

**Testimony to the Board of Education – Karen Devitt, Co-Director, RFKM
10/8/13**

My name is Karen Devitt, co-founder of Real Food For Kids – Montgomery.

Hundreds of other parents feel as we do – that our school children deserve better food. This applies to all children, but especially to those whose only reliable source of food may be MCPS.

Many products sold every day in MCPS defy “Common Sense Nutrition”. For example:

Strawberry Flavored Milk, served in all schools at breakfast and lunch, has 25 grams of sugar (up from 22 last year), plus artificial flavor and color. A child can easily ingest the equivalent of 12 teaspoons of sugar within a few hours - from this milk alone.

Sidekicks, ‘100% Fruit Juice Sorbet’, sold in secondary schools, contains artificial flavor and color. With no actual fruit in it, it nonetheless counts toward the fruit component of a reimbursable meal, because it contains fruit juice concentrate – but without all the fiber and nutrients that come in unprocessed fruit.

Welch’s Fruit Snacks is a ‘gummy’ candy sold in all schools. It has 19 ingredients, including artificial flavor and color. It claims to be made with “Real Fruit”, but how much real fruit can there be in the 5th ingredient of a 0.9 ounce snack?

These three products provide a window into the world of highly processed, chemically-laden, packaged foods that are acceptable fare in our cafeterias.

To move the conversation forward – and break the stalemate between “it must improve” and “it costs too much” – RFKM and Montgomery Victory Gardens are hosting a School Food Forum on Saturday Nov. 2 to bring together major stakeholders in county school food reform.

While cost is too often the excuse for not innovating, we hope to demonstrate that 1) there are ways to improve school food and thrive financially; 2) other school systems our size have done it, and 3) there is no one quick fix. This is our school system, these are our kids, this is our community. As a community, we all need to work together on this.