



Testimony of

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Agency Performance Oversight Hearing on Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Budget

Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Committee of the Whole

Council of the District of Columbia

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*An initiative of the Food Research and Action Center*

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Chairman Gray and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony here today. My name is Srinidhi Vijaykumar and I am a Nutrition Associate at D.C. Hunger Solutions, an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. D.C. Hunger Solutions works to create a hunger-free community, thereby improving the nutrition, health, economic security, and well-being of low-income District residents.

I am here to testify on the importance of the District's school nutrition programs. OSSE Wellness and Nutrition Services has been a steadfast supporter in increasing participation in federal nutrition programs and promoting school wellness. Especially now with more and more cash-strapped families trying to make ends meet, the federal nutrition programs ensure that children have a healthy breakfast, lunch, and often an afterschool snack.

This past year has seen many positive developments both in promoting school wellness and improving federal nutrition programs. OSSE Wellness and Nutrition Services has created a workgroup of state agency representatives and community partners to promote and monitor Local Wellness Policy implementation. The Local Wellness Policy sets out key benchmarks for promoting school health, including goals for nutrition education and physical activity as well as nutrition guidelines for all foods available on the school campus during the school day. It provides a blueprint to reduce childhood obesity. We need to be sure that D.C. public and charter schools have sufficient resources and technical assistance to implement this important policy. Sandy Schlicker, Director of Nutrition Services, is to be credited for her key leadership in bringing school officials, government, and community partners together to monitor and implement the Local Wellness Policy.

OSSE has also worked extensively with D.C. public and charter schools to enhance the monitoring of the school meal programs. The collection of school meal applications is critical for the school system to improve the administration of its food program and draw down the maximum level of federal funding. OSSE has provided key technical assistance to help DCPS and charter schools improve their systems and promote accountability. A key step forward to continue to improve the infrastructure of the school meal programs is to ensure that data is shared, on a monthly basis, between DCPS and the Income Maintenance Administration. This

enables all students in food stamp families to be automatically certified for free meals, alleviating the burden on struggling families to complete applications and ensuring that DCPS receive the full federal reimbursement. With more than 100,000 residents benefiting from food stamps and the numbers rising by the month, this data sharing is increasingly important.

Finally, OSSE has greatly improved the D.C. Free Summer Meals Program, which the community depends upon on to provide meals for children when school is out. In the past several years, D.C. has had the number 1 ranking in participation in summer nutrition programs according to the Food Research and Action Center. However, more work remains to be done. Last summer, 60 fewer schools provided meals to the community than the prior year, contributing to a large drop in student participation in summer meals. D.C. Hunger Solutions and OSSE, in partnership with the Office of Planning, have created a map to highlight which parts of the city lack access to summer nutrition sites. OSSE has also enhanced the nutrition standards for summer meals, ensuring that low-fat milk and more fruit is served, and also providing nutrition education training for summer site sponsors.

In conclusion, many promising developments have taken place in the past year and we look forward to partnering with OSSE to continue to promote student wellness and ensure that every child has access to healthy food year-round.