

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Serving Amid Institutional Camouflage: The Invisibility of School Food Service Workers

Abstract approved:

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Nancy R. Rosenberger

The products, processes, and tools of school feeding programs have been examined from multiple perspectives and disciplines in an attempt to improve child nutrition outcomes, to support local and national agriculture, and increase sustainability practices. There is little qualitative research on the role, needs, and experiences of school food service workers, and what is available tends to focus on how workers can be used to improve student's nutritional profiles rather than the workers own experiences and needs as members of the labor economy. Unlike other studies on school feeding programs that are food-centric and mostly quantitative, this fills a gap in the literature as a qualitative, worker-centric study. Ten school food service workers in a suburban northwest Oregon school district were interviewed, and participant observation through volunteer work took place in one elementary school, one middle school and one high school. Combined with a historical account of school food service, and a review of current studies, the data shows that school food

service workers are invisible, and excluded from full participation in the programs they deliver.

One way to increase worker visibility and seek advocacy opportunities is to trace the workers' historical and current associations, and the corresponding narratives born of the controversies and contradictions of neoliberalism. Tracing associations led to the following researcher recommendations: 1) Workers need access to living wages, and affordable health care; 2) Need national demographic data to justify wages, hours, and benefits; 3) Need worker-centric research to balance the food-centric literature; 4) School Food Service Workers need a dedicated National Union; 5) Labor unions should use this data to increase worker visibility; 6) Educational unions should assist workers in advocating for a USDA certification program; 7) Training for certification must go beyond culinary training to include nutrition training, farm-to-school program development, school-garden development, and nutrition and sustainability education training, and summer meal programs; and 8) National service programs should be administered directly through the schools rather than non-profit programs and be used as a jobs strategy to fill gaps in employment

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Serving Amid Institutional Camouflage:  
The Invisibility of School Food Service Workers

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Janette Byrd

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Applied Anthropology

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Director of the School of Language, Culture, and Society

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Janette Byrd, Author

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In the wake of the recently declared obesity epidemic, US health care reform, and Farm Bill negotiations, school feeding programs have garnered national attention due to their role as a dietary intervention for American youth, a social welfare program for students who qualify for free and reduced meals, and as a conduit for surplus agricultural commodities which are subsidized by the federal government. For example, First Lady Michele Obama has initiated the Let's Move! program and championed the Healthy and Hunger Free Children Act both of which have a component calling for improved nutrition in schools (Let's Move! 2014). Schools are also increasingly visible through participation in national efforts to create more sustainable communities through the use of farm-to-school programs which provide fresh, local food, and school garden programs that also deliver fresh, local food and provide opportunities for composting food waste. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) have also partnered to assist schools in developing additional programs for reducing food waste (USDA Food Waste Challenge).

Considering the high visibility of school food and its associated programs and initiatives, the school food service workers are relatively invisible. New USDA regulations have required a new focus on nutrition in school feeding programs, and altered school food service procedures, however, the way food service workers experience these changes has not been explored. There are new grants to fund training initiatives and increased funding for equipment, but there are no corresponding initiatives to increase worker compensation. Worker's wages are dependent on revenue and reimbursement for meals sold, and unlike training and equipment, there are no special funds dedicated to workers' wages (Civil Eats In the Case of School Lunch; Levine 2008; Pew Charitable Trusts \$35M for School Kitchen Equipment 2016; Poppendieck 2010; Wilde

2013). The workers are the defining link in this national dietary intervention and it is important to understand their experiences and respect their expertise as both behind-the-scenes and front-line workers who deliver school feeding programs on a daily basis. It is equally important to increase the visibility of the workers as members of the labor economy who must make a living and who deserve access to benefits.

There has been very little research into the workers' experiences; most research is from a dietetics perspective, is quantitative rather than qualitative, and focuses on the content of meals, not the workers' experiences. While some work has been done from a sociological perspective with a qualitative component, it is necessary to utilize applied cultural anthropology to further develop a qualitative body of research. Cultural anthropology challenges researchers to study cultures, societies, and institutions in their totality and the study of culture through ethnographical methods gives a glimpse into the lives of others from their own perspective which invokes feelings of empathy. Applied anthropology combines the holistic study of culture, societies and institutions, and empathy-inducing ethnographical methods with policy analysis and the "desire to improve institutions, communities, and peoples lives" creating a unique methodology for researching school food service workers, and advocating for change (Robbins, 2006 p.1; Ervin, 2000). Applying the theories of cultural anthropology to contemporary cultures, societies, and institutions requires understanding the associated information, values, cultural narratives and power relationships. This study fills a gap in the literature because it is worker-centric rather than food-centric, and it assists in the creation of a more holistic understanding of school feeding programs and the people who deliver these programs on a daily basis. It adds to the large body of research related to school feeding programs, and augments the small body of research dedicated to the underserved, and under-utilized school food service worker. The study

of work is also important to anthropology, and a glimpse into what it is like to work as a school food service worker will contribute to the body of knowledge of the anthropology of work.

This qualitative study will explore the on-the-job experiences of school food service workers in one suburban Oregon school district. It will utilize the cultural anthropological methods of ethnographic interviewing and participant observation. The use of grounded theory will allow for discovery of themes and patterns in the workers' experiences and amplify their voices in the often controversial discourse surrounding school feeding programs (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Russell 2011). The study objectives are to explore the on the job experiences of school food service workers to 1) add the workers' voices and experiences to the discourse surrounding school feeding programs which is a missing piece in the construction of a holistic understanding of these programs, 2) examine their experiences and working conditions in relation to those of other workers who have established advocacy groups, and, 3) explore the possibilities for school food service worker advocacy. Possible outcomes of this study are increasing the visibility of school food service workers; discovering advocacy opportunities for improved working conditions, hours, pay, and benefits for school food service workers; contributing to a holistic understanding of school feeding programs; and filling a gap in the literature of school feeding programs; and contributing knowledge to the anthropology of work.

Thesis chapters include the "Background and Theoretical Framework" which will walk the reader through the history of the National School Lunch Program up to its current incarnation followed by theories of domestic work, agency and neoliberalism that will inform the final analysis found in the "Discussion" chapter and recommendations in the "Conclusion" chapter. The chapter titled "Behind The Lunch line: District Characteristics and Participant Observation" provides a description of the town, district, and schools of this study along with the researcher's



participant observation experience and “Its Not My Fault the American Public is Fat!” will explore the themes discovered during interviews and conversations using worker quotes to illustrate each theme.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The National School Lunch Program has a long and complicated history entwined with the demands of the military for healthy soldiers, and the entrance of women from the private sphere of domestic work to the public sphere of commodified reproductive labor. This chapter will provide the history and current incarnation of the program beginning with *Women, War, and Defense Nutrition*, followed by an examination of current policies in relation to the obesity epidemic and efforts to embed sustainability initiatives into school food systems. The background will conclude with a discussion of the current state of school food service worker training, labor and advocacy issues. Once the background, history and current issues have been explored, theories of domestic work, gender, agency, and the contractions of neoliberalism will provide a framework for analyzing this information, the results of this study, and the possibilities for charting a new pathway for advocating on behalf of school food service workers.

### Background

#### *Women, War, and Defense Nutrition: The Birth of the National School Lunch Program*

The first true United States school lunch program was founded in 1898 by a budding biochemist fighting to establish her career in an academic and professional environment inhospitable to women. Ellen Richards, the founder of Home Economics, desired to bring scientific nutrition to the general public as a means of improving American living standards. Richards' crowning achievement was the creation of the first institutional kitchens and the standardization of recipes and menus for large-scale food service. During an audit of Boston public schools' sanitary conditions, Richards discovered that students were buying food from

janitors and decided to dedicate herself to the development of a scientific school lunch program that sold food based on newly developed nutritional standards (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010).

Prior to Richard's formalized school meal program, school feeding endeavors were kept to the confines of private, charitable women's organizations operated by volunteers, reliant on donated food or money, and focused primarily on needy children. In some schools mothers formed "hot lunch clubs", other schools put pressure on municipal governments to use taxes to support school lunch, and in one New York City school, teachers donated portions of their salaries to support a lunch program. After Richard's involvement, there was still a need for donated money and food, and volunteer labor, but there was a move toward a more standardized program that required specialized knowledge and skills. Home economists were invited to teach female students to prepare food for school lunches which provided culinary and nutrition training for girls, and food for students in need. Home economists also trained women at night to become volunteer "practical lunch-room managers" who were supervised by dietitians; however, many nutrition professionals felt that volunteers would not be able to sufficiently run a nutrition science based lunch program (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010). During this time the municipal and state governments became increasingly involved in school meals, but the federal government would not formally take an interest in these programs until the waning of the Great Depression (Poppendieck 2010).

Home economists and nutritionists popularized knowledge of vitamins, nutrients, and calories in the wake of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and Roosevelt's New Deal promised greater federal social welfare programs, yet disposal of agricultural commodities and regulating the agricultural market through commodity subsidies initially took precedence over children's nutritional needs in the development of a federally regulated school meal program. The 1935

Agricultural Adjustment Act paved the way for donated agricultural commodity distribution in schools under the provision that these commodities were not sold for profit and that children who could not afford meals would eat for free. That same year, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal agency dedicated to work relief, experienced a surplus of unemployed women who under federal legislation were unable to take manufacturing jobs. As women, it was taken for granted that they knew how to cook, and they were sent to work in school feeding programs. The federal government was now providing free food through donated agricultural commodities and free labor through the WPA (Poppendieck 2010). There is no national demographic data on the gender makeup of school food service workers, however it is currently estimated that of the 873,900 food preparation jobs in the US about 3% are held by women and a total 5% of all food preparation workers are employed in elementary and secondary schools (USDL Occupational Handbook 2015).

When the US entered World War II, children's nutritional status was once again in the spotlight, yet agricultural price protections continued to shape school feeding programs. The concept of "defense nutrition" was born when it was discovered that a significant number of military draftees could not pass physicals due to the residual effects of childhood nutritional deficiencies (Levine 2008; Paarlberg 2010; Poppendieck 2010; Wilde 2013). In response, The War Food Administration (WFA) used newly established nutritional science to develop Recommended Daily Allowances (RDAs) for the vitamins, minerals, and calories of standardized military meals. During this time, farmers were concerned that agricultural prices would collapse during the war and rather than continue to donate surplus commodities, farmers demanded federal cash reimbursements for schools to purchase locally produced agricultural commodities. Schools would no longer receive donated commodities or free labor, instead they

would receive cash subsidies to purchase commodities and pay worker wages; although some USDA surplus “entitlement” and “bonus” food would be provided at no cost (FY 12-13 value of these foods is 23.35 cents for each meal served) (USDA NSLA factsheet 2013). The War Food Administration determined that the RDAs used for military meals would form the basis for school meals to qualify for these cash reimbursements. If schools served meals that met the RDAs, which would mediate childhood malnourishment and undernourishment, then future war draftees would be less likely to fail physicals. This initiated a shift in the purpose of school feeding from merely the consumption of agricultural commodities to ensure that farmers received subsidies for surplus commodities, and poor children received a hot meal, to the consumption of *nutritious* (emphasis added) commodities to ensure all children could grow into adults who were healthy enough for military service (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010; Wilde 2013). However, this did not signal the end of the push and pull between the economic needs of farmers and the nutritional needs of children.

The National School Lunch Act (NSLA) established the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in 1946 and its declaration of policy states that:

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 (NSLA 2004 Sec. 2 [42 U.S.C. 1751])

While the Act’s language privileges “safeguarding the health and well-being of the Nation’s children” as “a measure of national security”, over providing farmer subsidies, the notion of a federal school meal entitlement program was not politically popular. The NSLA did receive bipartisan support, however, not because it would provide food to hungry children, but because it contributed to the stabilization of the economy via the agricultural market. Both Republicans and

southern Democrats opposed social welfare programs, especially programs that could interfere with a state's right to implement Jim Crow laws, but all could support agricultural subsidy programs. Ironically, subsidies for farmers can be seen as farmer welfare in the same way that providing free meals for children is seen as social welfare (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010; Wilde 2013).

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) assumed ownership of the newly created National School Lunch Program and it was administered by the Consumer Marketing Service, whose main focus was marketing agricultural commodities. Both agencies predominately employed men with little interest or training in nutrition. This and the disbanding of the Bureau of Home Economics in 1953 was the harbinger of the decline of the home economist and subsequently women's role and status in nutrition science and school feeding programs.

Margaret Mead, who worked with the Bureau of Home Economics, noted that the USDA's interest in the nutritional status of Americans had "withered away." Home economics gave way to what would be known as the food service industry and moved from a female-dominated to a male-dominated profession. Managing a school food service program was now a legitimate career option and it attracted men who were interested in business management. The managers supervised school food service workers who were mainly unskilled and untrained women. The workers were considered "less skilled" than hospital workers who had to prepare three meals a day. Despite lack of skills and training, school food service workers were thought of as a "splendid group of people" whose endeavors were "most sincere and valiant" (Levine 2008).

#### *Poverty, Inequality, and the cost of Entitlement Programs*

The USDA was not equipped to administer a social welfare program, nor was that ever its intention. However, with what some refer to as the "discovery" of poverty and hunger in the U.S. in the 1960s, Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman began to feel pressure to focus on the

needs of poor children instead of the needs of the agricultural industry. It became clear that the middle class economic boom of the 1950s was more myth than reality when researchers and activists found children in the United States suffering from the same diseases of malnutrition and hunger that they witnessed abroad in third world countries (Levine 2008; Paarlberg 2010). Still Freeman maintained that the USDA is intended to support the interests of the agricultural industry, and that social programs were best administered by other government agencies (Levine 2008).

Yet Freeman's own research showed the gross inequalities in the NSLP. He found that there were no policies to prevent states from excluding schools from the NSLP that consisted mostly or solely of minority children, especially in poor urban areas and the segregated schools of the rural South. Many schools that participated in the National School Lunch Program did not offer free lunches, even in areas with large numbers of children living in poverty. At one point, the head of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Joseph Califano, attempted to move the National School Lunch Program to the Health Education and Welfare department. Secretary of Agriculture Freeman then withdrew his objections and stated that agricultural and nutrition administration should be centralized in one department and the USDA could rise to the challenge of administering social welfare oriented nutrition programs as well as agricultural programs (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010).

Because the National School Lunch Program is an entitlement program there is no preset dollar amount allotted for services. Instead, each year the Program must be afforded adequate funding to provide reimbursements for all currently eligible children to participate (National School Lunch Act 2004). The NSLP provides free and reduced meals for students who meet certain income requirements; eligibility for free or reduced priced lunches is determined using

the federal poverty line as a measure of need. The poverty line was developed in 1955 by Home Economist Mollie Orshansky who was employed in the Social Security Administration. The principle of the federal poverty line is based on the idea that an acceptable standard of living can be determined by one's ability to afford a healthy diet. Orshansky estimated that on average families spend one-third of the household budget on food that meets the USDA's recommended daily allowance of macro and micronutrients (Levin 2008).

Children deemed to have the greatest need for food assistance according to the NSLA come from families with an income within 130% of the poverty line and are therefore entitled to free lunches, and children from families with an income within 185% of the poverty line are eligible for reduced priced lunches (USDA NSLP fact sheet 2013). Children whose families do not meet income eligibility requirements may participate in the program by purchasing meals. From its inception in 1946 to FY 2012 the program has served more than 224 billion meals. In FY 2012 the program served more than 31.6 million children, of which 23.5 million qualify for free and reduced meals, and cost a total of \$11.6 billion. Current cash reimbursement rates for schools in the lower 48 states that served less than 60% free and reduced price lunches were: free lunches \$2.93, reduced-price lunches \$2.53, and paid lunches \$0.28. Schools with more than 50% of students qualifying for free and reduced meals may serve all of their students for free (USDA NSLP fact sheet 2013).

Every five years The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, which authorizes all federal child nutrition programs, is reviewed and the laws governing these programs are either reauthorized, revised, or removed. The 2016 Reauthorization Act includes new language that increases the eligibility verification requirements for serving free meals to all students at schools with more than 50% of students qualifying for free and reduce lunches. This new language can



cause some schools to lose their ability to serve free lunch to all students if they are unable to complete the new verification process due to difficulties in substantiating the status of students in homeless, migrant, immigrant, or limited English proficiency families. This is also evidence of the ever-swinging pendulum of bi-partisan support for the National School Lunch Program. This current Reauthorization Act still generally enjoys bipartisan support, yet there is a partisan line between those who back the new verification process and those who want to increase access to free and reduced meals (FRAC Analysis of Reauthorization 2016).

*New Regulations and the Twin Burdens of Hunger and Obesity*

The Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (CNA) further solidified all federal programs, activities, and funds related to feeding school children under the domain of the USDA and created uniform standards for all aspects of the program. It piloted a school breakfast program, expanded the National School Lunch Program and the Special Milk Program which is a program that provides reimbursements for milk distributed for free to school children regardless of financial need. The CNA authorized shared funding for kitchen equipment declaring that if the state submitted a detailed written justification for new equipment the federal government would provide up to three-fourths of the total cost with the state providing the rest. Worker wages are paid through cash reimbursement for free and reduced meals or revenue from paid meals, and while the federal government had no intention of providing funding for all food service personnel, Section Seven of the CNA provided a clause for states that could not afford enough staff to adequately deliver the program. As with requests for equipment funds, a detailed written justification must be provided to receive funding assistance for personnel including proof that the program has increased in size, and that funds will improve program integrity and quality of meals served; the formula for increased funding depends on the dollar amount allocated in the two preceding fiscal

years to the requesting school, and the level of growth and needs documented in the request (Child Nutrition Act 2004; USDA NSLA History 2014).

In 2016 President Obama released the 2017 federal budget which included an additional 35 million dollars in grants for school kitchen equipment up from 30 million in 2016. The Pew Charitable Trusts report on school equipment championed the significance of the increased funding and the importance of new, improved kitchen equipment for the success of school feeding programs (\$35M for School Kitchen Equipment 2016). Also in reaction to the new budget for kitchen equipment, Civil Eats reported that “kitchens might be as important as ingredients” (Civil Eats 2016). There are no corresponding budget requests championing the need or importance of increasing funding for worker wages; however, there have been a few recent studies starting to explore the connection between increased wages for workers and the success of school feeding programs. These studies will be explored in the *Training, Labor, and Advocacy* section.

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 enacted the first major changes to the school lunch program in thirty years (USDA Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act 2014). This act was created in response to the continued prevalence of food insecure children and the recently declared obesity epidemic. The changes included placing a maximum number of calories on meals (650 max calories for grades K-5, 700 grades 6-8, and 850 grades 9-12) whereas before there were only minimum calorie requirements. Other changes include a reduction in sodium, and increasing whole grains, vegetable and fruit servings (USDA Comparison of Regulatory Requirements 2012; USDA NSLP fact sheet, 2013). Studies continue to show the rational for policy and programs like the CNA to intervene in childhood food insecurity and obesity. For example, in 2014, 7.9 million children lived in food insecure households which means that the

members of the household were unsure if there would be enough resources for food (USDA Food Insecurity 2016). Children in poverty are estimated to regularly consume only 10 of 16 essential nutrients, and undernourished children have trouble with concentrating, learning, cognitive ability, and socializing, and are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, but Tufts University found that improving nutrition could curb or eradicate these issues (Karger and Stoesz, 2006).

Children facing food insecurity are also at risk for obesity. The US Center for Disease Control estimates that as of 2012 there are 12.7 million children and adolescents in the US who are obese and that there are racial and income disparities in the distribution of obesity (CDC Obesity Data 2016). As a result, childhood obesity has been classified as an epidemic with cataclysmic consequences. These consequences include health issues such as diabetes and other metabolic disease, flat feet, stigma, poor educational outcomes, and remaining obese throughout adulthood. Adult obesity is linked to less job opportunities, lower wages, lower productivity, and increased missed work days due to obesity related illness (Brewis 2011; CDC Child Obesity Causes 2016; Crawford, Jeffery, Ball, and Brug 2010; Mickle, Steele, and Munro 2006; Puhl, Heuer, and Brownell 2010; Oliver 2006). An estimated 39 million lost work days per year are attributed to obesity which costs employers \$13 billion, and an estimated \$117 billion is spent annually on health conditions related to obesity (Murphy 2004).

First Lady Michelle Obama started Let's Move! which is designed to combat childhood obesity, and the language of Let's Move! echoes that of the National School Lunch Act stating that combating childhood obesity is a matter of national security (Let's Move! 2014). The US Surgeon General has also declared that the obesity epidemic is a threat to national security, and Mission Readiness, a nonprofit, nonpartisan national security organization consisting of retired

senior military leaders, called upon congress to protect child nutrition programs such as school feeding programs as a matter of national security. Mission Readiness reports *Retreat Is Not an Option* and *Too Fat to Fight* state that at least 12% of active duty service members are obese and nearly one-fourth of Americans aged 17-24 are too overweight to serve in the military (2014 and 2010).

Despite the classification of obesity as a threat to national security, not everyone believes that childhood obesity is a major issue, or that school meals should play a role in reducing childhood obesity (Oliver 2006; Jamie and Lock 2009). The USDA's proposed new regulations for school meals incited much controversy, eliciting more than 133,000 public comments, (Vestal 2011). In 2012 the Congressional Committee on Education and the Workforce submitted an official request to Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack asking that he remit the new school food regulations due to concerns from food service personnel, teachers, parents, and students and lack of evidence that they will be effective; the regulations are currently under revision and there is not yet a definitive resolution to this debate (US Gov. Files, letter to Vilsack 2012). There are also organizations such as Opt Out of School Lunch dedicated to helping schools drop out of the National School Lunch Program (Opt Out of School Lunch.org). Other organizations such as Nutrition Nannies are opposed to government intervention in diet in general and in schools in particular (Nutrition Nannies.com). There are no studies that examine the effects of changing regulations and the subsequent backlash on school food service workers, their working conditions, their ability to do their job, or their ability to advocate for better wages and benefits; however one recent study did examine food service manager's perceptions of the effectiveness of the regulations, but not the way they are impacted by negative feedback. Managers generally

agreed (about 63%) that students responded positively to the new meals. (Alcaraz and Cullen 2014).

Most research regarding school feeding programs is quantitative, not qualitative, and focuses on the content of meals, or teachers' and administration's perceptions of these programs. What qualitative work has been undertaken only briefly mentions the workers' needs, if at all, and tends to focus on how workers can improve student's nutritional profiles, rather than the needs of the worker's as members of the labor economy. For example, Sociologist Janet Poppendieck did spend a week working along-side school food service workers while conducting research for her book Free For All: Fixing School Food In America, however, like most texts on the subject, the purpose of this book is to provide insight on the food system, not the labor economy (Adamick 2012; Cooper and Holms 2009; Poppendieck 2010 Tsui, Deutsch, Patinella, and Freudenberg 2013). It is vitally important to improve our food system and children's health outcomes, however, it is equally important to ensure that our labor economy provides living wages and access to benefits such as sick leave, healthcare, and retirement for all its members, including school food service workers.

### *Sustainability, Education, and National Security*

Childhood hunger, undernourishment, malnourishment, and obesity are no longer the only facets of the National School Lunch Program connected to national security. The White House National Security Strategy mentions climate change as a threat to national security, and the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, and the National Intelligence Committee all state that climate change has a wide-ranging, direct impact on national security (Whitehouse.gov Climate Change 2015). Efforts to combat climate change include exploring sustainability initiatives such as utilizing local foods to reduce carbon foot prints and reducing

food waste to conserve resources. The Center for Strategic Leadership at the United States Army War College reports that the Army has a long history of land stewardship and that a cultural shift toward a “triple bottom line of Mission, Environment, and Community” should be instilled in future Army officers. Placing the environment and community alongside mission makes a bold statement about the army’s commitment to creating sustainable commonwealth (Hartman, Butts, Bankus, and Carney 2012). Through efforts to utilize local foods and reduce food waste in schools, school food service workers are poised to educate future military leaders on the importance of environmental stewardship and by extension the threat of climate change. Not only do school food service workers contribute to the creation of autonomous able-bodied citizens eligible for military service through preparing nutritious food and educating students on making healthy choices, they also participate in enculturating students to embrace the environmental and community “bottom lines” desirable in future army leaders.

Combating food waste is a nutritional issue, a budget issue, and a sustainability issue. If students are not consuming the new, more nutritious food, they are not getting the nutrition they need, money and labor are squandered, and the environment suffers. For example, a study of food waste among middle school students in Boston found that overall, students’ nutrient consumption levels were below school meal standards (golden standard 85%), and foods served were not valid proxies for foods consumed. The costs associated with discarded foods are high; if translated nationally for school lunches, roughly \$1,238,846,400 annually is wasted (Cohen, Richardson, Austin, Economos, and Rimm 2013). Schools participating in the NSLP are now also participating in sustainability efforts such as sourcing local food through the farm-to-school program and school gardens, and mitigating food waste through training, food and nutrition education for children, composting, and recycling. These efforts have not been formalized

through federal policy recognizing them as national security endeavors, but they contribute to national sustainability efforts and concerns in the same way that the NSLP contributes to national health and nutrition concerns.

The federal government and several nonprofit agencies have multiple programs to assist schools with these efforts. The Department of Defense (DoD) has long been associated with the National School Lunch Program through its call to action for improved nutritional status for current and future enlistees and the development of “defense nutrition”. Nutrition standards for military food service and school food service were co-created and both programs are used for the dispersal of subsidized agricultural commodities. Currently there is more focus on building local food systems and supporting local agriculture and the DoD and the USDA have partnered to help provide schools with fresh produce purchased through DoD and to promote connections with local small farmers who may be able to provide fresh produce. For example, the DoD provided \$50 million for fresh produce for school meals in 2002 which improves access to fresh nutritious food and reduces the carbon footprint of the agricultural system (USDA NSLA Background and Trends 2008; USDA NSLP fact sheet 2013). The USDA has also provided \$5 million in grants for the development of farm-to-school programs.

Often, local nonprofit agencies receive grants to assist schools in developing their farm-to-school and garden programs. The grants also provide money for program training, but it is unclear if school food service workers receive training to develop these programs, or if training is strictly for administration (Slowfood 2016; USDA Farm to School Grants, 2016). School gardens provide fresh, local nutritious food and can offset the costs of purchasing food, they are often run by school clubs, teachers, or local nonprofit employees, and school food service workers are not customarily involved in school garden programs. Nonprofits that help establish

farm-to-school programs and school gardens also sponsor schools as sites for summer feeding programs. Sponsors can purchase meals through schools and schools can then utilize year-round farm-to-school programs to provide fresh local food during the peak season and try new recipes and cooking techniques for the upcoming school year (USDA Farm to School Sponsor 2016). School food service workers can participate in the summer meals program, however, programs that take place at schools are often staffed by volunteers or paid national service members through organizations such as the FoodCorps, preventing these programs from providing year-round employment opportunities for school food service workers (FoodCorps 2016).

### *Training, Labor, and Advocacy*

In recent years, the importance of training school food service workers in culinary skills and nutritional knowledge has been championed by government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Training initiatives aimed solely at workers and not administration typically do not include farm-to-school and school garden program development, composting, recycling, and food waste program development, or menu creation. Workers receive culinary training and some nutrition training, and are urged to interact with students to encourage them to try new, nutritious foods (Pew Charitable Trusts Serving Healthy School Meals 2013). The USDA offers Professional Standards training, and a training program in New York partnered with the Conscious Kitchen to provide professional chef training for all school food service staff (The Conscious Kitchen 2016). In addition to training, there are initiatives encouraging school food service workers to wear professional chef coats to signal their status as professionally trained chefs and to boost their pride and self-respect; these coats also protect against burns and cuts (Cooper and Holms 2009). There is evidence that chef training does improve nutritious food consumption. A two year pilot study in Boston Middle Schools reported that schools that participated in the Chef Initiative program by providing chef training for School Food Workers



saw a statistically significant increase in whole-grain and vegetable consumption (Cohen, Smit, Parker, Austin, Frazier, Economos, and Rimm 2012). While chef training can help reduce food waste and improve nutritional profiles by increasing fruit, vegetable, and whole grain consumption, it does not guarantee improved working conditions, guarantee full time hours, year-round work, increased wages, sick leave, health care, or retirement benefits for workers.

Even with training, school food service work is labor intensive, and workers are at risk of injury. A study in Japan found that “the number of occupational lower back pain (LBP) cases accounted for approximately 60% of all occupational diseases from 1990 to 2000”, and was a significant occupational health problem. In facilities for providing meals, LBP among cooks has become a major source of occupational health problems. Epidemiological studies showed that LBP developed in 36.3–56.6% of cooks and was experienced in 53.2–83.3% of cooks. Based on these results, cooking has been considered an occupation in which LBP develops” (Iwakiri, Yamauchi, and Yasukouchi 2001:198). A study in New Jersey found that, “there are myriad safety issues for [school food service] workers: standing uninterrupted for hours, heat and burns, spills and slips, heavy lifting and more” (McCain, 2009:7). The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Handbook states that, “Food preparation areas in kitchens often have potential safety hazards, such as hot ovens and slippery floors. As a result, food preparation workers have a higher rate of injuries and illnesses than the national average. The most common hazards include slips, falls, cuts, and burns” (2015).

Training, equipment, and improved working conditions are important components of school food service that enable workers to improve school food service, but school food service workers also need and deserve living wages and benefits. Until recently, there were no studies that paid attention to school food service workers’ working conditions, hours, pay and benefits or

advocacy efforts for improvements in these areas. A report from the Rutgers Center for Women and Work found that New Jersey School Food Service Workers were paid an average of minimum wage, had little to no benefits, and were only paid during the school year (and not on holidays) despite the importance of their work. The report argues that the role of the food service worker is critical in increasing access and consumption of healthy food, especially for marginalized children, and that they should receive adequate training, living wages and benefits (McCain 2009). A study in New York City found that “the vast majority of foodservice jobs are of low quality with low pay, limited benefits, and high turnover”.

It was also found that it was virtually impossible to access data on school food service worker because they are lumped together in the general categories of “cook” and “food preparation worker” (Tsui, Deutsch, Patinella, and Freudenberg 2013) This glaring lack of data on school food service workers is especially notable when considering the amount of data available for fast food workers. Unite Here! member organization Restaurant Opportunities Center United (both organizations will be discussed further in the “Discussion” chapter) gathers data on fast food workers in order to advocate for better wages; in fact, these workers are on the forefront of the “Fight for Fifteen” movement that aims to increase the federal minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour. Fast food worker food insecurity statistics, gender makeup, the number who use federal assistance due to low wages, and other information is gathered by these organizations to illustrate the importance of providing these workers with living wages. School food service works could benefit in the same way that fast food workers do if the same data were gathered and utilized to advocate for the workers. I also argue that data on the dollar amount spent on healthcare for all workers, including fast food workers and school food service workers, should be gathered and analyzed as well to inform debates on healthcare funding. Understanding

the cost of healthcare for these workers will show how they are impacted by healthcare plans. For example, it could show whether providing affordable healthcare to these workers would reduce total healthcare spending for the worker, the employer, and the healthcare system at large.

Schools suffer from a paradox of both a lack of workers and a lack of hours for current employees. This is due in part to pressure to balance school budgets by cutting staff, reducing current staff to part time, and the use of third party labor contracted through private companies. The use of third party labor from private companies is one barrier to advocacy efforts for better pay, hours, working conditions, and benefits for school food workers; school administration are not involved with bargaining for private company wage rates and benefits (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010; Wilde 2013). Other barriers missing from the literature are the relative invisibility of school food service workers, despite the relative visibility of school food, as compared to public commercial food service work, and the confusion surrounding where they belong in other existing advocacy efforts.

School food service work can be classified as domestic work, which includes both health care and food service work. School food service is a government sponsored health intervention that cultivates the next generation of citizens to become healthy enough and culturally prepared for military service and full participation in the labor economy. School food service workers could be included in advocacy efforts for domestic workers; however, this can be problematic, as much domestic work is privatized and not affiliated with government funding. Also, domestic work advocacy groups often focus on the dignity in caring for others with love which can reinforce the idea of this work as personal and emotionally fulfilling, instead of labor deserving of fair wages (Burnham and Theodore, 2012). Food service workers are expected to embody a “solid core of caring and concern for the children” that drives them to go above and beyond by

skipping breaks or working off the clock. This creates the illusion of adequate staffing, and muddles attempts to show that working conditions need improvement (Tsui, Deutsch, Patinella, and Freudenberg 2013).

The workers are employed in schools, they participate in educating students about nutritious food, the Oregon Department of Education administers the school lunch program, and school food service workers can join the Oregon School Employee Union, therefore it makes sense to include their needs in efforts to increase funding for education; yet there is no guarantee that workers will benefit from increased education funding. In fact schools use the sale of competitive foods, which are foods that are separate from the lunch room offerings such as vending machine products, to balance school feeding program budgets, but these funds are often diverted to subsidize cuts in education funding outside of school food service rather than providing better pay for in-house school food service staff (Peterson 2011; Tsui, Deutsch, Patinella, and Freudenberg 2013). The Food Chain Workers Alliance, a national coalition of organizations seeking to improve working conditions and pay in food industries with a chapter located in Oregon also views school food service staff as a part of the educational system. At the 2015 “Closing the Hunger Gap Conference” I attended a session on food chain labor to hear a presentation from a representative from the Food Chain Workers Alliance. The presentation briefly injected information on the importance of food chain workers in child care settings, including schools; however school food service workers were not explicitly mentioned. During the Q&A I asked for more specific information about the advocacy efforts for school food service workers and received a vague response about supporting increases in education funding.

The Food Chain Workers Alliance does not appear to advocate on behalf of school food service workers in the same way that it does for other food service workers. As noted, fast food

workers (as well as other restaurant workers) are at the forefront of a much debated movement to increase the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour. Rhetoric includes the notion that these workers are important and deserve to make a living wage, yet school food service workers are not included in this popular rhetoric. In addition, the Food Chain Workers Alliance *Hands That Feed Us* report does not mention school food service workers in its discussion of the role of government funds in creating jobs through school food procurement policies. The report focuses on creating jobs for local food producers, not creating full time positions for school food service workers that pay a living wage (2012). The only member organization of the Food Chain Workers Alliance that explicitly includes school food service workers, although they are a small subset of represented industries, is Unite Here! This labor union represents more than 250,000 workers in almost every state in the US, including Oregon, as well as Canada, who work in a variety of industries, many of which are associated with domestic work. Industries include food service, hotel/hospitality, gaming, airports/transportation, and the manufacturing and distribution of textiles (2016).

### **Background Summation**

The history of the National School Lunch Program is tied to the history of women's struggle to enter the workforce, support of the military, and the concept of defense nutrition. It is both a social welfare program and a farmer subsidy program designed to contribute to the stabilization of the economy. It is tied to national security through creating citizens healthy enough to participate in military service and the labor economy, contributing to national sustainability efforts as a measure to combat climate change, and educating children to foster a culture that values good nutrition, health, and sustainability. As an entitlement program funding is both guaranteed and precarious. Workers' wages often are secondary to purchasing equipment, improving infrastructure and subsidizing cuts in education. There have been recent efforts to

increase training for workers, yet they are still systematically excluded from many aspects of the program such as menu creation, farm-to-school program development, and school garden program design and implementation.

In many ways school food service workers are invisible, and their occupation does not fit neatly into categories of domestic work, education, or food service work which complicates efforts to advocate for improved working conditions, full time work with a living wage, and benefits. The following theoretical framework will provide a more detailed look at gender; domestic work and its move towards public reproductive work; the nature of agency among school food service workers; and use of narratives and associations to reveal the controversies and contradictions of the National School Lunch Program.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Gender, Domestic Work, and Agency*

Historically school food service workers have been women, and the workers interviewed and observed for this study (except two bakers) were also women, yet the lack of national demographic data for school food service workers prohibits a definitive claim that school food service is gendered, feminized work. Yet, the historical and localized data of this study that finds the work to be female-dominated warrants an examination of gendered work and agency.

According to Butler, “the appearance of gender is often mistaken for an inherent truth” and “the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power” meaning that the performance of one’s gender is not necessarily predicated on a natural internal state, but is it influenced by social expectations and power structures (2009:i). If gender is in fact performed, and not reflective of an “inherent truth” what does it mean to perform gendered work in a neoliberal labor economy?

Husso and Hirvonen state that “gendered identities shape the possibilities of agency” (2011:9). They base this claim on the idea that historically, “women have less independence in access to money, power, authority, and status in a society which forces them to make a resource out of their feelings” (2011:12). This means that women in care giving professions, like the feeding of children, must rely on what are traditionally “feminized” notions of emotion, feeling, and “willingness to be of service” which are connected to the unpaid private sphere, and do not translate into “masculinized” notions of “efficient organizers” who are “dynamic problem solvers” which are connected to the paid public sphere (2011:1). Women are often hired into paid care work because they are assumed to embody the emotional qualities necessary for care work which encourages the reproductive performance of gender on the job. The performance of masculinity is connected to the embodiment of professional assets that do not rely on emotion and are historically connected to “power”, which is a *business* asset, not a *care* asset leading to “implicit and explicit division in the labor market” (terms and emphasis added) (Husso and Hirvonen 2011:1). Laboring under these gendered notions and the contradictions often found in care work including “ambitious political goals, the needs of clients, and tight budgets” leads to “different states of autonomy and dependency for men and women” and are “experienced as personal conflicts” because even the “well-meaning ideologies of a welfare society can violate individual’s well-being in the process of its restructuration (2011:4, 7).

Care work is also known as domestic work which is work that is traditionally done in the home, also termed the “private sphere” and involves care giving activities including house cleaning, elder care, child care, and food preparation. This unpaid work has usually been undertaken by women, often wives, mothers, and daughters, while male family members participate in paid labor outside of the home, otherwise known as the “public sphere” (Grewal

and Kaplan 2006). Domestic work is “the work that makes all other work possible” by providing support for those who perform paid labor (Romero and Perez 2015). However, this work has expanded beyond the home into the labor economy and while much still takes place in the home or is unpaid it is also “disproportionately reliant on the paid work of women employed by state agencies” (Roberts 2008:545). Expanding capitalism, changing family dynamics, and the reduction of time spent in the home once a wave of women entered the labor economy after WW II created a need for commodified services to replace work done in the home (Ferguson 2015).

Domestic work is also the work of social reproduction. Social reproduction replicates skills, knowledge, and moral values, and reproduces workers who in turn reproduce the capitalist labor economy (Roberts 2008; Romero and Perez 2015). In the context of the National School Lunch Program and its mission to ensure that children are prepared for military service, it is reasonable to extend the social reproduction of food preparation to reproducing the military as well as the labor economy. Margaret Mead, as the head of the Committee on Food Habits (CFH), concluded that school lunchrooms could help “foster common tastes and a unified democratic culture”, and could reinforce gender norms and recreate the environment of the “family meal”, especially in the face of a “breakdown of family ties.” Mead also believed that communal school cafeterias would “reinforce a commitment to American culture and strengthen children’s identity as American citizens” (Levine 2008).

During the time of Mead’s study and the CFH policy recommendations, the official journal of the Congress of Industrial Organizations promoted the National School Lunch Program with an article titled, “Kids Eat Democracy” (Levine 2008). In other words, the act of children eating in a state sponsored communal setting often run by women volunteers or employees of the state would reproduce good citizens who were healthy enough to participate in,



and assume individual responsibility for, the risks of the free-market labor economy, and military service. These acts of social reproduction are further reinforced through the concept of “offer versus serve”, meaning that students should be offered more than one entrée choice and have access to the salad bar and snack bar so they can exercise their autonomy over their food choices. While some argued that children did not have a choice in what they studied so therefore they did not need to have a choice in what they ate, Mead stated that “Choice in food is one sign of being and adult in America” and that denying that choice leads to the, “consequent development of dependency and lowering of moral.” Home economist Mary Kelly believed that the lunchroom should be a place that provides lessons in the “development of citizenship responsibilities (Levine 2008).

Food service and preparation occupy a precarious place in the labor economy as it is still done in the home without pay, or outside of the home by volunteers, but it is also an occupation undertaken by women who are at risk of poverty and often do not have other options for entering the labor economy. According to Biewener, “All the unpaid labor that takes place throughout the food system is likely an important factor in explaining why so many of the paid food-system jobs are so poorly paid” (2016:13). Looking at the use of unpaid volunteers in another facet of domestic work, health care work, provides a rationale for advocating for living wages for school food service workers. The World Health Organization has noted that the use of volunteer health care workers is unethical and is not a sustainable solution to the shortage of workers. Instead, it claims these workers deserve the financial security and personal well-being offered by a reliable living wage (Maes 2012).

Commodified domestic work, or “public reproductive labor” performed primarily by women, often takes place in institutionalized settings, and is sometimes referred to as unskilled

“dirty work” (Ferguson 2015). As school food service became more regulated and standardized, workers became less skilled. The recent recognition that culinary training contributes to the success of the National School Lunch Program has initiated a new interest in reskilling school food service workers; however, recognizing the skill of workers makes both the worker and their work more visible, and requires the public to trust their expertise. Giddens states that “expertise is part of intimacy in conditions of modernity” and that “expertise is continuously reappropriated by lay agents as part of their routine dealings with abstract systems” (1990:144). In the age of the internet and the wide spread sharing of knowledge and information, lay people, in this case the parents and the general public, are inundated with information on nutrition and school food regulations. This constant barrage of information combined with the association of school food service workers with unskilled domestic work allows the public to assume that they have acquired enough information to become lay experts on school feeding programs and provides a rationale for the devaluation of school food service workers’ skills and expertise.

In institutional settings, structural segregation keeps service work out of sight as it takes place “behind institutional walls, back rooms [kitchens], or at night”. This segregation can offer the worker some autonomy, but it also renders both the worker and the work invisible (Tsui, Deutsch, Patinella, and Freudenberg 2013). The school food service worker occupies an oscillating realm of invisibility and visibility. Much of their work is done out of sight, however, the product of their work is subject to federal regulation and public scrutiny and like restaurant workers, they have face to face contact with clientele while serving. The autonomy offered by invisibility is a double edged sword that severs the workers’ ability to call attention to the importance of their work, the tools they need to work effectively, and their lack of full time hours, year-round work, living wages, sick leave, retirement, and healthcare. It has been noted

that school feeding programs have enjoyed an uptick in funding for training, equipment, and infrastructure, which alludes to the emerging visibility of the *work* and allows for more autonomy on the job. Yet, the personal needs of the worker for instance full-time work, better wages, and access to benefits, have not enjoyed the same recognition, showing that the *worker* remains invisible.

A study exploring missed opportunities in efforts to improve school feeding programs examines the notion of worker training as a means to increasing the worker's individual agency. This agency is described as the worker's "power to influence what is served in institutional settings." It states that reformulating the job to allow for more flexibility and therefore increased agency, as well as providing increased wages and benefits can improve "nutritional profiles" of students (Tsui, Deutsch, Patinella, and Freudenberg 2013). My critique is that it does not explore the way agency functions as the workers' ability to advocate for training, wages and benefits, nor does it discuss the importance of worker well-being, stress reduction, and supporting worker dedication to the job as something the worker deserves, but instead it champions these notions as a means to ensure investment in the job and quality of work.

Investment in workers can lead to better performance and improvements in children's nutritional status, but to focus only on how the children benefit from these improvements reduces the worker to simply a means to an end, similar to a piece of equipment. The study on school food service worker agency posits that most efforts to improve school feeding programs are top-down strategies, and that focusing on worker skills and agency as a bottom-up strategy is a neglected area of opportunity to improve the system and children's nutritional status. What it does not do is explore changing the rhetoric and dynamic of top-down versus bottom-up strategies, or how workers could and should leverage their collective agency for their own well-

being because their well-being is important in and of itself, not just as a tool for better performance.

The school food service worker may benefit from the relative autonomy of invisibility, but the product of their labor is subject to a great deal of public scrutiny. If, as in the case of the school food service worker, autonomy comes from the privacy and solitude of invisibility, and the individual agency workers deploy to improve program delivery renders the work, but not the worker, visible, then one must ask, how can workers use their agency to become visible? What would make the worker visible not as a tool, but as a person who must make a living in a neoliberal society wrought with controversy and contradictions? Latour posits that an actor (a person or thing with the capacity to act) has agency because it can act, and these actions cause other actions by other actors, creating an association between the actors. Actor-network theory offers a method for tracing the associations of an actor as they deploy controversies, creating a network that illuminates both the individual, and the collective that has been constructed by these networked associations. Once associations have been made, and the actors and their networks made visible, opportunities to exercise a greater agency either individually or collectively arise (Latour 2005).

Actor-network-theory also provides a mechanism for thinking around the tyranny of hierarchies, or scales that place the individual underneath the state, and also collapses the separation of the global and local and temporal distance, offering a schema for thinking beyond notions of top-down or bottom-up strategies. Rather, a network of an individual's, or a state's associations can be traced, and as more associations are added to the network, it simply gets longer and remains flat; it does not get bigger or higher. However, associations shift and change along with the actions of their actors which causes the boundaries of the collective to be

redefined and reconfigured (Latour 2005). An examination of the historical and contemporary human and non-human (in this case equipment, infrastructure, and policy) associations of school food service workers offers a framework for capturing a glimpse the current configuration and boundaries of these associations and how they are or are not used to leverage the collective agency of school food service workers to their own benefit.

### *Contradictions of Neoliberalism*

Societies must find ways to translate or mediate structural contradictions or paradoxes created by ideologies such as neoliberalism, and anthropological theorists have struggled to recognize and analyze the ways cultures translate, mediate, and reproduce these contradictions. Latour states that it is not necessary for the researcher to try to impose order by solving or explaining controversies; instead, researchers should look at the way social actors play out these controversies and create their own sense of order, “the best solution is to trace connections between the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any given controversy” (Latour 2005:19). Conflicting discourses pose problems for human actors to which they must respond, perhaps through associations, or cultural narratives containing solutions to these contradictions that do not disrupt hegemony. While these associations and narratives can preserve hegemony and reproduce contradictions, they also provide opportunities for change because people can reconfigure, add and dismiss associations, and relate to cultural narratives in different ways, in different locations, at different points in time (Latour 2005; Ortner 1989). Tracing the associations of school food service workers reveals the controversies or contradictions under which the workers labor and provides an opportunity to examine the narratives available to workers that preserve hegemony, and the ways in which workers and their advocates can relate to, or reimagine these narratives anew via their associations.

Neoliberalism is a complex term that can be applied in various ways. Simply put, neoliberalism embraces market rule and the notion that the market, rather than the state is the most efficient way to meet human needs. Governments should not regulate businesses and wages, and social services and public spaces should be privatized. Markets must be free of regulation and individuals must be free to participate in the market; this however, is a “precarious freedom” for the individual (Beck 2002:16). One is both a citizen, or member of society, and an individual solely responsible for all the risks that come with membership in society. In order to be considered good citizens (and loyal subjects to the sovereignty of the market) individuals are expected to regulate themselves, and are at risk of falling through social, economic, and political gaps if they are unable to participate fully in the market and labor economy. Gaps in services must be filled locally, creating local and diverse forms of neoliberalism. Foucault refers to the mentality that accompanies this exercise of power in the form of market rule, lack of government regulation, and individual responsibility as “governmentality” (1979). Neoliberalism, like class, is rarely explicitly included in economic, political, and social discourse in the US, and this lack of open discourse makes it difficult to highlight the inherent contradictions of neoliberalism and to explore alternatives that do not simply reproduce neoliberal governmentality (Ong 2006; Allen and Guthman 2006; Roberts 2008).

Patricia Allen and Julie Guthman provide an excellent example of neoliberal contradictions and the difficulty of developing alternatives in their examination of the emergence of farm-to-school programs (FTS) in California as an alternative to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). They find that FTS mirrors the National School Lunch Program in its mission to provide an outlet for agricultural commodities and to increase the consumption of nutritious

food. It also shares the awkward role of a social welfare program that, even though it is a nonprofit program, must also make revenue for farmers and schools. Unlike the NSLP, farm-to-school focuses on small local farms rather than large industrial farms. In this way, FTS creates new localized forms of neoliberalism that places responsibility for school feeding programs on the local, private sector, rather than the public, national sector. The National School Lunch Program also creates new localized forms of neoliberalism by finding local solutions to gaps in services which usually come in the form of balancing the program and school budget by cutting worker hours, wages, benefits, or using volunteer or third party labor (Levine 2008; Wilde 2010).

Like the NSLP, farm-to-school reproduces neoliberalism by utilizing volunteer or third party contracted labor which displaces school food service workers and disrupts collective bargaining power for higher wages and benefits. In order to secure private funding which is often unstable and finite (as opposed to government funding which can be more stable and indefinite) FTS programs often have to utilize neoliberal rhetoric which focuses on issues of local and sustainable food systems rather than nutrition or equity. There is a lack of equity when school districts with the greatest need (that have high rates of students on free and reduced programs) do not have parents and communities that are able to initiate privately funded, volunteer, or third party run farm-to-school programs. This reflects neoliberal ideals of market rule and individual responsibility (Allen and Guthman 2006). There is a “paradox of necessity” [when] neoliberal economic policies increase the need for social intervention while simultaneously undermining the capacity for such intervention” (Roberts 2008: 548).

### **Theoretical Supposition**

Tracing the historical, current, national and local associations of school food service workers as individuals, as a group of employees in a particular school district and a particular

state, and as a group working under a federally regulated program a) reveals the various controversies born of neoliberalism and embedded in the National School Lunch Program, and the cultural narratives and associations that workers can access to relate to, reimage, or reproduce these contradictions, b) collapses the local and “global” or in this case the national by revealing both the differences found within school districts and states, and the commonalities among distant locations across the nation, c) increases visibility and agency. The “Discussion” chapter will trace associations outlined in the Background and Theoretical Framework sections and in the local context and themes derived from interviews and participant observation.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

### **Anthropological Methods**

This study utilizes the qualitative methods of Applied Cultural Anthropology. Qualitative methods rely on field work conducted at the location of the issue or group being studied, which in this case are school cafeterias. This method places emphasis on the participants' meanings of their experiences and necessitates face-to-face interactions between the participants and researcher. Because the researcher is an instrument of data collection and analysis, qualitative methods require the researcher to reflect on their experiences and potential biases. In contrast to quantitative methods which focus on a specific variable or hypothesis, qualitative methods focus on capturing a holistic account of the many factors found within the research topic. It also differs from quantitative methods in its focus on inductive discovery, and allowing the study to form as data is gathered rather than creating strict parameters at the outset of the study. Qualitative research is not designed to produce generalities, although sometimes it does reveal data that could be generalizable to a larger group (Creswell 2014). This study is not intended to reveal generalities, however, it does discuss some commonalities found when laboring under blanket federal regulations and explores possible avenues for future research and advocacy.

### **Population**

This study took place in an elementary school, middle school, and high school of one suburban Northwest Oregon school district. This district has a central kitchen that houses bakers and a catering program and the bakers participated in the study, but the caterer declined. No national or local demographic data is available for school food service workers, however all food service workers encountered were female while the delivery drivers and two of the bakers were male. Workers' ages ranged from recent high school graduate to over 65. It appeared that

workers encountered were mostly white and at least one Hispanic, but this is was not confirmed. A total of ten workers participated in interviews and more than twenty were observed during participant observation. The number of school food service staff in this district averages round 45 employees; however, the number fluctuates due to employee turnover and part-time positions that are difficult to fill. The total number of school food service workers in the US is unknown, however, roughly 5% of 873,900 food preparation workers are employed elementary and secondary schools and 3% of all food preparation workers are female. (USDL Occupational Handbook 2015). The only criteria for participation is that the individual is over 18 and employed as school food service worker in the selected district and schools; none of the participants are considered to be part of a “vulnerable population”.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment was ongoing throughout the study which took place from September to June of the 2014-2015 school year. I met with the district administration to get permission to conduct the study and a formal letter of support. Administration approved of the study and sent an email to all workers to let them know about the study, and that they had administration’s approval to participate if they chose to do so. In addition to the notice from administration I hung flyers in each school and spoke to the supervisors and staff on site. I accessed the contact information on the district website to send targeted emails to potential participants; however, not all food service workers are listed on the website. Roughly half of the workers who participated in the interviews contacted me to request participation; the rest agreed to participate during conversations that took place while hanging flyers or while conducting participant observation. Workers were not offered compensation for participation.

Workers and district administration were granted anonymity with the understanding that in describing the district, the participant observation experience, and the interview data, some identifying information could unintentionally be revealed. Consent of the workers was obtained prior to conducting interviews, and both supervisors and workers gave consent for participant observation activities. A consent form was developed, however, IRB granted a request to waive gathering consent form signatures in order to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Workers were given the option to choose their own pseudonym, or to have one assigned; most chose their own name.

### **Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviews**

This study utilized unstructured and semi-structured interviews that took an estimated 30-45 minutes of participants' time per interview. Notes were taken during interviews and with the participants' permission a voice recorder was used; all interviewees agreed to voice recordings. Interview questions were: What are your on-the-job experiences? What activities do you do on the job each day? What do you like or dislike about the job? Who do you interact with on the job? What are your experiences with policies or regulations that you must follow on the job? The answers to these questions were followed up with probes such as: Can you tell me more about that? How did you feel about that? These probes will provide more insight into their particular experiences.

### **Participant Observation**

I registered with the school district to become an official food service volunteer and obtained an Oregon Food Handler's Card. I worked one shift at the elementary school and one shift at the middle school. I also spent one afternoon at the middle school observing and interacting with the workers, but not participating in work activities. I spent one afternoon

observing workers and activities at the high school, and worked two shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. I also spent one shift working with the bakers at night.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed by transcribing and hand-coding interviews and field notes, then grounded theory was used to discover themes within the interviews and notes. Themes were derived from keywords, concepts, topics, and patterns found in the data. Much ethnographic interviewing is unstructured, which is a technique often employed when exploring the lived experiences of a person or a group of people. Sociologists Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss developed Grounded Theory which is often utilized by Anthropologists. It is a systematic, traditionally inductive process for discovering patterns and themes once the interviews have been transcribed (Bernard 2011; Creswell 2014). Once themes were discovered they were placed in the context of the history of the National School Lunch Program and contemporary issues found in literature related to school feeding programs, then additional theories of domestic work, agency and neoliberalism were used to for a final analysis of all data.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The use of participant observation and conducting interview with workers in each school, coupled with a literature that included similar studies and a historical account of school food service served to triangulate the data. Food service presents differently at each school level and the role and experiences of the worker in the elementary school, middle school, and high school are distinctive. The history of the National School Lunch Program provided context necessary to understand the current incarnation of the program's regulations and processes. Similar studies that used similar methods provided a model for methodology and analysis. For example, Janet

Poppendieck worked for one week as a school food service worker and conducted qualitative interviews with workers in various schools (Poppendieck, 2010).

### **Researcher Qualification**

The National School Lunch Program is a social welfare program for students who qualify for free and reduced meals, a federally regulated dietary intervention for all school children, and provides jobs primarily for women (Levine 2008; Poppendieck 2010). As a former Research Associate in the School of Social Work at the University of Arkansas whose work focused on food justice related issues including the role of interdisciplinary academia in food justice, and as an MA Candidate for Applied Anthropology with a graduate minor in Food in Culture and Social Justice, I am well equipped to undertake a qualitative Anthropological study that is relevant to academics in multiple disciplines and will be inserted into the larger discourse of the National School Lunch Program. Through my work at the University of Arkansas I have collaborated with many school feeding program stakeholders including school employees, non-profit groups, healthy food practitioners, community members, and policy makers, and can produce a body of work that not only advances academic theory, but is applicable and accessible to these groups. In addition, for several years I was the program coordinator for the North West Arkansas Community College Workforce Education Center, where I coordinated training programs for displaced workers during the 2008 recession, and I have over a decade of experience working in the food service industry in multiple capacities.

### **Limitations**

I was unable to conduct interviews or participant observation in all schools in this district, and as a volunteer I did not experience firsthand what it is like to depend on this work for my livelihood. I did not work consecutive shifts, I worked a shorter shifts rather than full time,

(although most workers work less than six hours also), and I did not have the opportunity to work with the caterer. Workers are typically hired to work in a particular school, but can be called in to sub at other schools, or workers may ask to work in multiple schools to increase hours. Unlike workers, I was able to set my own volunteer schedule to a certain degree (the work must take place during school hours, or in the case of the bakers, afterhours) and had more choice in which schools I volunteered. As someone who spent more than a decade in the commercial food service industry I have a certain degree of empathy and bias in favor of the school food service workers.

## **CHAPTER 4: BEHIND THE LUNCHLINE DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

### **Introduction**

Implementing a blanket federal regulation, program, or dietary intervention across school districts in a nation as large and diverse as the U.S. is challenging at best. It is estimated that at least 99,000 schools and child care centers across the U.S. participated in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in 2014 (USDA ERS, NSLP). Despite blanket federal regulation it is faulty to assume that there is a universal school food service worker experience or that solutions to work-place challenges can only be implemented in a broad way at the federal level. However, it is also faulty to assume that the federal government cannot be held accountable for ensuring appropriate wages, benefits, and working conditions for those who implement federal programs at the local level. Understanding both the local and federal challenges and opportunities of implementing the National School Lunch Program is vital to examining the working conditions of school food service workers.

The “Background and Theoretical Framework” chapter provided an overview of the Program’s history, federal context and processes, and this chapter aims to describe the local processes and context in which the workers interviewed for this study labor. Understanding the history, and federal regulations and process tells us what each school, and each worker has, or does not have, in common. Taking a detailed look at a particular district’s characteristics reveals a unique context that can shape workers experiences and needs in different ways. This chapter provides insight into the characteristics of the district and schools in which this study took place in order to show the advantages, challenges, solutions, and associations for this particular district that may or may not be shared by other districts in Oregon and across the nation.

In addition to the expectations school food service work outlined by the federal regulations of the National School Lunch Program, school missions and the desired outcomes for students outlined in the description of the district characteristics, show what each staff member, including school food service workers, are expected to support and actively work towards based on their role and capabilities. Job descriptions for school food service specialists and assistants are included in this section to underscore the duties and expectations for school food service workers. The participant observation section explores the environment, materials, processes, and activities recorded and experienced during participant observation in order to provide additional insight into the daily activities and experiences of the workers and what it is like to live up to the expectations of school food service in the elementary school, middle school, and high school. The Researcher Reflection section discusses how emersion into school food service work allowed for greater understanding of and appreciation for school food service work.

### **The Town**

A successful school feeding program needs the support of its local community largely because states and school districts must fill gaps in federal funding and resources. Schools depend on the community to participate in sustainability efforts and farm to school programs through local nonprofit organization and parent associations. The local attitudes, political will, and resources are a vital line of support for school lunch initiatives and provide insight to advantages and challenges to embracing school food service workers as worthy of fulltime work, a living wage, and benefits.

This district is located in a politically progressive college town in the Oregon Willamette Valley. The Willamette Valley is one of the most agriculturally diverse locations in the world with over 220 specialty crops (Oregon Farm Bureau) which can be utilized by farm to school



programs across the state. This particular town has a resident population of roughly 58,000 and approximately 86.03% identify as White, 1.16% African American, 0.76% Native American, 6.42% Asian, 0.29% Pacific Islander, 2.52% from other races, and 2.82% from two or more races; 5.72% of the population identify as Hispanic or Latino of any race. The median income for a household in the city is \$35,236, and the median income for a family is \$53,208. Males had a median income of \$40,770 versus \$29,390 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$19,317. About 9.7% of families and 20.6% of the population were below the poverty line, including 15.2% of those under age 18 and 6.0% of those age 65 or over<sup>1</sup>.

The area has been described as one of the top ten places to live, as having the highest Peace Corps volunteers per capita, the most “green” buildings per capita, and has been ranked #1 in patents per capita. It has been ranked #1 on the Environmental Protection Agency's national list of Green Power Communities. It has been called America’s Most Innovative City, Favorite Eco-Friendly Small Town, Safest Small City in America, and America's Smartest Cities. It has also been described as one of the least religious towns in the nation. Oregon has a state minimum wage of \$9.25 and there are current initiatives to increase this wage to \$12.50 - \$14.75 (OregonLive.com, “It’s Official”). Oregon is not a right-to-work state, meaning that the state does not prohibit agreements between employers and labor unions, and there is a chapter of the Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel (PSRP) division of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO union in this district that school food service workers can join (OSEA.org).

### **The District**

This district is home to seven K-5 elementary schools, one K-5 charter school, one K-8 school, two middle schools, two high schools and one alternative high school. The alternative

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<sup>1</sup> Citation of town and district information names the exact location and violates terms of anonymity

high school does not participate in the same lunch program as the rest of the district and was not included in this study. Current district-wide enrollment is roughly 6,600 students. Students represent more than 47 different nationalities and speak a variety of languages, predominately English, Spanish, Korean, Arabic and Chinese. Two elementary schools are dual-language immersion schools, and dual-language electives are offered at one middle school, and one high school, both included in this study. The school district staff consists of 368 (333 full time) certified teachers and counselors, 343 (280 full time) classified employees, and 48 (45 full time) administrators and supervisors for a total staff count of 759 (658 full time). Two-thirds of the district's teachers have master's degrees or higher.

### **School Food Service**

*“To ensure all students have affordable and nutritious food offerings and to promote nutrition education for life long health habits and readiness to learn.” District Program Objectives*

In order to ensure success, school district administration and parents must be active in school feeding programs and value supporting these programs, and this district is highly invested in its school feeding programs. It participates in the National School Lunch Program and school Breakfast Program with 33.3% of students district-wide qualifying for free and reduced meals. Kids who qualify for reduced lunch pay \$0.40 and both free and reduced students get free breakfast. A computerized meal program system is used for student meal purchases and works on a debit system; each student has an account that is either funded by personal money, or is designated as free and reduced. Parents can place restrictions, such as no charging allowed on their child's account, by contacting the school kitchen manager. Charging is when a student has insufficient funds and wishes to purchase a meal and pay the account deficit at a later time, but this practice is discouraged by administration. Allowable charges are: elementary student - three

total charges, middle- one charge, and high- no charges. The following table shows meal prices for 2015-16.

School	Breakfast	Lunch
Elementary	\$1.50	\$2.50
Middle	\$2.00	\$3.00
High	\$2.00	\$3.25

Table 4.1 School Meal Prices

There is a central kitchen located in the high school which prepares the majority of food for the district and sends hot or cold meal carts to each school for finishing. The schools finish the meals by assembling, heating, and plating them, chopping vegetables, preparing condiments, and other culinary activities. The elementary schools are now allowed to pre-order their meals each day from the central kitchen, rather than estimate how many they will need for the day. This eliminates waste and ensures that students get the meal they want; sometimes popular meals run out before students reach the front of the line causing some to forgo purchasing a meal. There are pictures of the meals in each classroom to help the students make their choices. Students, staff, and administration must select their choice by 8:30 am each morning.

Workers at each school prepare a daily salad bar consisting of fruits, vegetables, mixed salads such as pea salad, and a protein usually in the form of eggs or beans, and the middle and high schools have snack bars that sell items including drinks, chips, cookies, and other snacks that meet the NSLP nutritional requirements. Students are typically offered three meal choices that they can supplement with the salad bar or food from the snack bars<sup>2</sup>. High school students are allowed to eat lunch off campus.

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<sup>2</sup> Monthly menus can be found in the Appendix B, and descriptions of meals and salad bar offerings can be found in the participant observation section of this chapter and subsequent chapters.

This district participates in the Summer Meals Program. Many children rely on access to free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch during the school year, and the district believes that it is important to ensure that all their students continue to have access to nutritious food even when school is not in session. Any child eighteen and under can participate, even if they do not qualify for free and reduced meals; however those that do not qualify for free and reduced meals must pay \$2.00 for breakfast and \$3.50 for lunch. Parents and guardians can eat as well as long as all children have received meals. Meals must be eaten on site and the district makes an effort to include fresh local fruits and vegetables when possible. School food service workers, volunteers and non-profit employees staff the summer meals program, providing some additional summer work; however, this program is not utilized as a means to provide year round work for the majority of school food service workers.

#### *Website and Programs*

A look at the school district website and the food service related programs shows that this district and the community at large are highly involved in food service and take children's health and wellness very seriously. The district website has a school food service page with information on free and reduced meal options, meal account balances, menus, and the summer meal program (all discussed above), as well as the catering program, the district wellness committee, the "What's New!" link, nutrition information complete with external links, the farm to school program, the pick of the month program, and employment opportunities.

More than ten years ago, the district successfully eliminated all soda and other less nutritious competitive food vending machines, and the catering program helps to mitigate lost vending sales revenue. The catering department is a full service operation that caters local events

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for organizations, retirement homes and the local university. Like the caterers, the bakers operate out of the central kitchen; they provide all baked goods for the district and the catering service including breads, pastries, cookies and other desserts. Items for catered events are not required to meet the NSLP dietary guidelines and are not subject to the same regulations. However, the bakery products provided to the schools must meet those guidelines.

In 2006, the District Wellness Council was created to implement the district's Wellness Policy and assist schools with their wellness initiatives. Initiatives include physical activities, tasting tables in the cafeterias to introduce children to new, locally grown fruits and vegetables, and school gardens that teach students how to grow fresh produce. Schools also participate in the Fruit and Veggie More Matters Promotion, Farm to School Coalition, and the District Superintendent's Sustainability Steering Committee, among others. Participation in these groups is seen as a significant effort in building partnerships and healthy communities. The "What's New!" and Nutrition pages are also an effort to build partnerships and increase community involvement. These pages are designed to facilitate information sharing to keep the students, parents, and the community informed of the latest food and nutrition information and includes articles, links, and current events.

Oregon has the distinction of being the first state to offer farm-to-school (FTS) funding for all schools state-wide. The \$4.5 million in funding includes FTS products for all meal offerings: breakfast, lunch, snacks, after-school meals, and summer meals. Districts do not have to apply, they are automatically enrolled and can opt out if desired. This district recently received \$70,000 in grants for FTS, including the provisions for educational efforts to teach children about healthy eating, and learning about food in general; these activities are implemented through partnerships with two local nonprofit groups. The district's Pick of the Month club is

modeled on the national Fruits & Veggies - More Matters<sup>3</sup> campaign. It is a collective effort among at least three organizations and aims to encourage children and adults to increase their daily consumption of fruits and vegetables; the FTS program is designed to support these efforts. Each year the group selects seasonal fruits and vegetables, ideally from local farmers, to highlight on the school menus. An effort is made to choose different foods each year and to promote variety.

### *The Job*

The local context of the district embodied by the state, town, and district characteristics explored in the sections above outlined resources, attitudes, current initiatives and processes. This section will outline the organizational structure and job description of the workers followed by a section on my experiences working alongside the school food service workers. The Director of Food and Nutrition Service, the Food Service Supervisor, then the Administrative Assistant occupy the top tier of the organizational chart followed by kitchen managers (also called specialists or head/lead cooks) that oversee one (sometimes more than one) elementary school. There is a manager for each middle school and one for each high school. There is also a manager for the central kitchen and the catering program. Food service assistants (workers, sometimes called cooks) occupy the bottom tier of the chart. The assistants often work at more than one school in order to gain additional work hours and “subs” and “floaters” are on call to fill in at when someone is absent. Workers are typically employed by the school district; however, the district can choose to use third party contractors to fill open positions. The average manager works 7.25 hours per day, 176 days per year, and earns \$10.92 per hour; an annual salary rough estimate is about \$14,000. At 7.25 hours they are considered full time and eligible for benefits.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/>

The assistants work anywhere from 1.75 to 6 hours a day 176 to 179 days per year and earns \$9.91 per hour; roughly estimated at around \$3,000 to \$10,600 annually. Employees must work 240 days per calendar year to qualify for vacation leave, but all full time workers (those who work more than 6.25 hours 176 days a year) qualify for one sick day per month and medical benefits. Employees who work more than 600 hours per calendar year (excluding those who work less than 3.4 hours per day, 176 days per year) qualify for the retirement plan that is funded by the employer at 6% of the worker's salary. Below are three excerpts from a food service assistant job description showing the extent and the variety of worker's responsibilities and requirements<sup>4</sup>.

#### ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Assists the kitchen manager to implement the food service program in accord with federal, state, and district food service standards and procedures; Receives and accurately accounts for cash; Supervises students outside the classroom, as assigned, to support the district's discipline and instructional programs; Provides standard first aid, as defined by the American Red Cross, in a competent and compassionate manner; Provides other related services as assigned.

#### GENERAL PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS:

Perform duties in a courteous and efficient manner that builds the confidence of staff, students, and the public in the Corvallis School District and enhances learning; Observe laws, district policies and procedures, and professional standards for the position ; Establish and maintain effective working relationships with school personnel, parents, students and the public; work collaboratively as a team member; Maintain regular attendance at work and work activities and is punctual in meeting deadlines, attending meetings, and following schedule; Carry out work responsibilities with strong organizational skills effectively under pressure of deadlines, difficult situations, interruptions, and new or emergency conditions; Respect confidential information and the privacy of students, staff, and parents; Support students and staff in the district's career-related learning standards to encourage the development of independent work skills through career exploration and community involvement; Develop job skills necessary to meet changes in the position; Maintain personal appearance and hygiene appropriate to the position as defined by the district; Meet applicable district physical ability/health and safety guidelines for the position.

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<sup>4</sup> A full job description for a specialist and an assistant can be found in Appendix C.

## QUALIFICATIONS:

Basic knowledge of institutional food preparation techniques, including ability to operate institutional food preparation equipment; Knowledge of state nutritional and sanitary guidelines applicable to food service programs; Ability to communicate effectively; Demonstrate computer and accounting skills consistent with the level of responsibility of food service assistants; Hold a current food handler's card; Ability to understand and implement the school/program's student discipline policy and to manage student behavior effectively outside a classroom setting; ability to effectively perform multiple, simultaneous tasks with numerous interruptions; Ability to travel among district facilities as needed; if driving, the ability to meet district driving standards; Standard First Aid certification, or the ability to obtain certification within two months of hire, may be required.

The Food Service Specialist job description is similar with only a few differences.

Specialists test, adapt, and create new recipes; implement the food service accounting system; serve as a lead worker; must have an intermediate, rather than basic, knowledge of institutional food service; be able to communicate both orally and in writing independently plan, organize, and implement assignments, and plan and direct the work of staff and students. Both positions are expected to meet the following physical demands: exposure to the usual hazards associated with cooking equipment, such as hot stoves, steam cookers, and cutting devices; exposure to cold while in the kitchen freezer and cooler; regularly lift of a variety of items ranging up to forty pounds in weight, and frequently push items ranging up to 100 pounds; with assistance occasional lifting of fifty pounds and occasional climbing on a stool or ladder is also required and the employee must be able to stand for prolonged periods.

## **Participant Observation**

Volunteering as a school food service worker allowed me to observe the workers as they interacted with each other, students, other school personnel, the equipment and infrastructure (as non-human actors), as well as engage them in conversation as activities were taking place. It also allowed me to experience the physical, mental, and emotional nature of the work. It is important



to reiterate here the limitations of my participant observation discussed in the Methods chapter. Because I was volunteering I did not experience firsthand what it was like to depend on this work for my livelihood. Workers are typically hired to work in a particular school, but can be called in to sub at other schools, or workers may ask to work in multiple schools to increase hours. Unlike workers, I was able to set my own volunteer schedule to a certain degree (the work must take place during school hours, or in the case of the bakers, afterhours) and had a certain degree of choice in which schools I volunteered (as a researcher I had to get approval to volunteer and some schools did not want to participate in the study). Due to these distinctions, I did not fully experience what the school food service workers experience as official employees.

### *The Elementary School*

I volunteered at an elementary school in a middle income neighborhood with sizable Hispanic and Muslim populations. At this school 24.7% of children qualify for free and reduced meals. On the school website a “welcome” is offered in English, Spanish, Arabic, German and Japanese. The website also includes a tab for food menus and the school’s mission, “Within our caring community we seek to create an environment that empowers students to become lifelong learners, who are compassionate and contributing members of our world community.” There are 380 students and a total of 39 staff members, one of which is a food service worker who comes in for an hour at breakfast, another is a part-time helper, and the elementary school kitchen manager runs the lunch service. The food service worker on the lunch shift has been in food service at this school for about a year and a half, but has been in the industry for over 20 years. She will be the featured staff member of the month which means that her picture and a description of what she does will be on display in the school. This helps the kids get to know the non-teaching staff and fosters a sense of school community.

It is a small school and you must walk through the gym to get to the kitchen. The kitchen is along the back wall with a door next to a long window for food service; when not in use the window is shuttered with a retractable metal cover. During meal time tables and chairs are set up in the gym converting it into a cafeteria. While we worked, a gym class played dodge ball and we heard the kids shouting and the sound of the balls thumping against the wall- occasionally against the kitchen wall and the metal shutter on the food service window.

The kitchen is smaller than I expected, about the size of medium-large home kitchen. On the right wall is a computer terminal that the worker uses to tally meal payments and take inventory. Next to the computer terminal are the industrial ovens filled with racks that hold trays of food brought from the central kitchen for finishing. The back wall houses a pantry and refrigerator, a built-in desk with storage, and the back door which leads to the garden and back parking lot where deliveries are received. On the left under the windows facing the parking lot is a standard stainless steel institutional sink and dishwasher unit. The unit has two sinks used for scraping and rinsing dishes that are then loaded into racks and pushed along a conveyor belt into the dishwasher. An island used for food preparation with a sink attached, storage underneath, and two tall wooden kitchen stools sit in the middle of the kitchen. The school is fortunate to have a school garden and children can join the garden club to participate in growing and harvesting food to be used in the school cafeteria. The food service worker is allowed to compost and serve the food from the garden, but does not participate in growing or harvesting the produce. Three Master Gardeners, one who cooked in this district for many years but is now retired, run the garden on behalf of the school.

Right after breakfast, around 8:30 and 9:00 am a gentleman delivers the meal carts from central kitchen. He pops in very briefly, exchanges smiles and a “how do ya do” with the worker

who is glad to see him and to get started prepping the food. The delivery driver is out the back door and off to the next school, so quick it almost doesn't register that he had ever been there. At the end of the shift he comes back to get the dishes and take them back to central kitchen. He is still in good spirits but also still in a hurry, and he and the worker exchange brief pleasantries as he loads his carts then spirits them away while we clean. School district administration's lunches arrive with the food carts, and the worker takes lunch over to the administration because they are right next door. We walk over to the administration building and deliver the food in much the same manner as it was delivered to us. We come in beaming big smiles call out "how are ya" and "here ya go" as we drop off each individual meal. Administration thanks us for the food and seem happy that I am there helping out for the day; we met when I applied for permission to conduct this study. We slip out the back door as quickly as we came in. No time to waste, the kids will be here soon!

There is a first and second lunch and each shift can sell anywhere between 120 to 150 meals depending on what is served that day. The parents or the children go to the office each day and drop their lunch money in the deposit box, then the worker picks the money up to do the day's accounting on the computer in the kitchen. The computer is older with white a cream colored monitor that is not exactly "flat" like the most current screens and the software has the look of a standard fill-in-the-blank data entry program. The worker is able to quickly enter in the information and appears adept with the computer and software. When talking about what she does each day she glosses over the activities that involve the computer and is more animated and enthusiastic when talking about the food and the kids.

Once a month they offer what is called a "munch lunch". On this day everybody gets a corn dog or peanut butter and jelly sandwich, an apple and carrots. This lunch is served in a

paper bag, and recently they have been able to serve these lunches in bags that are more interactive for the kids with word puzzles or other games printed on them. On this day we had three entrée choices complemented by the daily salad bar. We served breakfast pizza, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with a side of broccoli and one half of a hardboiled egg, and silver dollar sized pancakes with sausages (you could get a side of cheese if you did not want the sausage). If we run out of lunches (the worker had to guess how many she will need when she placed her order for the day because the pre-ordering system was not in place yet) you get a “moo lunch”. A “moo lunch” is dairy based; it consists of yogurt, cheese and crackers and is supplemented by the salad bar.

To prepare for the day we scrubbed our hands, selected from an assorted collection of aprons (mine had flowers on it, hers was blue) and sat at the kitchen island to chop vegetables and mix a pea salad for the salad bar. The salad bar also had hard boiled eggs, cottage cheese, and apples and bananas. I then poured syrup for the pancakes in about sixty little plastic cups. The worker teased me about how careful I was not to spill the syrup. I did not want to make a mess or waste any syrup, but perhaps I was being a little over cautious. I had the sense that it was not my desire to keep from spilling syrup that made the worker tease me, rather that I had to be so overly cautious to prevent it. I was obviously not a “seasoned” worker. The salad bar is on rollers and before service we pushed it and the cold milk cart out into the gym where someone else had set up the tables, chairs and trash cans. We placed signs above the service station that said what each meal was and which meals had pork or meat; there is a sizable Muslim student population so it is important to make it clear which meals have pork and meat. Meals with pork have a little cartoon piggy on the sign to ensure that even the kids who were still learning to read knew which meals had pork.

A few minutes before first lunch service started, five very excited kindergartener helpers ran into the kitchen hollering, “Hello Ms.\_\_\_\_\_!” They did not even register my presence and headed straight for the sink. They knew to quickly scrub hands, put on (comically oversized) plastic gloves and aprons, and pick out a service station to man. One young man walked up to me wrestling with his plastic gloves and thrust them in front of my face and desperately cried, “Help!” He did not seem to notice that we had not met before, but I think my apron signaled that I was a grown up there to help with food service. The kids were too small to reach the counter so they had to stand on step stools. Each helper had several trays in front of them that they handed to the students in line while the worker and I assembled new trays as needed. The worker spoke to the children (and me) with the patience and professionalism of a seasoned childcare worker. She directed all of us with ease and an infectiously calm demeanor. The children appeared excited to the point of fury when service started and I think had the worker’s demeanor waived just once that the kids were prepared to dissolve into chaos. Each helper wanted to have the “popular” meal. At one point the young man who had needed help with his gloves looked at me desperately and cried, “They’re not coming to my line!” He had been saddled with the unpopular peanut butter and jelly sandwich with a side of broccoli and half of a hardboiled egg, which apparently did not measure up to the breakfast pizza or the pancakes with syrup and sausage. I told him that he had to sell it by telling everyone how good it was. He started yelling “Peanut butter and jelly! It’s delicious!” Alas, it did not attract students to his line.

The first shift helpers are rotated daily and the younger kids do not have to help clean up afterward (the sinks and dishwasher are too big) but they do get a cookie after their shift. The helpers get to pick out which lunch they want and it is set aside for them so they are not always saddled with a “moo lunch”. They have to eat after everyone else and get less recess time, but

they do not have to pay for lunch and they get to choose what they want to eat. However, sometimes the parents do not want their kids to eat the school lunch so they forgo the free meal. The first lunch service was a whirlwind and, much like the deliveries it was fast, efficient and full of pleasantries.

Second lunch helpers are typically older kids who work in the kitchen for the entire week and today we had four fifth grader helpers. Like the first shift, these kids knew the routine, called out cheery hellos to the worker, and didn't seem to register my presence as they got right to work. The older kids did not need any help, nor did they quibble about who did what. The worker was able to treat the older kids more like a seasoned work crew. She called out what needed to be done and the kids fell in line. They sped through service while I filled syrup cups and the worker kept her eye on the line and kept refilling trays of pizza, pancakes, and sausages. At the end of the shift the helpers brought the milk cart and salad bar back into the kitchen and wiped them down. They also pre-washed the trays before the delivery driver from the central kitchen came to pick them up. The kids used to complain about washing the dishes, but the worker turned it into a contest to see which group has the fastest overall clean up time. At the end of the month she uses her own money to buy the prizes of either candy, pencils or other knick knacks, and makes a big production of awarding the weekly prize to the winners. Now they fight over who gets to do the dishes to see who is the fastest. Today, after a brief back and forth, two helpers were put on dish duty and the worker made a show of getting out her stop watch, and saying "ready, set, wash!" They furiously scraped trays and sent them through the washer and cheered when they were done. They had beat their own previous record.

The food service worker at this school cleverly makes every moment with all of the helpers a teachable one. She explains to them the different meal options and reminds them to

help the kids who do not eat pork/meat find the vegetarian options. During service she points out which vegetables come from the school garden and teaches them about recycling and composting as they clean up. As we sat and rested in the humidity of the dishwasher's soapy steam and breathed in the smell of warm syrup like aroma therapy, I complemented the worker on how respectful and engaged the students were. She smiled and modestly told me that they were already good kids before they came to her kitchen.

At the beginning of the shift I had the honor of writing the daily joke on the chalk board. I do not know a lot of jokes that I can say within the walls of an elementary school, but I eventually settled for a classic: Why is six afraid of seven? Because seven eight nine! That is awful, but at least the worker and the kids could laugh at how bad it was. By then end of the day standing, pushing out the milk cart and salad bar, assisting the helpers and putting everything away proved to be quite physically demanding. When I left my back was sore, my feet were sore, my hips were sore, but I was still laughing at my bad joke and overall found the experience to be very rewarding. I felt right at home in the kitchen. This work was hard, but it turned out to be less physically demanding than what I would encounter at the middle and high schools.

### *The Middle School*

The middle school is a dual language immersion school, and has over 700 students 247 of which qualify for free meals and 33 for reduced (39.6% total). The school has been recognized for leadership in efficiency and environmental design, and its mission is to “grow world-class learners, engaged citizens, and leaders of the future.” It prioritizes fostering positive relationships with students, families, and the community, and strives to increase communication and create a culture of collaboration. The school acknowledges that a rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup> century world requires students to learn critical thinking, teamwork, and technology. There is no information on

the website regarding food service except for a link to the district site to view the menu. The food service staff does not appear to be listed in the staff directory, but there is a Foods Teacher listed who leads a class similar to home economics. Outside the front office there are flyers for the school's garden club and a Master Chefs' outdoor Camp for teens held at the high school garden.

This school has a designated cafeteria space with tables and chairs that do not have to be removed when not in use. The kitchen is much bigger than the elementary school kitchen and instead of walking up to a window, students enter the kitchen single file and walk around to each food station. When you enter the kitchen, to the right is the manager's office and a break area that includes storage space. On the right wall is a service station for items that do not need to be warm such as muffins and cinnamon rolls. Behind and to the right of the manager's office is the snack bar that has chips, water, 100% juice and other snacks that meet the federal nutritional guidelines, and there is a poster on the snack bar wall stating the nutritional value of the snacks. The school has recently started serving smoothies mixed with yogurt and seasonal fruit that qualify as a meal. Kids come up to the snack bar window to pick out what they want which is then sold to them by a worker.

In the center of the kitchen and moving to the left are food stations. The first station has a warm counter with pre-plated pizza, corn dogs, or other hot meals. To the left of that is the nacho bar where students select from meat, beans, cheese, sour cream and assorted vegetables to be assembled by the worker. The self-service salad bar is placed in the middle of the room along with the milk cooler. The walls visible to the students are dotted with posters with anti-bullying messages and championing the joys of eating vegetables. Posters have slogans such as, "Oregon State Basketball Powered by Veggies!" Behind the service stations are several large industrial



ovens and behind the ovens along the left side wall is a large walk in cooler and the back door. To the right of the door is a hand washing station, a food prep area and a dish washing station that is quite a bit larger than the one at the elementary school.

I spent the first day with the manager who has worked for the district for ten years; it was after lunch service and all the workers were gone. We talked while she gave me a tour of the kitchen. In her first year she was a sub and then a food prepper in the central kitchen. She could retire next year, but she will not because her husband is choosing not to retire yet; she will probably reduce her hours to part-time. All the kitchen managers have meetings to discuss what is working, what is not, and what flexibility they need from administration to meet their school's individual needs; however, the middle school and high school managers have more input in menu creation than the elementary managers. The school computer system has been upgraded so now different schools can share information and administration can "remote" into a school's computer without having to go on site to trouble shoot issues. However, the district director of food service did have to come out on this day because the computers were not working.

The manager sends a weekly meal order to the central kitchen every Wednesday and places a bread order with the bakery on Thursday. She orders meals two weeks in advance and bakery items one week in advance. She must keep a temperature log of food that is set out for service; a health inspector comes once in fall once and once after winter break to check the temperature. The manager takes temperature of the food once after it is cooked and once when it is set out to serve, and if the temperature drops the food must be tossed. Food set out to serve but not eaten within four hours must be thrown out. This school is responsible for the elementary school breakfast in the classroom program because the elementary school kitchens do not have enough storage space in their kitchens. About 440 meals are sent out for breakfast in the

classroom and about half of them come back uneaten, but sometimes they can put uneaten, unopened food in the snack bar. The middle school manager uses a tally sheet to record how much food is leftover, and the teachers or workers can purchase leftover food to take home, but they cannot use leftover food to serve students a second meal. The staff start a pool at the beginning of the year and everyone contributes some money to be used to purchase leftover food. Occasionally if they see that a student has not eaten, or is still hungry, they will use that money to purchase a meal for the student. They must keep a detailed log of what was purchased to account for all meals prepared.

The middle school manager arrives each day at 6:15 am and begins prepping the hot food. Another worker arrives at 8:15 am to roll out the computers that are used to record meal sales. These computers are stationed in the cafeteria in front of the entrance to the kitchen. The workers enter the student's name or scan their name badge into the computer and a picture of the student pops up with an @ for reduced lunch a ~ for free meals, and a # for regular paid meals. Parents can request that notes be placed on a student's account such as "no pop-tarts" or "no charging". During my participant observation, the workers I was with at the computers knew the student's names by sight and knew which kids were on free and reduced meal plans. Often the worker had the account settled before a child reached the front of the line which meant that kids on free and reduced meals moved through the line as inconspicuously as students who had money in their accounts.

The students get a fifteen minute break at 8:30 and 10:30 for breakfast which often consists of pretzels, muffins, cinnamon rolls, bagels, and cereal; Friday is maple bar day. Workers always bring out two boxes of breakfasts items but they only open one at a time because they say it is hard to predict how many you will need and if you open a box it is difficult

to save what was not served. One worker comes in for only two hours a day at 11:30 for lunch service. Lunch service is divided into two back-to-back shifts, and there are about five kids who are considered “at risk” which means that they have behavioral issues, and they eat before the other students. After them, the kids in the “lifestyles” program for kids with special needs eat and then the first lunch shift begins. Monday is pizza day, Wednesday/Friday are burger days and Tuesday/Thursday are chicken nugget days. The nacho bar, salad bar and snack bar are available every day. On Fridays they also have fish and chips or hotdogs. Friday meals are the most popular and Monday meals are the least popular.

This school is typically adequately staffed, and there were four female workers on the day I worked the lunch shift. Two of the workers were about my age (mid-thirties), and the other appeared to be at least in her mid-fifties. There is also a female custodian that cleans up after service, but she also monitors the traffic coming into the kitchen. At one point during second lunch I did not see the monitor and the kids were flooding into the kitchen. It almost turned into chaos, but the monitor quickly appeared and with the authoritative voice and mannerisms of a football coach hustled the students back into a single file line.

I worked the nacho bar with the fourth worker who was so small, young, pretty, and blond that at first I thought she was a student helper, but then I noticed that she had a tattoo (a real tattoo not done by marker or a rub on) peeking out of her shirtsleeve. She relayed stories of how the nacho bar has changed over time- first you could give both beans and meat, then you could not, then you could again. I could not help but notice how polite all the young men were with her. One young man accidentally upset his tray of nachos and he appeared mortified. I did not see exactly how it happened; did he knock it over after it was handed to him, or did it spill in transit? As I attempted to clean it up with soapy white kitchen rags and brown paper towels I

commented that these things probably happened all the time. The worker deadpanned, “Nope, this is the first time.” I was attempting to make the boy feel better, but perhaps I inadvertently insulted the worker? Did I unknowingly imply that the worker, rather than the students, must spill food all the time?

My experience with the food service equipment is that it was made and installed for an adult male who is at least six feet tall. The workers moved throughout the kitchen with ease and gave no appearance of having difficulty with any of the equipment; however, they do use work-arounds for equipment that does not meet their needs. There is one oven that the workers do not use because it was installed too high to be reached without a stool, and it is too dangerous to take huge service trays in and out of a hot oven while standing on a step stool. Some of the other ovens were also high enough that I had to reach up over my head to put trays in the oven and take them out. Some of the workers were tall enough that they did not have difficulties with these ovens, but the worker from the nacho station also had to reach above her head to use them.

The trays are so big and heavy that even when they were empty I had to use both hands to carry them. I spent part of the morning taking corn dog nuggets out of the oven and putting them in paper boats. At one point I burnt my thumb while taking a tray of nuggets out of the oven and almost dropped it, which would have been devastating. Someone went to the trouble to make those nuggets, the school paid for them, and we would not have had the proper number of meals to serve. They would have found a way to work around it, but it would still be embarrassing (worse than spilling syrup at the elementary school, someone at actually *made* those nuggets). Are feelings like these why the worker from the nacho bar did not respond well to my suggestion that spills happen all the time, even though I meant that students, not the workers must spill food? Spilling food was emerging as an unspoken taboo.

We prepared for breakfast in the class room by filling big blue plastic tubs with milk cartons. Each tub had a piece of paper on the front of it with a teacher's name and the number of milks needed for that class. Getting the crates of milk out of the freezer and then trying to put them up on the stack where I can reach them was very difficult; the crates were very heavy. After the tub is filled with milk we returned it to the walk in cooler. I tried to lift up the tub while simultaneously opening the freezer door and that just did not work. I had to prop open the cooler door (not good for the food or the energy bill) and then carry the tubs in one at a time. I filled six out of thirteen tubs. Needless to say I was quite sore and tired after this shift. But, as worn out as I was, I would still need to show up ready and willing for my shift at the high school.

### *The High School*

There is little information available on the high school website regarding values, missions, or enrollment numbers, and there does not appear to be any information on school food service, including menus or contact information for kitchen staff. The district website does state that 28.3% of the students at this school qualify for free and reduced meals and provides a table showing increasing graduation rates. There is no published information regarding the percentage of enrolled students from each demographic listed in the table below.

Student groups	2012 4 year graduation rate	2015 4 year graduation rate
Econ. Disadvantaged	45.7%	73.3%
English Lang. Learners	32.4%	46.7%
Hispanic	55.9%	81.1%
Special Education	31.5%	64.2%

Table 4.2 Increasing High School Graduation rates

The high school meal service is very similar to the middle school service, only on a moderately larger scale, and the high school is home to the central kitchen that provides meals to all the other schools and serves as the kitchen for the catering service and the bakers. My time

spent in the central kitchen focused on food preparation rather than service processes. I spent one afternoon taking a tour and shadowing some workers during lunch, and one morning working with the central kitchen workers prepping food for all of the district schools and was able to observe the high school breakfast service that took place while we were prepping. I also spent one evening with the bakers whose work day starts at 8:00 pm. Although this is the biggest kitchen in the district, because the bakers and the caterers use the same kitchen as the high school lunch service, space and equipment are limited and shifts must be staggered to accommodate each department's needs.

The high school kitchen manager, the central kitchen manager, the catering manager and the lead baker all share a large office located behind the service area. Next to the office is break room and next to the break room is a very large (larger than the middle school) walk-in cooler. To the left of the service area are several large ovens designed to accommodate a standing cart (at least five feet tall) full of trays. Rather than trays being placed on racks in the oven, the entire cart is wheeled in to the cavernous space. There is also a very large and expensive blast chiller designed to quickly cool down food to preserve it, but they do not need to preserve food that quickly and it goes largely unused. In this area there are also several steamers that are used frequently by the workers to heat food, and workers commented that they do not like to use microwaves, but instead prefer to use the steamers, and would much rather have more steamers instead of the blast chiller.

Along the back wall is the large dishwashing station and at the far end is the back entrance for deliveries. In the middle of the kitchen are several large stainless steel prepping stations. The "snack shack" is large enough to warrant a separate room which is reminiscent of a small bodega only it serves NSLP approved snacks. I spent some time hanging around the snack

shack talking with workers while kids wandered in and out. Workers in the snack shack told me that they think they should be able to sell the students food that they actually want instead of the program approved snacks. Typically, workers start arriving around five or six am to prepare the meals that must be delivered and to prepare for the 7:30 breakfast. Second breakfast is at 9:15 and lunch runs from 11:00 - 11:50. It is mostly self-serve and when I was there it actually seemed to fly by. There are many workers in the central kitchen and I do not know what constitutes “fully staffed” but I do know that there is high turn-over in the part-time shifts and that it is hard to find people to work as subs. Workers were all female except for delivery drivers and ages ranged from recent high school graduate to over 65.

A young worker trained me on the dish washing station which is not unlike ones that I have used while working in restaurants. I also rolled little hot dogs into pita dough that was made by the bakers. About five women and I stood around a prep table, some rolling hot dogs, others assembling peanut butter sandwiches with strawberry/cranberry jam that they made. I tried to engage the workers in conversation and some were willing to talk, others eyed me suspiciously and exercised their right not to talk to me (we told them about my study and let them know that they were not obligated to participate). One even told a story about a worker who talked too much and how that got in the way of work, and I feel that story was for my benefit. Even when we were silent I found it very satisfying to listen to the pat-pat-pat of hands flattening the pita dough, to smell the strawberry jam, and to know that we were preparing good food for children. I was worried that I rolled my hot dogs too tightly and that they would explode when finished in the ovens at the other schools. One woman burned her hand and dropped a tray of pizza slices while I was there and it was obvious she felt very embarrassed about it. No one minded and everyone was very nice about it, but as she kneeled to clean it up she did not look comforted.

This was similar to what I experienced in the elementary and middle school. You know that it is just a mistake and it can be fixed, but it just feels terrible to throw food away. Not only has the food itself been wasted leaving fewer hot meals to be served, but the money to purchase it and the labor that went into making it has also been wasted.

As stated above, the bakers work out of the high school central kitchen. Full-time shifts typically run from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am, with part-time staff leaving at midnight or 2:00 am. Once in a while when there are enough orders, or something changes at the last minute, the full time baker can still be in the kitchen when the morning central kitchen food service shift starts between 5:00 and 6:00 am. I arrived one evening at 8:00 pm to talk with the workers and to see if they would allow me to help them bake. Typically there are three bakers, one full time, one six hour worker and one four hour worker. On this night there were three bakers, one of which was working his last shift. The shift was revamped to a night shift after he was hired and the hours did not fit with his schedule. I spent some time talking with him, but he disappeared shortly after while no one was looking; he did not finish his full shift. The other part-time baker was a young female, who had only been employed with the district for one week and hoped that in the fall she could get the six hour shift.

The bakers make all the baked goods for both the catering service and the school meals including breads, pizza dough, cookies, cinnamon rolls, and muffins. The items for the catering service do not have to meet NSLP nutrition regulations. The biggest difference between catered meals and school meals is that the catered items can contain real butter rather than margarine, use more salt, and can be made from white flour rather than whole grain flour. Typically orders come in by the dozens. For example, the pre-order for the following week included 74 dozen



muffins for the breakfast in the classroom program. While I was there we were tasked with making cookies for the students who help out in the kitchen.

Under the direction of the young male lead baker, the female part-time baker and I scooped dozens of chocolate chip cookies. Despite the soreness in my hands and arms after scooping for an hour I was still intoxicated by the sugary, buttery (although it was actually margarine) chocolatey, vanilla-laced smell of the cookies. We filled a tall cart with racks of cookies, wheeled it into the adult person-sized oven and watched them plump up into soft, gooey cookies. For the first time since I started this study I was finally allowed to taste the food! There are so many rules surrounding food purchased with federal or state dollars that I had not been offered food at any of the schools. Despite how hungry I would get while working with the food I did not have the nerve to ask anyone if I could try it. But these were “bonus” cookies and I was allowed to eat one, and it was delicious!

### **Researcher Reflection**

School food service work is a place-specific occupation and its processes, while federally regulated, are largely shaped by the local community and district characteristics, and each individual school’s policies, infrastructure and objects. The importance of community and district characteristics and how they create associations for school food service workers will be explored further in the “Discussion” chapter in tandem with the background and federal context of the National School Lunch Program. This chapter will conclude with a brief reflection on my participant observation experience observing and interacting with workers, and the objects of school food service. The following chapter, “It’s Not My Fault the American Public is Fat”, will provide more insight into the workers’ own experiences through an exploration of themes discovered during the interview process.

Despite shared titles, pay rates, and the blanket federal regulations that govern their processes, the differences in infrastructure and tools in each school influences the role of the worker and alters their daily activities. When activities are dependent on the tools available, school food service presents differently, and can even appear unequal in settings with a minimal amount of tools and infrastructure. For example, if a kitchen lacks appropriate ovens or counter space, there is less opportunity for cooking from scratch. If one observed only these kitchens they would not be exposed to the complexity of school food service or the wide range of activities that take place across schools. This illustrates the non-universal nature of the school food service job, and also complicates attempts to articulate what a worker “does”.

At the high school in this study, school food service work can mean preparing cinnamon rolls from scratch, or rolling hot-dogs in house-made pita dough for dispersal at all district schools. At the middle school it can mean heating large trays of premade pizza and hot dog nuggets, or organizing and packing food prepared at the high school to be sent to the elementary schools that lack the capacity to pack and store food. Undeterred by lack of infrastructure for high volume scratch-cooking, food service at the elementary school did show the protean nature of the work through the supervision of student kitchen helpers, although not all elementary schools in this district with similarly small kitchens use student helpers. Observing only one school, or one type of school would not paint a complete picture of this district’s school food service, just as observing one district would not reveal the full story of school food service state-wide, and Oregon would not be fully representative of school food service nation-wide.

. An exploration of worker visibility will be saved for the “Discussion” chapter, but it is important to note here that lack of permanent cafeteria space can send unintended messages. It reinforces the notion that food service is tacked on to education, squeezed into the student’s

schedule, and immediately removed from sight once service has ended. The elementary school in this district is smaller in size and population than the middle and high school which accounts for the lack of space for a permanent cafeteria space. In terms of my participant observation, I did experience a sense of invisibility. At each school the students with whom I interacted did not seem to notice that I was a complete stranger whom they had never seen in the cafeteria before. To clarify, some workers have been on the job for many years and have a rapport with the students implying that not all food service workers are unseen or interchangeable to the students. As noted, workers know the students' names and their free and reduced status, and at the elementary school the students have a direct relationship with the worker through the student helper program. Yet, at each school the students did not seem to question (or notice in some cases) my presence, or my role as a worker. I do not know if this is simply because they are children who are distracted by school work and friends, or if there is enough personnel turn-over that seeing a new face in the kitchen is not noteworthy.

The workers, however, were aware of my presence, and at the high school which has the most workers, I felt particularly conspicuous as I did each activity. This is in part due to the skepticism some workers expressed about this research project and my motives for studying school food service. Workers at each school were polite to me and each other, but when one worker spilled a tray of pizza, her reaction led me to believe that there is awareness, and possible judgment, of other worker's performance. No one said anything negative to the worker who dropped the tray, but her lowered head, and string of apologies implied that she expected someone to be upset with her, and that she was upset with herself. I can relate to that feeling. I was afraid to spill syrup, or a tray of nuggets for fear of causing frustrations among the workers. No one told me that they would be upset if I spilled something, in fact some workers went out of

their way to tell me not to worry so much, mistakes happen, but I just “knew” it would be an issue. Perhaps this is a holdover from the years I spent working in commercial food service.

Either way, I had less concern that I would break a piece of equipment than I did about rendering food unservable. I actually felt a type of disdain for the equipment; it was too big, too heavy, and too hot. I resented that it was not made to suit my needs and preferences and related to it like an uncooperative co-worker who was never disciplined or fired because ultimately they would be too difficult or costly to replace, so it is simpler to just find work-arounds. Knowing that workers are unhappy with the blast chiller and that there are ovens that are installed too high to be used reveals that workers sometimes have a negative relationship with the equipment. I attribute this feeling to the food-centric environment of school food service and the knowledge that workers and equipment can be replaced, but wasted food is gone forever. The consumption of nutritious food is the measure of success for the National School Lunch Program and the nutritional content of spilled food is a measurable loss and cannot be salvaged for consumption.

In addition to the emotional stress I witnessed and experienced, the physical nature of the work took a toll on my body. After every shift at each school I was exhausted, my back, feet, hips, arms, wrists, and hands ached. During my time in this district only one worker mentioned having any physical difficulty performing their duties. Workers now have to take a physical before employment starts to ensure that they are capable of lifting heavy items, bending, standing for long periods of time, and doing repetitive work with their hand and arms. One woman mentioned that she was older than the others (I guessed this, but did not want to assume) and that she was “grandfathered in” because she was hired before the physical fitness test was required. She did not believe she would pass it now, but would have when she first started. This worker commented that lifting and bending were much harder these days, and I certainly found that to be

true for me as well, and I am at least half her age. I did not share this with the other workers because they did not seem to have trouble doing these activities and I did not want to appear weak or whiney. It would be reasonable to assume that workers do not generally complain about aches and pains or anything that might impede their ability to do their job. If a worker is unable to perform a function, that means that someone else must do it and as with most professions co-workers typically do not want to be saddled with someone else's work. That ties into the embarrassment of spilling or wasting food. Someone else may have prepared that food, and someone else may have to do extra work to correct your mistake.

I do not know how I would have reacted if my "help" in the kitchen actually created more work and made things harder for the workers. I believe that feeling is connected largely to my past work in food service more so than to my role as a researcher. I have a strong sense of "help out or get out" that I have cultivated through my past work experience in fast-paced food service and this environment and these workers embodied that same sense of urgency and desire to make it through service with as little difficulty as possible. It is not personal or mean spirited; it is practical. Food service can be unpredictable. Equipment fails, dough fails to rise, food gets spilled, but service must go on, and the kids must eat. Not once, not ever, at any of these schools has food service not happened. Everyday these workers make it happen. Failure is not an option. The following chapter will delve deeper into the experiences of the workers, their activities, and how they view food service in general and their role in particular, through an exploration of themes discovered during the interview process.

## CHAPTER 5: “IT’S NOT MY FAULT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IS FAT!”

### Introduction

Semi-structured interviews allow for the spontaneous introduction of a wide range of topics and themes as conversations are free to follow the interviewee’s train of thought and preferred topics. The interviews in this study provided a wealth of information on many topics related to school food service, but there are four major theme categories that stood out as markers of workers’ invisibility and silenced voices. These themes outlined workers’ love of the job despite lack of hours, wages and benefits, and highlighted workers expertise despite lack of agency over processes. Yet, the love of the job does not prevent worker turnover or desire to improve working conditions and wages. Workers revealed desire to formally participate in activities beyond preparing and serving food including menu creation, school garden programs, and nutrition education, from which they are often excluded, and reclassification of their role. The themes analysis will touch on the controversies and contradictions revealed through these themes which will be discussed in more detail in the Discussion chapter.

### Selected Themes

#### *Working with Food and Students: Sustainability, Education, and Job Fidelity*

School food service workers participate in many activities related to sustainability efforts which include reducing food waste, composting, recycling, and featuring local foods in the cafeteria. Workers try to keep food waste to a minimum and have varying perceptions on the effectiveness of these efforts. They have many strategies for reducing waste during food preparation; however, most feel that food waste occurs in the cafeteria, not the kitchen. Workers believe that they could do more to reduce food waste, and would like to participate in activities like donating food to the homeless, and letting gleaners or farmers take leftover food, but feel

that systemic barriers prevent them from utilizing these methods. Workers report limited involvement with local food initiatives, yet reveal an understanding of their purpose and potential. Some report desire for more inclusion in farm-to-school, school gardens and menu creation.

Sheena<sup>5</sup> has been in school food service for nearly two decades and attended the school at which she is now employed. Over the years she has seen many changes in the school food program and has developed a keen eye for food consumption and waste patterns. For our interview we met at a local restaurant and over soup and sandwiches Sheena tells me in a voice that commands authority and is used to competing with clanging pots and pans, whirring industrial dishwashers, and the rowdy chatter of hundreds of children, that “Overall we don't really have a lot of waste. I know my kids so I don't have a huge waste problem.” She believes it is important for workers to do all that they can to prevent food waste, but the worker's individual agency wanes once the food has crossed the lunch counter. “It's making the kids take stuff is where the waste is. I can't do anything about them throwing it away. As a cook I don't have a lot of control over anything but what I do. I can't control what happens after point of sale.” Eliza agrees that most food waste occurs in the cafeteria rather than the kitchen. As we walked through her kitchen she gently but firmly informs me, “It's the food waste that goes into the garbage once it leaves the kitchen. They are serving the food, the kids are taking, it but it's ending up in the trash which is the issue.” Both Sheena and Eliza have more administrative duties than the other workers and have some degree of input in big-picture strategies. They work hard to make the school food system viable and want to make it known that they do all that they can while bound by federal regulation and school policy.

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<sup>5</sup> Title and school level are omitted in order to protect anonymity.

Kris does not participate in administrative duties and was a student at the school in which she works only a few short years ago. We met in the public library, a suitable setting for an interview with a worker who displayed a sharp, analytical mind, and was eager to delve into the systemic issues of school food service. Upon her arrival, the tall, thin, girl shed her dingy red pea coat and folded her frame into the extra chair. For Kris, school food programs must be treated as a business. She understands that although it is a “nonprofit” program, it still needs a functional business model in order to be self-supporting; after all, her wages depend on revenue and reimbursements from meals sold. “As far as waste is concerned I would first off cut out things that we don't use or cut down on them at least because it is a business, supply and demand, and if the demand isn't there you're just throwing money in the garbage because no one wants to eat that.”

Sheena noted that Gleaners wanted to take leftover school food, but because the school cannot guarantee temperature control after it leaves their kitchen they cannot let the gleaners take it. The facility in which the food was initially cooked is liable for the food even after it leaves that facility, rendering the school vulnerable to a lawsuit if anyone would become sick. At Eliza's school, teachers, staff, and administration contribute money to a “leftover food pool” so leftover food can be purchased and accounted for. They take the food home, or share it with students who they know are food insecure. Kris wishes that “...there was an extra program for the extra food. I'd feed it to the homeless or something. That would be an amazing program, but we can't do that because it's not really our program. We can talk to the district and see what they say but I don't know how it'll go over.”

Oregon Jeep Girl remembers a time when regulations were less binding and schools were able to implement localized solutions to food waste. These solutions may not save the schools



money, but they do manage to put leftover food to good use. As we sat resting our haunches on stools in the kitchen after a whirlwind service she jovially reminisced about the way things used to be despite the negative connotations of what that meant for the way things are now. “One thing that I would like to be able to do if there is someone who had farm animals, pigs or chicken, take that leftover stuff and give that to them. The federal government says, ‘This is ours no you may not give it away’. A lot of schools used to do that, had the freedom to and I didn’t feel so bad about throwing it out because I knew it was going to feed animals and not just end up in a landfill.”

Workers recognize that it is bad for both business and the environment to waste food and feel frustrated at the limited agency they have over process to eliminate food waste. They do their best to track eating patterns and know what their kids will or will not eat, but they must serve what the regulations dictate and this can cause tension and negative feelings. Kris takes food waste seriously because of her upbringing; she tells me, “I hate having to throw food away. I grew up in a house where being wasteful was not okay. Like if you didn’t want to eat your spinach then you put it away for later because you were going to eat your spinach eventually whether you wanted to or not because it was good for you and because throwing it away is wasteful.” Yet she also has a wry sense of humor when conveying how throwing food away on a daily basis can feel overwhelming. “It reminds me so much of reading *Grapes of Wrath*. I mean, it’s not as bad- we don’t have mountains of oranges that we’re setting on fire on porches obviously, but there is a lot of food that gets thrown away.” But Oregon Jeep Girl said it best when she said it simply, “It doesn’t feel good to waste food.”

One way workers can mediate negative feelings about food waste is to provide a good example for the students. They believe that it is good for the students to see them participating in

sustainability related activities. As Oregon Jeep Girl states, “We’re being a little more conscientious with what we do with our leftovers that helps the kids to see that too.” Sheena also does her best to educate students on local food programs. “We try to let the kids know that we serve a lot of local food. I try hard to participate in education. I sat down with the sustainability [club] kids and the teacher wrote me a letter afterwards saying that I really turned those kids around and that they spoke highly of me and realize that I am trying to work with what I have.”

However, workers are often left out of sustainability initiatives involving local food which hinders their ability to participate in providing a good example for children and participation in sustainability education. “I’m personally not involved in farm-to-school. I know we get a lot of local food.” Kris related when asked which programs she participates in, and Oregon Jeep Girl is also excluded from the school garden program although she would like to participate. She can compost, which she is “super stoked about”, but does not run the garden herself, instead three master gardeners are responsible for the program. “I’m jealous I want to go out there,” Oregon Jeep Girl says, then putting a positive spin on the situation, “but it is pretty neat to utilize the produce from the garden on the salad bar. They’ll have some spring lettuces here pretty soon and we can supplement that cut down on our food bill while getting fresh food so it’s pretty exciting to me because I’ve never had a school that’s had its own garden and it fit right in with food service.” She recognizes the potential for school food service to be more than just plating and serving food, it can be about creating a school food system that incorporates growing, cooking, eating, and composting fresh, nutritious food. She is also conscious of the financial benefit for the school; growing food on campus cuts down on food cost.

Workers report that they enjoy interacting with the students and care about their overall well-being. They know which children are food insecure and do what they can to make sure that

all children have access to nutritious food. “We figure out who's eating and who's not. Some kids eat only here. The principal wants every kid to eat.” Eliza relates, “I won’t let a kid go hungry. If you have ten slices of pizza left over and one of the kids didn’t get to eat I will give them food. I am not going to let a kid go hungry, it’s just not who I am.”

Despite the negatives, overall, the workers feel that working with food and with children is a very desirable, rewarding experience. The ever-up-beat Oregon Jeep Girl tells me that she, “absolutely loves this job and I wouldn't give it up unless something made me. To me the negatives are miniscule as long as you do your job and follow the rules and policies and regulations the whole nine yards and then have fun with it.” For her the job allows her to make a difference in children’s lives. “I love being a part of that. If I can teach one little child a little bit about nutrition I feel fulfilled, I feel happy.” The socially analytical Kris also expresses affinity for the work, “I love food. I love learning about food. I love eating food. I love cooking food. It's an important part of our culture.” I asked Kris if perhaps she was a secret cultural anthropologist and she grinned and said, “Who knows, maybe I am?” For the young baker Leslie, who started her job only a week before we met, food service is a family tradition. “I've always had a desire to work in food. My family has always had someone in the food industry. My aunt worked for the school district for many years, I had a grandmother who worked for the State Penitentiary, my grandpa -my dad's dad- had concessions for the carnival. There's always been someone in the food industry, always.” Ultimately, when it comes to job fidelity, Oregon Jeep Girl nicely captured what many of the workers expressed in different ways.

It's so rewarding when one of the kids brings me a card that they made that says ‘thank you for all the lunches they were really good, you’re really awesome.’ It makes you tear up to know I made a difference. I think it's awesome I love it, I definitely love my job. To me there's a lot of reward I mean I've done all kinds of jobs in my lifetime. I'm 53 years old and I've done so many things and this is my little niche, this is where I belong. I need to stay with the kids and work with them and yet still be with the food because food is

definitely my passion. I love to cook and just to be able to combine the two of them is rewarding.

*Offer vs Serve: The Choice is... Whose?*

“You've got to offer versus serve so that's what the salad bars are all about. This is what we're offering- you can have that but the actual main meal has to have all the components of the complete meal according to the federal government.” *Oregon Jeep Girl*

This school district, like most, serves more than one entrée for lunch in addition to the salad bar and snack bar offerings. This is based on the principle of “offering” rather than “serving”. In light of concerns that childhood obesity epidemic threatens to produce children who are unfit for military service and are unable to fully participate in the labor economy, it is important to nurture the development of future “good citizens” who make healthy food choices. Offering several choices allows students to develop skills in making healthy choices as well as respecting their autonomy over their body and food choices. However, these choices are still highly regulated though the federal government, school policies, school administration, and school wellness committees. School food service workers are often caught in between these school meal stakeholders and gatekeepers, and the students. Sheena articulated push and pull between the need to help students develop independence and to learn to make responsible choices with the demands of federal and local policies designed to intervene in children's health outcomes. “With high school students they're supposed to be testing the waters and trying to be more conscious at this stage of the choices that they can make. We are so limited on those choices that we can give them. Our wellness policy is actually more stringent than the statewide level from what I understand.”

Kris demonstrated a grasp of the contradictions in a nonprofit program that needs a strong business plan to be self-supporting but neglects the principle of supply and demand. When it comes to offer versus serve she recognizes this as a false choice due to the highly regulated

nature of the options presented to students. Kris states, “I like a lot of the food we serve but I also recognize a lot of it is lacking because of the standards. Why are the codes so strict to the point that I almost feel like we're feeding fewer people with these restrictions than we would be if we could feed them something else?” Kris experiences the push and pull between what is good for the students and what is good for the program’s bottom line. She states, “I wish it was more of a balancing act between what the kids want to eat and what we can serve when really a lot of the time I feel like we get stuck serving things that the kids don't like.” Sheena also notes that in her role she observes consumption patterns, yet has limited agency to leverage them to improve both purchase and consumption rates. As noted in the section above, food purchased does not equal food consumed. “We like to give them variation but you learn what variation works and you have to figure it out on your menu. This [menu creation] is something for the administration, I don't do this part.” Sheena also recognizes that children on free and reduced lunch status have even less choice within the prescribed options. “They can't come in and say I just wanted milk today; you have to take the entrée [milk is free when paired with a free and reduced lunch entrée], I have to charge you \$0.50 for the milk [if you do not get the full meal] and most of my kids are free and reduced so they don't have the money to just buy the milk so they take that PB&J [to qualify as a free and reduced meal] but really all they wanted was the milk.”

Workers try to get the students to try new foods and do what they can to educate the kids and encourage the consumption of nutritious food. Oregon Jeep Girl reports that, “The kids know right away if they don't like it and I say ‘well have you tried it? Just have a little taste, take a little bite’ and probably half of them will try and the other half goes ‘no gross’.” Kris also commented on how students react to unfamiliar food choices, “We have these chicken legs and the kids won't touch it, some of them don't even know that it's chicken. They've never seen real chicken before

so they'll ask 'what is that' and you tell them 'it's chicken before it turned into a chicken nugget' and they look at you like 'gross why would you eat that' and so they just don't know, they've never seen this kind of food before." When children are presented with new food in the lunch line, the worker has only a few short minutes to educate the children and try to "sell" the unfamiliar food.

At the high school level the students are allowed to leave campus for lunch. If a student never steps foot in the cafeteria, the workers do not have the chance to convince the student to try and buy new foods. Sheena laments, but relates to students who eat off campus. "We have open campus at the high school. You think they're going to eat lunch with me [in the cafeteria eating what the worker prepared] if they can run down to the grocery store and get whatever they want? I don't think so. When I was in school I never ate in the cafeteria." Kris has no administrative duties and occupies one of the lower level positions, yet she keeps track of consumption patterns and often wonders how things can be improved. "How can we serve the stuff in the way that the kids are going to want to eat it? High schoolers don't like healthy food especially with the grocery store right down the street, it's like two blocks away. It's a huge school and we serve maybe an eighth or a sixteenth of the people who most of them are just going to go down the block, grab something from the grocery store." When students do not even enter the lunchroom, it is difficult for workers to influence their choices, but at the same time they express feelings of responsibility for those choices. They also experience blame when the options they are required to offer to the students are undesirable to students, parents, and the community at large.

*Backlash and Blame: Who is at Fault When the System Fails?*

Despite workers' lack of control over regulations, food options, and process, they are on the front lines of food service and often receive negative feedback. Oregon Jeep Girl recounted an encounter with a parent who came to the cafeteria and told her in no uncertain terms, "Do not give my child anything from that kitchen!" The worker assured the parent that they would not serve the student, but was confused by the confrontation. Oregon Jeep Girl felt that although there was nothing wrong with the food, all the parent had to do was ask and she would make sure that the child was not served. Instead the parent approached her in a confrontational way that left her feeling hurt and questioning her skills. Later, Oregon Jeep Girl found out that the child had extreme allergies that can be triggered by simply being in close proximity to certain foods. This, however, did not make her feel better, "I would have understood if she had just told me about the allergies." Why did this parent feel the need to speak to the worker in this way? Why treat the worker like an adversary?

School food service workers are on the front lines of food service and are therefore often targets or recipients of negative feedback. However, these workers have little to no control over regulations, policies, food procurement, or menu creation. Eliza commented that elementary school kitchen managers have less say in menu creation than upper level managers and workers have little to no input in menu creation. In addition to lack of control over regulations and processes, workers are not able to force students to eat or make good food choices, nor can they force parents, children, and school administration to communicate effectively. Eliza related a story about parents who gave their child and the workers conflicting information. She states that a father put a "no charging" hold on his child's account, but the parents are divorced and the father did not communicate this to the mother. The mother did not send lunch money with the child and then became angry with the workers when the child arrived home from school hungry.

Corey believes that workers not only get caught between parents and their children, but that occasionally people complain about the program simply because they disagree with it in principle. Corey states, “Sometimes it's the adults who don't like the regulations and so they say the kids don't like the food.”

Workers also stated that frequently the parents who complain about school food are those whose children are not on the free and reduced lunch plan. Presumably, these parents can afford to pack a lunch for their children, or give their high school aged children money to eat off campus and are less dependent on school meals to feed their children. In the workers' experience, parents of children who rely on free and reduced meals are less likely to complain about the meals, or the school food system. Kris explains that she grew up in a household that depended on free and reduced lunches. She says that, “The only people that I knew who complained about the school food are people who get food somewhere else. We were poor, we couldn't afford anything else and so nutrition requirements be damned, food is food and it saves families an immense amount of money.” This was a source of frustration to her as a student and continues to be as a school food service worker. When parents of students who do not rely on free and reduced meals complain that school food is not adequate, Kris feels that parents should first look to food practices in the home before criticizing school food. “It's silly because I feel like these are the parents [of students not on free and reduced meals] who are irritated because their kids have health problems, but they go to school or the grocery store and buy whatever they want.” Kris recognizes that children's nutritional status is influenced beyond the confines of school food, and feels that there is too much focus on schools instead of other parts of the food system and environment. She says, “Schools are being asked to take on the responsibility of everyone else.”



Workers not only experience this backlash and blame from within their own schools, they also receive negative messages through the national discourse surrounding school food service. This includes messages that school food service is responsible for the current obesity epidemic. Corey tapped into the national dialogue saying, “I think Michelle Obama is kind of like a figurehead for all of that backlash and change” and implied that most people do not have access to the First Lady so their complaints are directed at the local school food service workers. During our interview Sheena looked me in the eye and said, “You be sure to quote me on this- it’s *not my fault* the American public is fat!” We had a conversation about this issue prior to the interview, but she often feels blamed for the health status of the students and wanted to be sure that her opposition to this notion was on record. As front line workers they are keenly aware of obesity, health, and other issues related to the food system. Yet they feel that time constraints as well as their position in the hierarchy of the school food system prevents them from taking action. Sheena states, “I don’t have the time to shout and be heard, I’m just here trying to make a difference in my school.” Oregon Jeep Girl also feels trapped by her role even though she often contemplates ways to improve service, “That’s the whole thing you know, we’re just the little bottom line people here. We can make suggestions or talk to some people about it, it’s just a matter of us doing more and sometimes there’s just not time.” When you are only allowed to work for two hours in the middle of the day, and your role is perceived as “little bottom line people” it is difficult to ask for increased hours which would allow you to improve processes and would require reclassification of the school food service worker position.

#### *The Work is Hard and The Job is Precarious*

As noted in the sections above, workers express job fidelity, and knowledge of the components of school feeding programs beyond preparing and serving food, including the

consumption patterns of students, the ways regulations affect those patterns, and the benefits of school gardens and food waste initiatives. Workers desire to help children develop good habits, including taking responsibility for their food choices, but they also have negative experiences in the form of backlash to regulations, policies, and processes over which they have little to no control. Workers report that they struggle to get enough hours to earn a living and to qualify for health insurance, which for some hinders job fidelity and makes it difficult to fill empty positions. Cory, a new employee, and one of only two male school food service workers I encountered, had already turned in his notice by the time we met. The bakers work overnight, but even though he was a baker, Cory was hired to work a day shift. When his schedule changed he knew he needed to find a new job. “When I started here I couldn't work nights because my wife works nights and we have a two-year-old. I quit my old job and a few days before I started here they switched the shift to nights. That's the way it goes.” Jaimie, the other male who also works nights as a baker notes how the schedule often deters applicants who cannot make due with part-time work that disappears in the summer months, “It’s hard to find somebody [to work] for a month at only four hours [per shift] and then nothing guaranteed for the summer until school starts”.

Full time hours are important for increasing wages earned, but they are also needed to qualify for benefits. Despite her comment that “the pay is not very good”, Oregon Jeep Girl would like to work more than four hours a day not only because she “really loves working here” but because when she was reduced from six to four hours it had a major impact on her access to benefits. “I'm down to four hours and that made my insurance go from eighty dollars a month to \$520 a month and that was just for two hours a day difference so now I basically drive up here and work for insurance.” Corey also notes that the pay is not good, and says that the benefits

package is part of what makes this job appealing, but they are nearly impossible to access. “It’s good benefits if they can get you full-time. That’s part of the reason why I’m leaving because they play the non-full-time game.” He states that one way schools balance budgets is to deny workers a benefits package. Even when workers scrape together enough hours to qualify for benefits, they are often unaffordable. “If you’re only six hours and the benefits don’t come out—that’s how they balance the budget. They’re restricting their benefits and I only make ten bucks an hour with a shift differential, and then I get no benefits because if I was going to buy benefits from the school district it would be \$400 which is more than I make here so it is why they have high turnover.”

Schools have the option to use contracted third party labor rather than hiring employees through the school district, but workers noted that when work is contracted out, it is difficult to advocate for better hours, wages, or benefits. They also cite difficulty using unions to advocate for improvements. According to Sheena, “The employees are worth the benefits. You can’t do anything [about benefits or pay] when the labor is contracted out, they’re not a part of the school system and they’re not as invested sometimes.” When workers are not contracted out they can join the union that represents all school staff, however, some workers feel that unions can complicate matters. “It feels like the admin is just kind of frozen. I don’t know if it’s just because of the union, but when they say they’re going to do something it takes a long time to go through a long chain and that’s why I don’t think things will change very fast. When there’s a union I think most school districts are going to be that way. It’s mutual frustration.”

In addition to problems with hours, wages and benefits, workers experience frustration with lack of tools and training, and a confusing hierarchy that makes it difficult to speak to their boss. Kris relates that “It’s irritating ‘cuz there’s almost always something missing. We don’t

always have the things that we need.” For Jaimie, the lack of training was more frustrating than the lack of tools. “When I first started working here I kind of got thrown into it, and there wasn't anyone to train me so it was really hard to grasp.” Kris expressed frustration with the food service hierarchy. “I had no idea who my boss was. I don't work for the school, I work for the district. It's really complicated and confusing when I want to talk to my boss and I have a meeting but I can't just go down the hall to the office, I have to go to the district building.”

Some workers felt that reclassification as educational assistants would increase their hours, wages, and access to benefits as well as reflect what they are capable of contributing to the program. Oregon Jeep Girl talked to Human Resources to request reclassification, but her request was not granted. One problem that stands in the way of reclassifying the job which would require better hours and a pay increase is that funding for school food service workers wages relies on meals sold either directly to students or through reimbursements for free and reduced meals and revenue from selling competitive foods. As noted by one worker, “I serve generally 180 meals”, yet the student population at this worker's school is 1,234 students with 450 qualifying for free and reduced meals which means that even students who do not have to pay for the food choose not to eat what is provided through the National School Lunch Program.

### **Themes Analysis**

During the interview process it was discovered that workers in this district do use the care rhetoric attached to domestic work or public reproductive work when describing their job. Themes also show systematic exclusion from activities that move beyond simply serving food and that have the potential to justify rethinking school food service beyond the typical notions of domestic service that is emotionally fulfilling and therefore does not need to provide financial stability. Yet workers describe the need for better hours, wages, and access to benefits. Despite

this exclusion, workers have an understanding of the issues and the potential of school food service as a revenue generator, a dietary intervention, and a sustainability initiative. School food service workers know what works in their school and what does not. They are both on the front lines and behind the scenes and observe patterns of behavior that they connect to the school food system at large. Workers know how many kids they serve on average and which kids are on free and reduced meals and know when kids are not eating. They know which foods the kids like or dislike. They understand the needs of their student population and the culture and structure of their school food system that includes administration, staff, wellness committees, parents, and students.

Workers understand that school food service embodies more than scooping and serving food. They recognize the importance of creating a sustainable school food system through recycling, composting, gardening and utilizing local foods and are knowledgeable of the local and federal barriers to implementing sustainability initiatives. They aim to educate children about sustainability, local food, and nutrition. Workers actively participate in creating “good citizens” who can make healthy food choices and intuitively understand the importance and challenges of respecting children’s autonomy in the confines of a federally regulated program. Workers express desire to be more engaged with the school food system including food systems education in the areas of gardening, composting, recycling, making good choices, team work, work ethic, and nutrition. Yet they appear to be systematically excluded from formal participation in these activities. One worker noted that there are three master gardeners who maintain the school garden and that she wishes she were allowed to participate in maintaining and education students about the garden. Others noted that they are not included in farm to school activities or menu creation. The worker who has student helpers each day and maximizes

the learning opportunities that arise is not formally or officially considered an educator. She did ask for reclassification as an educational assistant, but unfortunately I assume she did not receive it as I saw a recent job posting for her position. I have tried to contact her to no avail.

Each day workers see and experience the way federal regulations succeed and fail including problems in the funding structure and the rejection of highly regulated food that children do not like or recognize, yet workers often feel unable to speak up or take action to make improvements. School food service workers attribute lack of agency to their place at the bottom of the school food system hierarchy. They feel that they do not have the time or the authority to enter the discourse of school food service despite their specialized knowledge as daily front line workers. Workers receive backlash and negativity for issues and problems that they understand and recognize, yet feel unable to challenge the status quo. They experience blame for regulations, policies, procedures over which they have little to no agency. They express powerlessness when recounting the inability to prevent food waste after the point of sale, or to create recipes and menus that they know will sell. The inability to sell food to the majority of children creates a negative feedback loop by reducing revenue which reduces time and resources to make improvements, as well as higher wages for workers.

It is difficult to advocate for reclassification, more money, or more affordable benefits when, for example in one school, only 180 out of 1234 students are purchasing food. The workers feel blamed for the low sales, but do not feel that they have the agency to change the system. There is an interesting push and pull between workers' love of the job, their desire to be more involved, and the lack of status or inclusion in programs, processes, and problem solving. The lack of status is reflected in the official as well as perceived role of the school food service worker as "just a cook". It is also reflected in low pay, and the lack of full time work and access

to benefits. Workers may desire to become more officially invested in the school food system, yet they are hesitant to speak above their station or to take on additional work without compensation. It is interesting to note that at least four of the workers interviewed for this study are no longer employed in the school district food service. One retired and the others have not returned calls or emails inquiring about their reasons for leaving the program.

The themes and issues expressed during the interviews, conversations and participant observation highlighted controversies and contradictions of the National School Lunch Program, and the role of the school food service worker within the system. The following “Discussion” chapter will further explore these themes, and connect them to the historical and contemporary issues of school food service. The discussion will investigate the ways in which these themes are a product of both blanket federal regulations and the unique local characteristics of this particular district. It will also envision ways in which the controversies and contradictions revealed provide opportunities for change and worker advocacy.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Aims of this study are 1) to add the workers' voices and experiences to the discourse surrounding school feeding programs and to analyze them as a missing piece in the construction of a holistic understanding of these programs, 2) to examine their experiences and working conditions in relation to those of other workers who have established advocacy groups, and, 3) to explore the possibilities for school food service worker advocacy. After conducting semi-structured interviews asking workers to describe their on-the-job experiences and following up on topics which the workers introduced, conducting participant observation and a literature review, and analyzing the data, it became apparent that workers were not heard because they were not seen. Not only are workers invisible in their school and communities, they have been largely overlooked by researchers. Their invisibility is exacerbated by the lack of worker-centric, qualitative studies (versus food-centric, quantitative studies) and national demographic statistics comparable to those used to make fast food workers visible as members of the labor economy. That said, compared with the past the work of school food service has become increasingly visible, and through an increase in training initiatives, the agency and expertise of workers is slowly gaining national recognition. Yet until workers become visible, not just as tools to deliver the largest federal childhood nutrition intervention, but as legitimate members of the labor economy who must support themselves in a neoliberal society, their voices will not truly be heard.

One way to increase worker visibility is to trace the controversies and contradictions of their historical and current associations, and the corresponding narratives. There are many contradictions or controversies born of neoliberalism that are inherent to the National School Lunch Program which have narratives that serve to preserve hegemony; however, when workers relate to these narratives in different ways, in different locations, at different points in time, they



can reveal opportunities for change. This discussion will not solve or reconcile these controversies, rather, it will explore them and imagine how organizations that currently work to uplift other workers could increase school food service worker visibility and prevent the workers from falling through the gaps and cracks created by the shifting boundaries of neoliberalism.

### **Narratives of Contradictions and Controversies**

Schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are exemplary sites of the contradictions of neoliberal ideals of self-governance, deregulation, and the rule of the global market (Ong 2006). This section will outline the narratives of twelve key contradictions and controversies associated with school food service workers. The following figure uses Latour's theory of tracing associations to show a rudimentary "network" of the contradictions and controversies associated with school food workers. Do not be fooled by the apparent hierarchical nature of this figure; this is not a hierarchy. The network is actually flat, like a piece of paper laid horizontally on a table. Also, it is nearly impossible to truly trace every possible association of food service workers and the way these associations intersect, and interact, hence the rudimentary nature of this figure and its focus on twelve key associations revealed by the data obtained for this study.

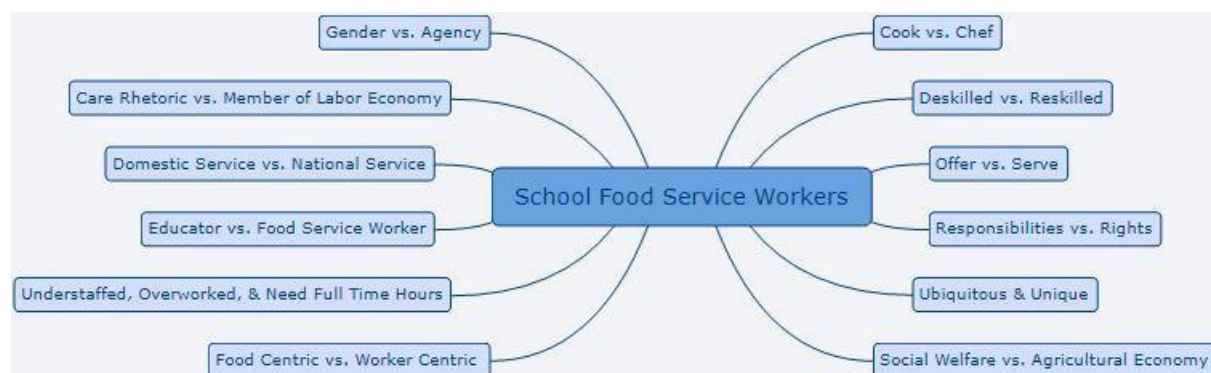


Figure 6.1 Network of Controversies and Contradictions

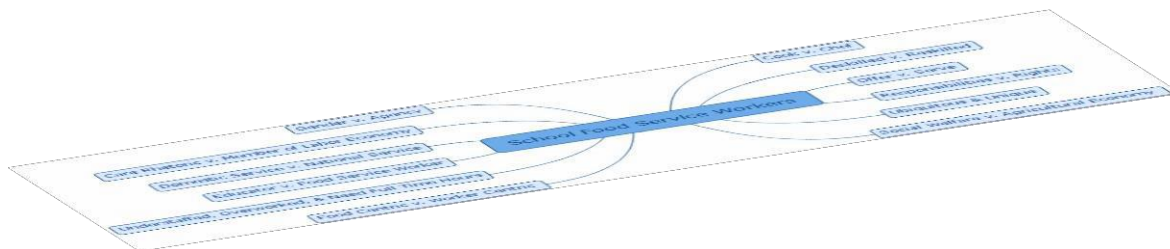


Figure 6.2 Flattened Network of Controversies and Contradictions

*Social Welfare vs. Agricultural Economy, Responsibilities vs. Rights, and Offer vs. Serve*

The contradictions found in schools are rooted in a highly regulated localized food system attached to a national agricultural market that must participate in the regulation of the economy through the use of subsidized agricultural commodities; it is also a social welfare program that aims to intervene in the health of children, particularly children of lower socioeconomic status. The National School Lunch Program exhibits the concept of “the social investment state” which rather than protecting people from falling through the social gaps created by market rule, aims to integrate them into markets through ‘active’ social policy, designed to foster the creation of the ‘active’ citizen by mobilizing a discourse of ‘responsibilities’ rather than ‘rights’” (Roberts 2008:552).

Under the NSLP the concept of “responsibility v. rights” is aimed at both the children and the workers. The children have a responsibility to be healthy which conflicts with their right to eat what they want. Workers interviewed use a phrase common in school feeding program materials, “offer versus serve”, to describe the process of providing three entrée choices in addition to the salad bar and snack bar. Workers recognize that students need to exercise their right to choose what they eat in order to grow into autonomous adults but also recognize the worker’s responsibility to encourage students to make appropriate choices as determined by the USDA nutrition standards; students have a responsibility to be healthy enough for participation in the labor economy and military service. Workers also understand that for students who are

unable to bring lunch from home, or eat off campus, their choices are highly regulated and that students would not necessarily choose this food if they had food options not regulated by government guidelines.

Contradictions in the National School Lunch Program located in government policies that enforce healthy practices while teaching ideals of self-governance in food choices prohibit the workers and students from exercising their “right” to participate freely in the market. Rather than running the program like a business based on consumer demand, - as workers in this study expressed desire to do by selling food to the children that they want to buy and, which would provide enough revenue to pay workers living wages and benefits, - the program depends on the worker to learn through training to sell food to children that they do not want to buy. The school food “market” is thus not “free”; the purchase options are highly regulated and neither workers nor children are “free” to decide what products should be bought and sold. To clarify, this is not an argument against measures to improve the nutritional status of children, rather it is a recognition of the paradoxes surrounding the efforts to achieve these goals in a neoliberal society that both creates the need for these programs and hinders their ability to succeed.

*Care Rhetoric vs. Member of the Labor Economy and Gender vs. Agency*

Intersecting with “social welfare v. agricultural economy, and “responsibilities vs. rights”, are the contradictions of “care rhetoric vs. member of the labor economy” and “gender vs. agency” revealing the limitations of agency in care work when gender is performed in the workplace. Women often find that they must capitalize on their supposed “feminine” emotional characteristics such as “caring” about children, and “loving to provide service” for others, especially children. Yet when workers articulate the emotionally fulfilling nature of feeding children it undercuts their agency, which in this case is their ability to advocate that this work

should be paid work that provides a living for women who are responsible for ensuring their right to participate in the labor economy and the free market, and avoid falling through gaps in services created by the free market. The workers as women have a responsibility to “care” about providing reproductive labor to create healthy children, even if said labor does not provide a living for the worker implying that the worker does not have the “right” to demand better pay necessary for free-market participation.

Masculine notions of efficiency, power, and business are associated with public work that is presupposed to provide for men who need to “make a living” (although there is an extensive body of research about minority male’s ability to make a living wage under neoliberalism which is beyond the scope of this paper). The gendered performance of care work reproduces notions of women as members of the unpaid private sphere and limits women’s agency as members of the workforce. When asked, workers state that they “love” their job, it is rewarding, and they “care” about the students. Love of the job, affinity for the student, and “failure is not an option” narratives mask issues of understaffing, or the need to improve working conditions and wages. It is difficult to claim that full time status or better wages are needed when service never fails and workers use care or emotional rhetoric to describe their work.

*Understaffed, Overworked & Need Full-Time Hours, and Domestic Service vs. National Service*

Workers are in the paradox of being simultaneously understaffed and overworked while fighting for full time work. This is a contradiction of a neoliberal society that overlooks women workers as individuals who have both a responsibility and a right to participate in the labor economy. Workers in this study expressed desire for full-time work, year-round work, yet also cited the district’s inability to fill part-time jobs, and high turnover due to low wages and lack of access to affordable health care plans. School food service budgets are often balanced on the

backs of workers though reducing positions to part-time, utilizing contracted labor, diverting funds to equipment purchases, and subsidizing cuts to education funding that could otherwise be used to provide wage increases.

Workers also expressed desire to participate more fully in nutrition and sustainability programs. Federal and private grant monies used to support farm-to-school programs, school gardens, and food waste initiatives often fund nonprofit organizations who pay non-food service staff to develop these programs and initiatives. Sometimes these nonprofit staff are national service members (national service is used in this text to refer to the non-military service that aims to “improve the life of fellow citizens” as defined by the Corporation for National and Community Service) who are performing duties that when performed by school food service workers is regarded both implicitly and explicitly as domestic work. Why provide grants to nonprofit agencies to create national service jobs to improve school feeding programs rather than reclassify or reimagine the role of the school food service worker? Why not train school food service workers (not just administration) to develop and run these programs and increase their pay and hours to reflect their new skills and responsibilities?

When their labor is treated as domestic service, workers are not free to participate fully in the labor economy. School food service workers deliver a federal program that is considered a matter of national security, yet they are treated as the providers of deskilled domestic service rather than skilled national service. The care rhetoric seen in the section above is associated with feminized domestic work or public reproductive work of reproducing citizens who can participate in the labor economy and military service. This reproductive work is also attached to narratives of creating autonomous adults who make responsible choices. One wonders if the

majority of school food service workers were men, would they been seen as providing skilled national service worthy of fulltime work, living wages and benefits?

*Deskilled vs. Reskilled and Cook vs. Chef*

The contradictions and controversies of “gender vs. agency” also intersects with “deskilled vs. reskilled” and “cook vs. chef”. School food service workers are simultaneously deskilled and reskilled. They are deskilled through heavy regulation and standardization, yet reskilled through culinary training programs. Reskilling increases the degree of individual agency over outcomes though improved technique. Once they have received chef training and the corresponding title, uniform, and equipment, their perceived agency increases and it becomes more difficult to deflect blame, yet they are still bound by federal regulations, and their food vendor options are limited by national agricultural commodities available, or local agricultural capacity. Further, as chefs they are still not administrators and are not fully included in all decision making.

“Offer v serve” intersects with “deskilled and reskilled”, and “cook v chef” by relieving the worker of responsibility for children’s food choices, but in order to bring in revenue, workers must try to sell these highly regulated options to students who do not necessarily want to purchase them. When students exercise their right to not make responsible food choices, workers report that they experience blame from parents and the community. As “Sheena” stated, “It’s not my fault the American Public is fat!” This worker has experienced feelings of blame for the state of children’s health outcomes. Sheena also echoed another sentiment that came up in other interviews, stating, “As a cook I don’t have a lot of control over anything but what I do.” Workers can use a perceived lack of agency connected to their title of “cook” to deflect blame and backlash.

Preferring the title of “cook” to “chef” and making the distinction between unskilled cook, skilled chef, and administrator, acts as a buffer to deflect negative feedback by denying any individual agency they might possess based on personal performance and skill set, and highlighting that which is out of their control. When workers use their status as cook to deflect blame it also argues against increased hours and wages; yet the title of chef and increased individual agency through training still does not guarantee a raise. Workers have access to widely used narratives like “offer v serve” and “cook v chef” that allow them to maintain the status quo, yet they will need to relate to these narratives in new ways if they want to enact change including advocating for better hours and wages.

Highlighting “gender and agency” here shows that women laboring under the contradictions often found in these gendered notions of unskilled, emotional, care giving, domestic work experience “different states of autonomy and dependency” than men that are “experienced as personal conflicts” because even the “well-meaning ideologies of a welfare society can violate individual’s well-being in the process of its restructuration (Husso and Hirvonen 2011:4, 7). In other words, workers deny their agency to prevent the internalization of blame that stems from backlash against federal regulations, and the very public association with First Lady Michele Obama’s efforts to combat childhood obesity through Let’s Move! and her support of the new school food regulations.

*Educator vs. Food Service Worker and Food-Centric vs. Worker-Centric*

The elementary school in this study that utilizes student helpers in the kitchen technically changes the status of the worker from just a cook, to a student helper supervisor. Yet, her position is not reclassified as an educational assistant or similar role that would reflect the supervisory and educational aspect of the student helper program. The worker remains “just a

cook” who “loves working with children” which should provide enough fulfillment to compensate for the lack of hours and wages. While this program does increase her visibility, it also serves to balance the budget by providing free labor which justifies reduced hours, and not hiring paid help, effectively releasing the federal government from the responsibility of staffing its program. It also creates a narrative that the work can be done by unskilled children which argues against reclassification for the worker and complicates attempts to show the importance and complexity of school food service work.

School food service is a food-centric environment that provides funding for nutrition programs, sustainability programs, training, equipment and infrastructure before wages for workers. Without a doubt, children’s consumption of fresh nutritious food in a sustainable food system, and the workers right to become skilled in culinary arts is of the utmost importance. Yet school food service workers’ labor does not take place in a vacuum; workers must live in a neoliberal society that holds them personally responsible for avoiding the inherent gaps created by embedded contradictions and controversies in relation to the students, the food, and themselves. Workers must make a living and deserve to be on the forefront of advocacy efforts to raise the minimum wage and increase access to health care. One way to advocate for workers is to use educational unions to fight for school food service worker reclassification as educational assistants. Workers expressed interest in reclassification but also expressed mixed feelings about unions which will be explored further in the “Opportunities” section at the end of this chapter.

### *Ubiquitous & Unique*

It is necessary to respect local differences and preferences while still seeking common ground if workers want to band together and reclaim the narratives of school food service work, bending controversies and contradictions to the advantage of the workers. School food service is



both ubiquitous and unique. It is governed by blanket federal regulations, but the characteristics of each district and school create individual opportunities and challenges causing workers to relate to common narratives in different ways. At the school or district level, relating to narratives in new ways can sometimes lead to localized neoliberalisms that ultimately preserve hegemony, as with local food in school lunches.

The school district in this study enjoys many advantages and at first glance appears to have few controversies or contradictions related to school feeding programs. There is a high standard of living and safety, diverse agriculture providing for an abundant farm to school program, and an educated, progressive populous that supports initiatives aimed to increase children's access to fresh, local, nutritious food. Yet at least 20% of the population lives below the poverty line and 33% of school children are eligible for free and reduced lunch. In addition, males have a median income that is 28% higher than the median income for females. This points to some of the challenges that school food workers can face when advocating for better wages and benefits. At first glance this district appears to represent an idealized school food system, but there are real issues of poverty and income inequality that complicate advocacy efforts.

As noted in the Background chapter, the National School Lunch Program does not provide funding for worker wages; wages are dependent on meals sold. The government provides reimbursement for free and reduced meals, and when 33% of children district wide qualify for free and reduced meals, worker wages rely heavily on the enrollment of children in the free and reduced program. How do workers advocate for better pay when their pay is dependent on socioeconomically disadvantaged children remaining eligible for reimbursable free and reduced meals? Furthermore, if school food service is in fact gendered with a majority of female workers, and if there is already a systemic 28% median income gap between males and

females living in the district, could this serve as an additional barrier to advocating for increased worker wages? Currently workers make just above the state minimum wage and it is not yet known how raising the minimum wage will impact the workers' wages. Will their pay increase, or will it exacerbate the devaluation of their work? If their pay increases, but the funding system does not change, will schools be forced to make staff cuts?

Other school districts will face similar challenges, but their unique contexts will also provide different challenges requiring locally tailored solutions. Schools that are larger or smaller, more urban or more rural, with a different demographic makeup, that are less safe, that have less funding, fewer resources, or have local agricultural disparities with minimal local vendor options for farm to school programs will have different priorities and different resources that are allocated based on those priorities. A district in an area dealing with systemic racism, that is extremely economically disadvantaged, or has very poor graduation rates may decide to allocate the majority of attention, efforts, and resources towards those issues instead of school food service (although access to nutritious food is intricately linked to those issues as well).

A right-to-work state will not have local unions to use as allies in the fight for better wages or working conditions, and states with lower minimum wages may be more resistant to increasing school food service worker wages. Areas with less community emphasis on environmental issues, local food, and general innovation initiatives will have less opportunities to form community partnerships that focus on school food service needs. A religious, conservative community could believe that food service is charity and that charity is the responsibility of the church and volunteers, not the government, therefore they would not support government funded food service work. Parents in other communities might see the use of children kitchen helpers as forcing kids to support a food program that their parents do not

support. Districts struggling with issues of racism and marginalization have a stronger association to the historic opposition to the development of the National School Lunch Program. The political Right did not believe in government supported social programs and southern Democrats did not want the program to interfere with Jim Crow Laws; this opposition ultimately caused schools with a great need for a school meal program to be excluded.

There are unique associations found even within districts. For example, in this district one worker noted that she does not know exactly who her “boss” is. When she has a concern or a suggestion she does not know when to turn to the on-site supervisor, or when to make her way across town to speak to the district administration. On the other hand, one worker is employed at a school whose kitchen window looks directly into the district administration building. This worker delivers lunch to administration each day and has direct access to her higher-ups. Whether this worker takes full advantage of this association is unknown, but the possibility is there in a way that it is not for workers at other schools in the same district. Workers across schools do not always have the chance to get to know one another, yet if they had a stronger association, it would increase the possibilities for collaboration. Collaboration with other workers creates opportunities to imagine new ways to leverage one worker’s access to administration on behalf of all workers.

### *Contradictions and Controversies Summation: School Food Worker Visibility*

School food service workers and their work occupy a precarious realm oscillating between visibility and invisibility. Much of the work takes place behind service lines and kitchen walls, yet the product of their work is visible to the public and heavily scrutinized. As federal regulations have expanded, and childhood obesity statistics continue to rise, the processes, equipment, and infrastructure of school food service have increasingly rotated into view. This is

evidenced through an upsurge in both federal, nonprofit, and other private training initiatives, and increased grant money for equipment and infrastructure. The workers themselves remain largely disregarded with a few notable exceptions.

Most attempts to make workers visible, while arguably well intended, often amount to little more than superficial gestures, or only focus on how others benefit from the workers' visibility; they do not focus on how to leverage increased visibility for the benefit of the workers themselves. Giving school food service workers the title of chef and professional chef coats can contribute to the workers' sense of professionalism, commitment, and individual agency over daily processes. Chef training may increase children's consumption of whole grains and vegetables, but unless these titles, coats, and training come with full time hours, increased wages, and benefits, what do the workers actually gain from these initiatives? Are workers truly visible if their needs as members of the labor economy who must provide for themselves and who need access to affordable health insurance through employee healthcare plans are consistently ignored?

Funding for school feeding programs is both guaranteed and precarious and each school district has unique strengths and challenges which contribute to the non-universal nature of the school food service worker experience despite laboring under the same blanket federal regulations and their collective invisibility as members of the labor economy. There is also little to no data on school food service worker demographics to show the gendered nature of school food service work, or their rates of poverty, food insecurity, which complicates advocacy efforts. However, this study sheds light on what is possible given these limitations. Tracing the associations of school food service workers provides a method for increasing school food service worker visibility which creates avenues to incorporate school food service worker voices in the

discourse of school food service work. Once associations are made or recognized, collective worker agency can be harnessed, increasing possibilities for advocating for improved working conditions, full time hours, increase wages, and access to benefits. One way to harness this collective agency is through finding new ways to leverage existing advocacy organizations that are available to school food service workers.

### **Opportunities to Bend Existing Organizations in Favor of School Food Service Workers**

Neoliberalism has proven to be adept at bending or shifting to appropriate attempts to create alternatives, so it is important to examine the ways in which people imagine new solutions to contradictions, or in the case of neoliberalism, new ways of meeting human needs, protecting freedoms, and striving for equity that are true alternatives to neoliberal governmentality. Will all alternatives, ultimately produce new, localized neoliberalisms? Can we even imagine true alternatives? According Appadurai, people, especially those who are marginalized see their lives as, “the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit” (1996: 54).

For example, as communities try to eradicate inequality, systems of governance and power adapt and provide space for programs such as farm-to-school that ultimately relieve the government of responsibility for providing healthy food to underserved children and of providing workers living wages and benefits by outsourcing labor, and placing the burden on individual communities thus creating new, localized neoliberalisms. In other words, “the technology of subjectivity that recruits people into active self-management and fosters neoliberal forms of (individual) freedom...shifts attention away from developing progressive state and social policies and forecloses alternatives to neoliberalism” (Roberts 2008: 553). But as Wilkins

believes, “there are often clever ways to work within the policy structure as we work to change it” (2005).

Unite Here! serves as an excellent example for collapsing distance, increasing agency, and relating to narratives in new ways through associations. Organizations like Unite Here! create opportunities for workers from different industries in distant locations to influence the actions of others in ways that increase the agency of the organization’s members. This labor union represents more than 250,000 workers in almost every state in the US, including Oregon, as well as Canada. School food service workers across the country (even in right to work states) and Canada are associated through this union and have access to the collective power of all participating industries. Workers within and across industries, located in close or far proximity, who might not otherwise have a means to share information or support bargaining initiatives can now collaborate. Unite Here! was the first union to endorse Barack Obama in 2008 (Unite Here! 2016). The National School Lunch Program and school food service work are obviously visible to the federal government, but if the historical and contemporary refusal to provide funding for workers’ wages is any indication, the workers themselves are still largely invisible. School food service workers have access to a union that is actively involved in national politics which creates an under-utilized association to make the workers need for justice visible on the national stage.

Currently school food initiatives are associated with First Lady Michelle Obama via the USDA, and this association often incites backlash against the program and subsequently the workers. This indirect association is based on the workers’ role in improving childhood nutrition outcomes and its strength is measured by the health of children. A well-placed school food service worker in the Unite Here! organizational matrix that has direct access to potential Presidential candidates could create an association with, and influence the actions of, future

presidents, based on the union's message of worker justice rather than the USDA's message of delivering a nutrition intervention for children at risk of food insecurity and obesity. This association would render the school food service *worker* visible, not as a tool for childhood nutrition intake, but as a member of the labor economy in need of a living wage and benefits. It would also flatten notions of top-down or bottom-up strategies, creating instead a direct association aimed at reimagining the worker's place in school feeding programs with the potential to influence the funding structure to favor workers' wages in the same way it favors training, equipment and infrastructure.

Many of the industries represented by Unite Here! are in the sphere of domestic work, or paid reproductive labor, yet others are not. Industries include food service, hotel/hospitality, gaming, airports/transportation, and the manufacturing and distribution of textiles. Membership is made up predominantly of women, but some represented industries like transportation are not traditionally viewed as domestic work, and may employ sizable numbers of men. In fact, this union houses the organization that contributed to the formation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (UniteHere.org). Membership in a union that represents traditionally male-dominated industries as well as female-dominated industries creates an association conducive to moving away from the care-centered rhetoric utilized by groups like the National Domestic Workers Alliance. Association with industries found in Unite Here! that do not rely on care rhetoric, including non-domestic work industries that are male dominated, provides an opportunity to move away from the care rhetoric without delegitimizing domestic work as paid work.

School food service occupies only a small subset of industries represented by these groups, and in order to strengthen these associations, school food service workers will need to find more common ground, and a way to acknowledge their differences while working toward a

common goal. They will need increased visibility to justify carving out a larger space in this organization, or creating a new organization all together that can partner with Unite Here! Other food service industry associations can increase visibility and point to ways workers can band together without dismissing difference. Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC-United) is a member organization of the Food Chain Workers Alliance with a mission to seek improved wages and working conditions for restaurant workers (Food Chain Workers Alliance 2012). In fact, fast food workers are at the forefront of the “fight for fifteen” that aims to increase the federal minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour, and national statistics on restaurant workers are collected and used to justify increased wages. Restaurant work varies greatly from fast food to fine dining yet despite the non-universal nature of this food service work, this organization finds ways to unite workers in common goals. School food service workers would benefit from a similar organization dedicated only to school food service workers placing them at the forefront of the “fight for fifteen” and that is associated with organizations like ROC-United and Unite Here!



Figure 6.3 Graphic of Fast Food Worker Data Used for the “Fight for Fifteen”



School Food Service has a long history entwined with the military, defense initiatives, and national security. The association with the military and national security has increased with the declaration of the childhood obesity epidemic as a threat to national security and the recognition of sustainability and environmental preservation as a national security concern that is in part alleviated through utilizing local foods and reducing food waste. School food service work is typically viewed in terms of domestic work or paid reproductive labor; workers participate in cultivating citizens healthy enough to participate in the labor economy and military service and who are enculturated to embrace sustainability initiatives which also increases their desirability as future military leaders. In light of the connection to national security, one must ask, if school food service work were a male dominated industry, rather than a female dominated industry, would the work be viewed as national service rather than paid reproductive work? Nonprofit agencies employ paid non-military national service members dedicated to community service to develop, implement, and evaluate programs like farm to school, or food waste reduction endeavors, and non-military national service has been used as a jobs strategy for marginalized adults who need access to both work and training (Center for American Progress 2016). The National School Lunch Program was originally staffed by the Works Progress Administration as a jobs strategy for women. Given these associations, an examination of classifying school food service work as national service to make workers visible and to create a jobs strategy implemented through the National School Lunch program is warranted.

Rather than use contracted third party labor to fill positions, or reduce staff to part-time to cut budgets, schools could be provided grants to directly participate in a federally administered National Service programs. The needs of each district would be unique, yet a program could be tailored to meet different needs across scales and across districts. For example, if a school does

not have a large enough applicant pool, then national service members from other areas could be placed at those schools. If a school has high turnover, a national service program could provide planned turnover with reduced costs and minimize the loss of production caused by unplanned turnover. Depending on individual school district needs and resources, some national service positions could lead to permanent employment.

As noted in the “Background and Theoretical Framework” chapter there is a glaring lack of data on school food service workers, yet there is an abundance of data on school food, specifically the nutritional content and the benefits of utilizing fresh, local food. Even qualitative studies that utilize participant observation and ethnographic interviews with tend to focus on the tools workers need to improve children’s health outcomes. If wages are mentioned in these studies, it is in the context of increasing worker dedication and providing skills and incentive to use agency to influence nutritional profiles. With the exception of McCain’s 2009 study on workers in New Jersey, studies, like school feeding programs, are food-centric rather than worker-centric, and school food service workers are ignored as members of the labor economy who need living wages and benefits. The first step to making workers visible as workers is to collect national data which will provide the evidence necessary to show rates of inequality and highlight the needs of workers.

Workers interviewed for this study expressed desire to be classified as educational assistants. School food service takes place in an educational setting, and is designed to educate students on the merits of making responsible food choices including fresh, local nutritious food that is often unfamiliar to them. Workers also educate students on sustainability through providing sharing tables, using local food, composting, and recycling. This is associated with public reproductive work designed to create students willing and capable of making healthy

choices so they can become adult citizens who are eligible for participation in the labor economy and military service but it is not considered “education” in the same vein as classwork. Is this due to the education and certification requirements needed to become a teacher? Would creating a certification process for holistic school food service that includes chef training, menu creation, farm-to-school, school garden, composting, recycling and food donation program development and implementation, and nutrition education for all workers strengthen the association of school food service with education? School food service workers can join educational unions and this association could be strengthened if educational union members assisted workers in advocating for a certification program. Paying all school food service workers as educational assistants would be a challenge for school districts with fewer resources which implies a need for flexibility and alternatives. Workers in this study did express mixed feeling about the effectiveness of unions to enact change, however, Unite Here! has members who live in right-to-work states and it would be informative to evaluate how they support members outside of traditional union membership in non-union friendly locations.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Increasing regulations and the surrounding controversies, and increased funding for training, equipment, and infrastructure are evidence of the high visibility of the work of school food service on a national scale. The lack of similar funding initiatives for worker wages is testament to their invisibility as workers. Vice President Joe Biden has often quoted his father saying, “Don’t tell me what you value, show me your budget and I’ll tell you what you value” (New York Times 2008). If this adage holds true, the school food service workers are both invisible and greatly undervalued. The school food service workers in this study expressed love of working with children and food and desire to participate in menu creation, garden and food waste programs, and nutrition education, yet they also express lack of agency and do not want to bear the burden of blame and backlash when students, parents, or community members express discontent with the food or service. Based on the data gathered and the resources available in the contemporary neoliberal society in which these school food service workers labor, the following eight recommendations have been identified as possible avenues for increasing worker visibility and agency as members of the labor economy while respecting the importance of the skills and expertise of the workers and their role in improving children’s nutritional profiles.

1. Workers need access to living wages, and affordable health care
2. Workers need national demographic data to justify wages, hours, and benefits
3. Workers need worker-centric research to balance the food-centric literature
4. School Food Service Workers need a dedicated National Union
5. Labor unions should use this data to increase worker visibility
6. Educational unions should assist workers in advocating for a USDA certification program

7. Training for certification must go beyond culinary training to include nutrition training, farm-to-school program development, school-garden development, and nutrition and sustainability education training, and summer meal programs
8. National service programs should be administered directly through the schools rather than non-profit programs and be used as a jobs strategy to fill gaps in employment when schools struggle to fill food service worker positions

Workers in this study expressed desire for full-time, year-round work with a living wage and affordable health care, yet without national data to confirm that all school food service workers want and need these things, it is difficult to advocate for change. The first steps to creating advocacy opportunities is to gather national statistics and using them in the same way that restaurant statistics are used to provide rationale for increase wages and access to benefits. I argue that in addition to gender, income, head of household status, and food insecurity statistics, information on amount spent on health care should also be collected to justify increased access to affordable healthcare. Second, more qualitative worker-centric research like this study is needed to fill the gap in literature to increase holistic understanding of school feeding program and to increase the visibility of school food service workers as members of the labor economy, not just as deliverers of the largest national childhood dietary intervention., [or as domestic workers in the schools.]

Unite Here! is a good place to start advocacy efforts, yet a union dedicated to school food service workers like ROC-United is dedicated to restaurant workers would be better situated to increase worker visibility and allow for national collaboration, effectively collapsing distance between workers in different states. Not all workers have favorable views of unions, but a national union could still provide resources, guidance, and support for workers in right-to-work

states, or other non-union workers. Educational unions can assist workers in advocating for a certification program that goes beyond culinary training to further develop worker's existing knowledge and expertise of school food systems including nutrition and sustainability program development and education. If workers are in charge of running farm-to-school, school garden, and summer feeding programs, they would have opportunities for year-round work. The certification could be developed directly at the federal level through the USDA and take place through an on-the-job training process, or through vocational educational institutions that partner with schools to place graduates, and provide professional development for current workers.

Given the differing needs of school districts, and the use of national service programs as a jobs strategy, a national service program could be combined with a school food service worker educational assistant certification process to provide gainful employment. For example, schools could use traditional funds from meals sold to employ as many full time educational assistant food service workers as possible, and then fill remaining positions with national service workers funded through other grant programs that are currently dedicated to school feeding programs but are distributed to outside organizations such as nonprofits. It would be necessary to conduct an audit of all funding related to school feeding programs to determine the full extent of the possibilities, but first we must allow ourselves to imagine the possibilities through tracing then reconfiguring associations and reconfiguring the boundaries of the network created by these associations.

As stated, this study was not designed to settle controversies, rather the analysis of the literature review, participant observation, and interviews inspired me to imagine how the narratives and associations of those controversies might be reconfigured and leveraged to benefit the worker. Tracing the associations found in the history of the National School Lunch Program,

in the district and schools included in this study, and in organizations related to food service advocacy does not rewrite narratives, rather it creates an additional narrative that school food service workers can access and creates new associations (e.g. with applied anthropologists or members of advocacy groups) for them to leverage. If, and how the workers use their narrative and associations to either preserve hegemony or make change ultimately is up to them. As a researcher in the discipline of applied anthropology, I hope that this study stimulates the imagination of school food service workers and their advocates. I want the workers to know that they are seen, they deserve to be heard, and they are important not just because they deliver the largest child nutrition intervention in the country in the name of national security, but because they are full-fledged, legitimate members of the labor economy who deserve proper training, appropriate equipment and infrastructure, a living wage with benefits, and above all respect.

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

### **Serving Amid Institutional Camouflage: The Invisibility of School Food Service Workers**

Principal Investigator: Nancy Rosenberger

Graduate Researcher: Janette Byrd

My name is Janette Byrd and I am researching what it is like to work as a school food service worker for my graduate thesis. I am a graduate student at Oregon State University in Applied Anthropology and the principle investigator (supervisor of my work) for this study is Dr. Nancy Rosenberger. The title of the study is, *Serving Amid Institutional Camouflage: The Invisibility of School Food Service Workers*.. If possible, I will also submit sections of my thesis for publication in Anthropology or related journals.

It is important that people who are interested in school lunches and other feeding programs understand what it is like to work in the kitchens that prepare and serve the meals. Without this knowledge it is difficult to get the whole story about school food and to understand the successes and challenges of feeding school children. Food service workers have experience and knowledge that is very valuable, but most people know very little about what school food service workers do and how important they are to the success of school feeding programs. Most importantly, school food service workers should have the opportunity to share their stories, and to have their voices heard.

I value working with the people I interview and observe to ensure that their voices are represented fairly. The schools and the workers' names will not be used and identifying material will be kept in a locked file until it is no longer needed and destroyed. I will use a voice recorder for the interviews with the workers consent; otherwise I will only take notes. Use of a recorder during the interviews will help ensure that I do not miss anything or misrepresent anyone, however, workers may request that I do not use a recorder and only make written notes.

I would like to interview school food service workers and to observe their on the job activities. The initial interviews will be 30 -45 minutes, and some people will

be contacted for follow up interviews that will also take 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted outside of work hours at the time and place of the worker's choosing so as not to interfere with the work schedule. The interviews will take place from January 26<sup>th</sup> - May 30<sup>th</sup>.

If you would like to be interviewed for this exciting unique project please contact me at [byrdj@onid.orst.edu](mailto:byrdj@onid.orst.edu), [jevbyrd@gmail.com](mailto:jevbyrd@gmail.com), or 541-829-9166.



## APPENDIX B MENUS

**MARCH 2016**  
**MONDAY**


"Wake Up to School Breakfast"

**ELEMENTARY MENU**

TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY	
<b>March 2<sup>nd</sup></b> <b>Birthday of Dr. Seuss</b> 		<b>1</b> Strawberry Shortcake (Muffin w/ Yogurt & Strawberries)		<b>2</b> Whole Grain Breakfast Round Bananas		<b>3</b> Pumpkin Cranberry Bar Grape Juice	
<b>7</b> Bagel w/ Cream Cheese Apple Juice		<b>8</b> Waffle w/ Local Berries & Yogurt		<b>9</b> <b>FREE BREAKFAST</b> All Elementary Students Whole Grain Breakfast Round Blueberries		<b>4</b> Buttermilk Bar Local Apple <b>Munch Lunch</b> w/ Corn Dog or *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich Cookies	
<b>14</b> Buttermilk Bar Orange Juice		<b>15</b> Berry Muffin Local Apple		<b>10</b> Fruit Breakfast Cake Grape Juice		<b>11</b> <del>Christmas</del> Christmas Filled Wh. Wh. Roll Applesauce Cup	
<b>21</b> No School 		<b>22</b> No School <i>Spring</i>		<b>17</b> Fruit Buckle Breakfast Cake Raisins		<b>18</b> Wh. Wh. Maple Roll Mixed Fruit	
<b>28</b> BenetFit Bar Applesauce Cup		<b>29</b> Strawberry Shortcake (Muffin w/ Yogurt & Strawberries)		<b>24</b> No School 		<b>25</b> No School 	
<b>31</b> Pumpkin Cranberry Bar Grape Juice		<b>30</b> Whole Grain Breakfast Round Bananas		<b>31</b> Pumpkin Cranberry Bar Grape Juice		<b>LOCHMEAD</b> Variety Low Fat Milk Served With Every Meal 	
<b>1</b> Mini Pancakes w/ Sausage Link <b>2</b> Biscuit & Gravy w/ String Cheese <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> *Macaroni & Cheese w/ Breadcrumbs <b>2</b> Turkey & Cheese Sandwich <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> Sloppy Joe <b>2</b> *Cheese Quesadilla <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> Macho Nacho Grande <b>2</b> *Moo Lunch (Yogurt w/ String Cheese & Crackers) <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich	
<b>1</b> Stadium Dog <b>2</b> Mashed Potato w/ Hamburger Gravy & Roll <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> *Cheesy Stuffed Breadstick w/ Marinara <b>2</b> Fiesta Chicken Burrito <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> *Macaroni & Cheese w/ Breadcrumbs <b>2</b> Golden Brown Weiner Wrap <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> Chicken Nachos <b>2</b> Tortilla Soup <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich	
<b>1</b> Juicy Hamburger <b>2</b> Yummy Rice Bowl <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> *French Toast Sticks w/ Scrambled Eggs <b>2</b> Pancake Sausage Dog w/ Cheese Stick <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> *Ole Bean & Cheese Burrito <b>2</b> Ham & Cheese Sandwich <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> Chicken Naches <b>2</b> Tortilla Soup <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich	
<b>1</b> Chicken Patty Sandwich <b>2</b> *Tasty Toasted Cheese Sandwich <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> *Macaroni & Cheese w/ Breadcrumbs <b>2</b> Turkey & Cheese Sandwich <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>1</b> Sloppy Joe <b>2</b> *Cheese Quesadilla <b>3</b> *Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich		<b>Eat Breakfast For a GREAT START</b>	











~ Menu Subject to Change ~

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

MARCH 2016		National School Breakfast Week "Wake Up to School Breakfast"		MIDDLE SCHOOL MENU	
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	
<div><b>Breakfast Specials</b> Assorted Cereals/Bars Bagels, Muffins Cinnamon Rolls (T &amp; Th) Buttermilk Bars (W) French Toast Sticks (M) Benefit Bars (W &amp; F)</div>	1 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Curly Fries  Chicken Nuggets w/Roll  Teriyaki Chicken/Rice	2 Buttermilk Bars Pancake Sausage Dog  Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie  Chicken Patty Sandwich  Hot Dogs	3 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Fries  Popcorn Chicken w/Breadstick  Spaghetti w/French Bread	4 Wh. Wht Maple Bar  Pizza: Meat or Cheese  Chicken Nuggets w/Roll  Mini Corndogs	
7 Breakfast Pizza French Toast Sticks  Pizza: Meat or Cheese  Chicken Strips w/ Breadstick  Pork Rib Sandwiches	8 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Curly Fries  Macaroni & Cheese w/Breadstick  Chicken Nuggets w/Roll	9 Buttermilk Bars Pancake Sausage Dog  Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie  Chicken Patty Sandwich  Meatball Sandwich	10 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Tots  Mashed Potato & Hamburger Gravy  Mini Corndogs	11 Wh. Wht Maple Bar  Pizza: Meat or Cheese  Chicken Nuggets w/Biscuit  Fish & Chips	
14 Breakfast Pizza French Toast Sticks  Pizza: Meat or Cheese  Chicken Strips w/Breadstick  Bean & Cheese Burrito	15 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Curly Fries  Chicken Nuggets w/Roll  Fajita Chicken Wrap	16 Buttermilk Bars Pancake Sausage Dog  Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie  Cheesy Breadstick w/Marinara  Chicken Patty Sandwich	17 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Tots  Popcorn Chicken w/Breadstick  Chicken Alfredo	18 Wh. Wht Maple Bar  Pizza: Meat or Cheese  Chicken Strips w/Biscuit  Baked Potato Bar	
21 No School  <div>School Breakfast ready SET GO!</div>	22 No School  <div>Spring</div>	23 No School  <div>Break</div>	24 No School  <div></div>	25 <div></div> <div>Daily Lunch Specials Assorted Sandwiches Chef Salads</div>	
28 Breakfast Pizza French Toast Sticks  Pizza: Meat or Cheese  Chicken Strips w/Breadstick  Corndog	29 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Curly Fries  Chicken Nuggets w/Rice  Teriyaki Chicken/Rice	30 Buttermilk Bars Pancake Sausage Dog  Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie  Chicken Patty Sandwich  Sloppy Joes	31 Sausage Muffin  Hamburger w/Fries  Popcorn Chicken w/Breadstick  Spaghetti w/French Bread	LOCHMEAD Variety Low Fat Milk Served With Every Meal <div>Eat Breakfast For a GREAT START</div>	

~~ Menu Subject to Change ~~

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MARCH 2016		March 7 <sup>th</sup> thru 11 <sup>th</sup> National School Breakfast Week "Wake Up to School Breakfast"		HIGH SCHOOL MENU	
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	
 					
<b>1</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Hamburger w/Curly Fries Chicken w/Potatoes & Gravy & Roll Chicken Caesar Salad	<b>2</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Breakfast Pizza Cheese Roll Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Chicken Nacho Bar Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>3</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Breadsticks w/ Marinara Fish Sandwich Hamburger w/Fries Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>4</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Egg Burrito Mini Pancake Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Corn dog Toasted Cheese Sandwich Crispy Chicken Salad		
<b>7</b> Breakfast Pizza Bean & Cheese Enchilada Chicken Patty Sandwich Crispy Chicken Salad Corn dog	<b>8</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Hamburger w/Fries Macaroni & Cheese w/Breadstick Chicken Caesar Salad	<b>9</b> Breakfast Pizza Cheese Roll Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Chicken Wrap Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>10</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Chicken Strips w/Roll Breadsticks w/ Marinara Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>11</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Egg Burrito Mini Pancake Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Taco Stick w/Chips Toasted Cheese Sandwich Crispy Chicken Salad	
<b>14</b> Breakfast Pizza Corn dog Fried Rice Chicken Patty Sandwich Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>15</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Hamburger w/Curly Fries Spaghetti w/Meatballs & French Bread Chicken Caesar Salad	<b>16</b> Breakfast Pizza Cheese Roll Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Nacho Bar Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>17</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Weiner Wrap or Cheesy Zombie Breadsticks w/ Marinara Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>18</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Egg Burrito Mini Pancake Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Corn dog Toasted Cheese Sandwich Crispy Chicken Salad	
<b>21</b> No School 	<b>22</b> No School 	<b>23</b> No School 	<b>24</b> No School 	<b>25</b> Breakfast Specials Assorted Cereals, Bagels, Breakfast Snack, Muffins, Cinnamon Rolls (M & W) Parfait French Toast Sticks (M, W, F) Breakfast Pizza (T & Th) BK Sandwich (M - Th)	
<b>28</b> Breakfast Pizza Chicken Rice Bowl Crispy Chicken Salad Chicken Patty Sandwich Corn dog	<b>29</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Hamburger w/Curly Fries Chicken w/Potatoes & Gravy & Roll Chicken Caesar Salad	<b>30</b> Breakfast Pizza Cheese Roll Pizza: Meat, Cheese or Veggie Chicken Nacho Bar Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>31</b> Wh. Wht Maple Bar Breadsticks w/ Marinara Fish Sandwich Hamburger w/Fries Crispy Chicken Salad	<b>LOCHMEAD</b> Variety Low Fat Milk Served With Every Meal 	

~~ Menu Subject to Change ~~

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## APPENDIX C JOB DESCRIPTIONS

<i>Title</i>	<b>Food Service Assistant (Multiple Locations)</b>
<i>Posting ID</i>	<b>FS-5609</b>
<i>Description</i>	<b>Hours:</b> 1.75 to 6 hours per day

**Contract Status:** Regular/Probationary

**Start Date:** ASAP

**Calendar:** 176 - 179 days, depending on level

**Open until filled. Earliest review will begin March 3rd.**

**PURPOSE:** The Food Service Assistant provides entry-level assistance in food service operations.

### **ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Assists the kitchen manager to implement the food service program in accord with federal, state, and district food service standards and procedures.
- Receives and accurately accounts for cash.
- Supervises students outside the classroom, as assigned, to support the district's discipline and instructional programs.
- Provides standard first aid, as defined by the American Red Cross, in a competent and compassionate manner.
- Provides other related services as assigned.

### **GENERAL PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS:**

- Perform duties in a courteous and efficient manner that builds the confidence of staff, students, and the public and enhances learning.
- Observe laws, district policies and procedures, and professional standards for the position.
- Establish and maintain effective working relationships with school personnel, parents, students and the public; work collaboratively as a team member.
- Maintain regular attendance at work and work activities and is punctual in meeting deadlines, attending meetings, and following schedule.
- Carry out work responsibilities with strong organizational skills effectively under pressure of deadlines, difficult situations, interruptions, and new or emergency conditions.
- Respect confidential information and the privacy of students, staff, and parents.
- Support students and staff in the district's career-related learning standards to encourage the development of independent work skills through career exploration and community involvement. •Develop job skills necessary to meet changes in the position.
- Maintain personal appearance and hygiene appropriate to the position as defined by the district.
- Meet applicable district physical ability/health and safety guidelines for the position.

**QUALIFICATIONS:** To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

- Basic knowledge of institutional food preparation techniques, including ability to operate institutional food preparation equipment.
- Knowledge of state nutritional and sanitary guidelines applicable to food service programs.
- Ability to communicate effectively.
- Demonstrate computer and accounting skills consistent with the level of responsibility of food service assistants.
- Hold a current food handler's card.
- Ability to understand and implement the school/program's student discipline policy and to manage student behavior effectively outside a classroom setting.
- Ability to effectively perform multiple, simultaneous tasks with numerous interruptions.
- Ability to travel among district facilities as needed; if driving, the ability to meet district driving standards.
- Standard First Aid certification, or the ability to obtain certification within two months of hire, may be required.

### Food Service Assistant (Multiple Locations)

- **PHYSICAL DEMANDS:** The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.
- While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to talk and hear. The employee is regularly required to stand and use hands to finger, handle, or feel objects, tools, or controls.
- The employee is required to regularly walk (occasionally on an uneven surface), occasionally sit and reach with hands and arms (frequently reaching above the shoulder), stoop kneel, or crouch. Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision, distance vision, peripheral vision, depth perception and the ability to adjust focus.
- The usual hazards associated with cooking equipment, such as hot stoves, steam cookers, and cutting devices continually is present. Work also involves exposure to cold while in the kitchen freezer and cooler. The employee regularly lifts of a variety of items ranging up to 40 pounds in weight, and frequently pushes items ranging up to 100 pounds. With assistance occasional lifting of 50 pounds and occasional climbing on a stool or ladder is also required. The employee must be able to stand for prolonged periods.
- Successful applicants for employment will be required to complete a pre-employment physical examination process to establish their fitness to perform the jobs for which they have applied without endangering the health and safety of themselves or others.
- **NOTE:** This is not necessarily an exhaustive or all-inclusive list of responsibilities, skills, duties, requirements, efforts, functions, or working conditions associated with the job.

This job description is not a contract of employment or a promise or guarantee of any specific terms or conditions of employment. The school district may add to, modify, or delete any aspect of this (or the position itself) at any time as it deems advisable.

- Additionally, interviews will be scheduled electronically through TalentEd Recruit & Hire, using the email you have provided on your application. Please be sure to check email and your Recruit & Hire account regularly.

Shift Type     Part Time

Salary Range   \$9.91 / Hourly

Location       Multiple Locations

Applications Accepted

Start Date      02/25/2016



## Food Service Specialist

### JOB POSTING

#### Job Details

Title Food Service Specialist

Posting ID FS-5610

Description Hours: 7.25 hours per day

Contract Status: Probationary/Regular

Start Date: As early as January 19, 2016

Calendar: 176 Day - Classified - Elementary Food Service Earliest review of applications will be March 9th

PURPOSE: Provides specialized assistance for district food service operations.

#### ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Manages elementary school kitchens and assist kitchen managers, as assigned, in accord with federal, state, and district standards and procedures.
- Assists Food Service Program Manager by testing, adapting, and creating new recipes that meet the needs of the district food service program and encourages student participation.
- Implement food service accounting system accurately and efficiently in accord with district standards and procedures.
- Serves as lead worker to other classified staff, as assigned, in a manner that promotes team development and effective work.
- Supervises students outside the classroom, as assigned, to support the district's discipline and instructional programs.

- Provides standard first aid, as defined by the American Red Cross, in a competent and compassionate manner.
- Provides other related services as assigned.

#### GENERAL PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS:

- Perform duties in a courteous and efficient manner that builds the confidence of staff, students, and the public in the Corvallis School District and enhances learning.
- Observe laws, district policies and procedures, and professional standards for the position.
- Establish and maintain effective working relationships with school personnel, parents, students and the public; work collaboratively as a team member.
- Maintain regular attendance at work and work activities and is punctual in meeting deadlines, attending meetings, and following schedule.
- Carry out work responsibilities with strong organizational skills effectively under pressure of deadlines, difficult situations, interruptions, and new or emergency conditions.
- Respect confidential information and the privacy of students, staff, and parents.
- Support students and staff in the district's career-related learning standards to encourage the development of independent work skills through career exploration and community involvement.
- Develop job skills necessary to meet changes in the position.
- Maintain personal appearance and hygiene appropriate to the position as defined by the district.
- Meet applicable district physical ability/health and safety guidelines for the position.

#### QUALIFICATIONS:

- Intermediate level of knowledge of institutional food-preparation techniques, including ability to operate institutional food preparation equipment.

- Knowledge of state nutritional and sanitary guidelines applicable to school food service programs.
- Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
- Ability to independently plan, organize, and carry out work assignments, and to plan and direct the work of assigned staff or students.
- Demonstrate computer and accounting skills consistent with the level of responsibility of food service specialists.
- Hold a current food handler's card.
- Ability to understand and implement the school/program's student discipline policy and to manage student behavior effectively outside a classroom setting.

#### Food Service Specialist

- Ability to effectively perform multiple, simultaneous tasks with numerous interruptions.
  - Ability to travel among district facilities as needed; if driving, the ability to meet district driving standards.
  - Standard First Aid certification, or the ability to obtain certification within two months of hire, may be required.
- **PHYSICAL DEMANDS:** The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.
  - While performing the duties of this job, the employee is regularly required to talk and hear. The employee is regularly required to stand and use hands to finger, handle, or feel objects, tools, or controls. The employee is required to regularly walk (occasionally on an

uneven surface), occasionally sit and reach with hands and arms (frequently reaching above the shoulder), stoop kneel, or crouch. Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision, distance vision, peripheral vision, depth perception and the ability to adjust focus.

- The usual hazards associated with cooking equipment, such as hot stoves, steam cookers, and cutting devices continually is present. Work also involves exposure to cold while in the kitchen freezer and cooler.
- The employee regularly lifts of a variety of items ranging up to 40 pounds in weight, and frequently pushes items ranging up to 100 pounds. With assistance occasional lifting of 50 pounds and occasional climbing on a stool or ladder is also required. The employee must be able to stand for prolonged periods.
- Successful applicants for employment will be required to complete a pre-employment physical examination process to establish their fitness to perform the jobs for which they have applied without endangering the health and safety of themselves or others.
- NOTE: This is not necessarily an exhaustive or all-inclusive list of responsibilities, skills, duties, requirements, efforts, functions, or working conditions associated with the job. This job description is not a contract of employment or a promise or guarantee of any specific terms or conditions of employment. The school district may add to, modify, or delete any aspect of this (or the position itself) at any time as it deems advisable.
- Additionally, interviews will be scheduled electronically through TalentEd Recruit & Hire, using the email you have provided on your application. Please be sure to check email and your Recruit & Hire account regularly.

Shift Type      Full Time

Salary Range \$10.92 / Hourly

Location

Start Date      03/02/2016