



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 15, 2011

Chicago School Bans Bag Lunches, Forces Kids to Eat School Fare

The *Tribune* quoted the school's principal, Elsa Carmona, as saying she implemented the policy a half-dozen years ago to protect students from unhealthy food choices.

"Nutrition wise, it is better for the children to eat at the school," Carmona told the paper. "It's about the nutrition and the excellent quality food that they are able to serve [in the lunchroom]. It's milk versus a Coke. But with allergies and any medical issue, of course, we would make an exception."



Although the heavy-handed school official couldn't name any other area schools with similar regulations, she insisted the policy is common practice. A spokesperson for the Chicago Public Schools said that while there is no formal policy in place, the district encourages principals to use "common sense judgment based on their individual school environments. In this case, this principal is encouraging the healthier choices and attempting to make an impact that extends beyond the classroom."

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The *Tribune* pointed out the financial incentive the school district might have in forcing students to eat school lunch. "Any school that bans homemade lunches also puts more money in the pockets of the district's food provider, Chartwells-Thompson," the paper reported. "The federal government pays the district for each free or reduced-price lunch taken, and the caterer receives a set fee from the district per lunch." The school, of course, pockets its cut of the action. As for families who do not qualify for free lunch or a discount for their kids, they must cough up around \$2.25 per day, or, say, five dollars more per week — per child — than if they had made bag lunches for their kids.

While compelling kids to eat what the school's "lunch lady" places before them might seem bad enough, what makes the situation worse is that, like the fare in most school cafeterias, the food at the Little Village Academy is — well, not good. So what's the alternative? Going hungry, the rules say. "During a recent visit to the school, dozens of students took the lunch but threw most of it in the garbage uneaten," reported the *Tribune*. "Though [the school district] has improved the nutritional quality of its meals this year, it also has seen a drop-off in meal participation among students, many of whom say the food tastes bad."



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Over the years, the Chicago school system has, apparently, conditioned the majority of parents to accept poor school food as they have poor education for their kids. Nonetheless, at least a few parents are putting up a fuss. “Some of the kids don’t like the food they give at our school for lunch or breakfast,” one mom told the *Tribune*. “So it would be a good idea if they could bring their lunch so they could at least eat something.”

With both parents and students complaining about the policy, some Chicago schools have opted for a milder form of lunch-time oppression: they allow kids to pack a lunch, but then dispatch special nutritional detectives to poke through kids’ lunch bags to make sure there is no contraband “junk food” being slipped in. “The kids may have money or earn money and [buy junk food] without their parents’ knowledge,” Rebecca Stinson, principal of Chicago’s Claremont Academy Elementary School, explained to the *Tribune*. But the extra vigilance is okay, Stinson assured, because, after all, parents expect school officials to keep an eye on their kids, right?

For most thinking parents, the whole notion of a government school “marm” making decisions on what their kids eat at lunch is absurd. “This is such a fundamental infringement on parental responsibility,” the *Tribune* quoted J. Justin Wilson of the national Center for Consumer Freedom as saying. “Would the school balk if the parent wanted to prepare a healthier meal?” Wilson wondered.

Yahoo News blogger Liz Goodwin noted that the food fight in Chicago is being repeated, to varying degrees, around the nation, as school authorities insist on insinuating their wills into such family issues as what kids eat. But parents are fighting back.

For example, “Alabama parents protested a school’s rule that barred students from bringing any drinks from home, as ice water was provided at lunch,” reported Goodwin. “East Syracuse, New York schools have outlawed cupcakes and other desserts. And schools around the country have kicked out chocolate milk and soda vending machines. Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin even showed up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania with dozens of cookies to express her disdain for a debate in the state about recommending teachers limit the number of times per month the sugary treats are eaten in classroom birthday celebrations.”

While school officials like Carmona at the Little Village Academy insist that such policies are all about taking good care of someone else’s children, Dr. Karen Gushta, a former school teacher and author of the book *The War on Children: How Pop Culture and Public Schools Put Our Kids at Risk*, says its all about usurping parental authority. “It’s another effort to take away parental rights and the right of a parent to make decisions about what is in the best interest for the welfare of their own child, and place that right in the hand of an administrator or some government agent or whomever it may be,” Gushta told OneNewsNow.com.

Gushta warned that there is an increasing effort by do-gooding government folk to try to protect us from ourselves, and parents need to stay vigilant to stay on top of those efforts “Today it’s food choices and maybe school choices,” she said. “Tomorrow it may be how you choose to discipline your child or where you want your child to attend worship.”



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