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Dear Board of Regents Members,

It has come to our attention that Family and Consumer Science classes might no longer be mandated in New York State.

We must state our opposition, in no uncertain terms, to this possibility. Now more than ever, our students need to learn about food and nutrition and how to prepare food. These are very important life skills.

As you know we have a crisis of obesity and poor health. Even students of normal weight may be malnourished based on the highly processed diets that are so prevalent.

This has led to unprecedented rates of overweight and obesity - 68% of all U.S. adults and 34% of all U.S. children are overweight or obese, and the numbers continue to rise. The health care expenses that this imposes at the state level will become even more of a burden than they already are.

Cutting a requirement for such an important course means that the very life skills that students need for a healthy and productive life will not be learned. In addition, FACS courses often use a multi-disciplinary approach, strengthening the knowledge of other subjects, including reading, math, and science, for example.

The New York Coalition for Healthy School Food is currently conducting a pilot program in East Islip, Long Island, to help Family and Consumer Sciences teachers teach students how to make the most healthy main dish entrees, and so far the feedback from the students has been fantastic. These entrees contain no cholesterol, are low in total and saturated fat, and are high in fiber and phyto-nutrients. We are giving students the skills to choose a healthy path that they might not have otherwise learned.

Most importantly, this is a pilot program and we have already shared the initial results with the Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) teachers on Long Island at a regional conference, and hope to present at the statewide FACS conference next year. In addition, we will create a blue-print document that will be available free of charge on our website which helps Family and Consumer Sciences teachers implement our ground breaking program in their classrooms across the state.

Currently, 50% of 2 – 15 year olds already have fatty streaks in their arteries, literally the beginning stages of heart disease. One-third of all U.S. children, and between 40 – 53% of African American and Latino children will develop type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives – think about that – up to and just over half of some groups will have this devastating disease. And 35% of cancer deaths are caused by diet. Virtually all of these are completely preventable, and with this prevention comes dramatically lower health care costs.

Yet most children know nothing about food preparation and cooking, and are growing up on processed foods not even made in their own homes. Cooking is fast becoming a dying art, yet learning about nutrition and how to prepare healthy food is a skill that all people need – it is a critical life skill. We have seen, for example, students coming into the seventh grade Family and Consumer Sciences classes with no prior knowledge of how to boil water or cut vegetables. In our other work, we had a 5<sup>th</sup> grader pick up an onion and ask what it was, and students regularly fail to identify even some of the most common vegetables.

This comes at a time when attention is starting to turn toward the problem – First Lady Michelle Obama has helped the public to understand that this issue must be addressed. If we continue to ignore it or worse yet take away the requirement of the small amount of education that students do get on the topic, we are doing the students a great disservice, one that has the potential to determine the course of their lives, and resulting long term in higher health care costs, lower productivity, and poor quality of life. That's long term – but the lack of a healthy diet now results right now in a decreased ability to concentrate and fight off illness, and that also affects a schools bottom line.

We believe students should learn about nutrition, food preparation, and in school, and these topics should be mandated, because it is such an important life skill, determining their very future.

Sincerely,

Amie Hamlin

Executive Director