

Local Nutrition Director Interviewed by *The New York Times*



Andrea Helton

Andrea Rutger Helton, director of Nutrition Services for Wellington Exempted Village Schools, was interviewed by *The New York Times*. The article, “Families Struggle as Pandemic Program Offering Free School Meals Ends,” was published on January 22.

The article is a sad portrait of the collapse of pandemic-era assistance for free school meals. Families are struggling to make ends meet; income eligibility guidelines are simply not keeping pace with inflation.

In the article Andrea talks about having to deny free meals to almost 50 families in the Wellington school district. “There’s nothing I can do, and it’s heart-breaking,” she says. One mother quoted in the article was disqualified because she made \$100 in gross income above the cut-off. By the end of the fall semester the mother had accumulated \$136 in debt to the schools.

According to the School Nutrition Association, 96.3 percent of school districts reported that meal debt had increased, rising to \$5,164 per district through November. This figure is higher than the \$3,400 median reported for the entire school year in the 2019 survey by the Association.

Subscribers of *The New York Times* can see the full article at https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/us/politics/universal-school-meals-free-lunches.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR25a2RbIOE1CDbOoKuqSJc_dI4cWf9o43ry_zlz2MRnf66I2pVEOtNb8Sw.

