Food Waste In Public Schools

If one observed a cafeteria lunch in any public school, one would see an ongoing problem; food waste. Many children rely on school lunches as a form of daily nutrition, however, in most cases, lunchtime availability is too short causing children to throw away unused food. This means that they do not obtain all the nutrients needed. Whereas someone else who does not have the resources could benefit from those nutrients that are just being hurled away. Food waste in schools creates a chain of effects that it even impacts our environment. Each day we have more and more landfills being filled up. Food waste within public schools has frittered nutrition for students, affected the environment, and impacted the common welfare.

Child nutrition is something important in today's society, if children do not receive the nutrients that they need then they are exposed to more diseases and sickness. Research states that " In the United States, food-borne agents affect 1 out of 6 individuals and cause approximately 48 million illnesses, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths each year" (HHS 1). Not receiving proper nutrients can also cause poor performance in academics and lower energy levels. On average cafeteria lunches last only around 30 minutes, the majority sell unhealthy food such as chips and ice cream that children crave and buy-which attracts their attention compared to nutritional food. Keep in mind that based on the United States Department of Agriculture, it requires that "students must take at least three out of five categories for lunch, and at least one of those choices must be a fruit or vegetable" (Lange 1). Students spend their time eating the unhealthy snacks they buy, leaving nutritional food such as fruits and vegetables. Not only is this an impactful cause of food waste simply in the cafeteria lunch, it can also cost funds being lost in school districts. Based on data found, "The costs associated with discarded foods are high; if translated nationally for school lunches, roughly $1,238,846,400 annually is wasted " (Lange 1). The money that is propelled could go to Title One school districts and those children coming from homes that remain in need.

Food waste in public schools has affected the environment by overdoing nutrition for students. According to research, "schools produce about 5 million a day in uneaten food" (Bloom 1). Research states that "About 94 percent of the food we throw away ends up in landfills or combustion facilities" (EPA 1). This creates landfills that persist more harmful to the environment than greenhouse emissions. Greenhouse emissions produce toxic gases such as methane, Co2, and chlorofluorocarbons that absorb infrared radiation and heats up the earth's atmosphere causing global warming (Spiegel1). The environment is currently suffering due to poor food control, and global warming has become present in showing negative effects of climate change such as the Amazonian forest fires, the oceans rising temperatures, and numerous other disasters in the world that are caused by these landfills we call greenhouse gas emissions. Not only does food waste impact the environment in these ways, but it also impacts freshwater. Based on research, "1.3 billion tons of food wasted worldwide each year is accurate, most estimates place the water "in" that amount to be 45 trillion gallons—or 24 percent of all water used for agriculture. And remember that 70% of the world's freshwater is used for agriculture" (Hawthorne 1). Whenever water is thrown out, gallons that were used to produce or plant food go to waste.

While the health and wellness of the students remain a major priority- another concern that

many citizens do not think about is the majority of people that do not receive this food. That one-third of food wasted in the cafeterias could potentially make the largest impact on hunger around the world. Notably, for “more than 820 million people who are hungry, food is not a guarantee” (FAO 1). A solution to reduce this percentage could range from simply less uneaten food being thrown away to decreasing the amount of food being given to students and spending more time giving it to those who do not have the same opportunities and capabilities. Others that negatively affected by food waste within cafeterias include the farmers that produce the vegetation. Their hard work and constant labor is continuously overlooked time and time again. It’s been taken advantage of long enough. Unpredictably, food waste impacts the economy as a whole. Citizens are spending money on food that is thrown away on a day to day basis. According to Kyra K. Payne, “ The United States spends over 165 billion dollars a year on food that is never eaten” (Payne 1). Many are suffering from the food that is wasted in school cafeterias daily, whether that be those in hunger, those in labor, or those affected economically.

Food waste within schools is an ongoing problem that is faced every day. Throwing away unused food on one child’s plate might not seem like a lot, but that number accumulates, and suddenly is almost every student in school in the United States. Food waste has caused many impactful events, which will continue day by day if our society does not do anything to solve them. All in all, food is constantly being put to waste causing students nutrition and health to become problematic. These problems include affecting the environment in a variety of ways, impacting districts and society’s costs, while also not acknowledging the fact that millions of people persist suffering from this traumatic event.