says she watched students bringing very unhealthy food on field trips for their lunch; she also noticed students who didn't bring a lunch and went hungry. Students were bringing “bottles of soda and flaming hot chips, or skipped lunch completely,” she says. Elsa Carmona decided she needed to do something to make sure that all of her students ate – and ate healthy food. So she created her “no home lunch” policy. She says her policy helps kids to stay healthy. She says she is protecting kids from not eating or making unhealthy food choices.

“Nutrition wise, it is better for the children to eat at the school,” Ms. Carmona says. “It's about the kids eating and nutrition and the excellent quality food that they are able to serve (in

the lunchroom). It's a milk versus a Coke. But with allergies and any medical issue, of course, we would make an exception."

Chicago Public Schools supports Elsa Carmona's school lunch policy. A Chicago Public School spokeswoman wrote, "this principal is encouraging healthier choices."

Fernando and many of his classmates do not agree with the policy. At the school, they must take the meals served in the cafeteria or go hungry. Sometimes, they take the cafeteria lunch but then throw it away. Many students say the food tastes bad. They would rather go hungry than eat it.

Some parents are upset about the lunch policy. "Some of the kids don't like the food they give at our school for lunch or breakfast," said Little Village parent, Erica Martinez. "So it would be a good idea if they could bring their lunch so they could at least eat something."

Anna, a grandparent at the school, says she is also upset. "My grandson is really picky about what he eats. I think the kids should be able to bring their lunch."

However, other parents like the policy. One parent, Miguel Medina said he thinks the policy is a good one. "The school food is very healthy," he says. "When they bring lunch from home, there is no control over the food."

Justin Wilson, a person who researched at the Washington-based Center for Consumer Freedom, says Little Village Academy's lunch policy is hurting parents' rights. He says that one policy cannot work for everyone. "Some parents may want to pack a gluten-free meal for a child, and others may have no problem with a child enjoying a soda."

Another problem with the policy is that parents must all pay for the school lunch. Parents may have to pay \$2.25 a day for food their kids don't like!

The students say they should be given a chance. “They’re afraid that we’ll all bring in greasy food instead of healthy food and it won’t be as good as what they give us at school,” says student, Yesenia Gutierrez. “It’s really lame. If we could bring in our own lunches, everyone knows what they’d bring. For example, the vegetarians could bring in their own veggie food.”

Second-grader Gerardo Ramos says, “I would bring a banana, orange and some grapes.”

Another second-grader named Julian Ruiz says, “Sometimes I would bring the healthy stuff. But sometimes I would bring Lunchables.”