

Thursday at 3:30- Changing the "State of the Plate" in Oakland Public Schools

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Advocating for school food reform in a financially-taxed system isn't easy. But the Oakland School Food Alliance has shown that systemic change is not only needed, it's possible.

The alliance has worked to "keep shining a light on the need for quality school food in Oakland ...," said Liz Sullivan, a community organizer for Oakland Community Organizations, a faith-based nonprofit working with low-income schools. "The result has been that there's more interest in it on the part of decision makers.

"This is something at the center of children's health because there are children who get most of their food every day from the Oakland Unified School District," she added. "So this is a critical concern."

The food alliance – OSFA – began in 2008, when Gail Adey, a parent leader with OCO, approached Revolution Foods to negotiate a contract for her child's school. When the healthy foods vendor told Adey it could only partner with the district, even though a host of other parents had reached out to them, she decided to make contact. It was from this diverse group of parents – representing both high and low-income schools, united by a desire to provide their children with healthier food – that the Oakland School Food Alliance was formed.

Since then, the organization has served as a springboard for transformation, partnering with key individuals and organizations. One of these individuals is Jennifer LeBarre, director of Nutrition Services for the Oakland Unified School District.

LeBarre and OSFA have worked to bring parent run farmer's markets to school campuses, introduce students to different vegetables through the Champions for Change program and have piloted a "scratch-cooking menu at Stonehurst Elementary," Sullivan said.

LeBarre will present the organization's successes over the past year and give the community a preview of what future plans are in the works at the Oakland School Food Alliance's Second Annual "The State of the Plate" event at 3:30 p.m. today, June 3, at MetWest High School, 314 E. 10th St. in Oakland.

The event will provide an opportunity for community members to connect and share ideas on the next steps for reform. Translation and childcare services will be available, and anyone is welcome to attend. Allison Rodman, a parent leader who joined OSFA out of a long-time interest in food and a former career in catering, said, "We've been in alignment and relationship with [OUSD] nutrition services all along, and have a friendly and cooperative relationship."

Chuck Davies, associate director of Residential Dining at University of California, Berkeley, also will speak during the event. According to Rodman, Davies has been key in helping the OSFA see what it takes to provide fresh food to a large student body. Moving forward, Rodman says the alliance is hoping to "marshal community and business financial support ... and to deepen cross-district parental interaction."

For more information about The State of the Plate event or the organization's bi-weekly meetings, contact the Oakland School Food Alliance at oaklandschoolfoodalliance@googlegroup.com or visit their page on Facebook.