

A SPORK IN THE ROAD

Press conference speeches, July 24, 2008

Hoang: Good morning, my name is Hoang Hoang and I am in 11th grade. I am a Rethinker.

George: Good morning, my name is George Dixie Carter III and I am a Pre-thinker.

Hoang: Welcome to our third annual news conference called “A Spork in the Road.” We are here today to talk with you about our school food and our school cafeterias. We have studied these subjects all summer long and we have 12 recommendations to make to our principals and school superintendents. These recommendations are for ALL public schools in New Orleans:

- Schools Operated by the Recovery School District
- Schools Chartered by the Recovery School District
- Schools Operated by the Orleans Parish School Board
- Schools Chartered by BESE - our state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

George: Our recommendations are for all of these schools!!

Hoang: First, let me recognize a few people I see here in the audience:

Ms. Kelly Batiste, principal of Fannie C. Williams, Ms. Wanda Anderson Gilliam, principal of Craig School, Ms. Bridget Ramsey from the Sojourner Truth Academy. Can you all stand up? These four schools will start up Rethink Afterschool Clubs next year and we are glad to have you here!

Let me tell you a little about Rethink:

We Rethinkers believe that:

- *every public school student in New Orleans deserves the same top-quality education - no matter their family income or the color of their skin.*
- *We believe that students should be part of “rethinking” and rebuilding public schools after Hurricane Katrina.*

George: We are experts on education! We go to these schools every day!

Hoang: This morning you will first hear about our recommendations from the Rethinkers and some special speakers. After that, we invite our school superintendents, principals, school officials, fellow students and anyone else to come up to the mike and tell us what you think.

George: Let it roll!

Speech II: We Value our Dignity and our Health

Good morning, my name is Jada Cooper.
I am a public School student and I am a Rethinker.
I am Arianna McKnight and I am also a Rethinker.
I am Daizha Sanders and I am a Rethinker.

As Rethinkers, we value our dignity and our health. Part of dignity in our Louisiana culture means eating food with a knife, fork and spoon. Knives cut meat, forks let us poke things and put them in our mouth and a spoon lets us scoop food up.

Many of you here today have probably never heard of a spork, let alone used one. This is what we are forced to eat our lunches with everyday at School! Sporks are plasticware used in all our school cafeterias, and they are impossible to eat with.

- From personal experience I have had a hard time eating with a spork. Once I tried to eat gumbo but ended up using a straw.
- Ronaldo, another Rethinker, says he can't cut meat with a spork so he shoves his hands into the gravy and pulls his meat apart.
- Victor, a Rethink Intern, says he has figured out how to eat meat with a spork. He breaks the spork in half and uses the sharp edge to cut his meat.

Sadly, for us, a spork is neither a real knife nor a real spoon. All we are asking for is real utensils - a knife, fork and spoon, separate. We no longer want to stick our hands into gravy to eat some kind of mystery meat. Right now, we are at a spork in the road. You, our school principals, leaders of the RSD, NOPS and Charters can take us in a new direction - please give us knives, forks and spoons.

Our first recommendation is: No more Sporks!

Our second recommendation is: Give us fresh, tasty food. We want as little highly processed food as possible. High processed food is bad for us and it makes us sick. Keep preservatives, chemicals and highly sweetened food to a minimum.

Thank you very much.

End. Followed by Spork skit.

Speech III: We Value our Local Economy, our Local Culture and the Diversity of all our Beliefs

Hello, my name is Lucy Tucker and I am a Rethinker.

Hello, my name is Alisia Hall and I am a Rethinker.

New Orleans is a region unlike any other. Part of our uniqueness as a city is our love of food and eating together. Food represents more than nourishment of the body, it's a time for family, conversation and nourishment of the soul.

Food represents love. Unfortunately, we do not feel the same love in school that we do at home. In fact, we feel neglected and at times abandoned. Some of our food is unidentifiable, under-cooked and frozen.

This summer, we've had the opportunity to visit local food places such as the farmer's market, the Hare Krishna Temple, shrimpers in Grand Isle and Café Reconcile. We learned that Grand Isle is one of the shrimp capitals of the world. However, a lot of the shrimp we eat is cloned shrimp from China. These cloned shrimp are raised in dangerous chemicals to keep them clean and pink. We do not want this! By supporting local shrimpers, not only we will help preserve the shrimpers' traditional way of life, we will have healthier bodies.

From the places we visited, we learned that fresh and local food is the healthiest and tastiest of all. The quicker you can get food from the ground to your mouth, the better it is for you.

Also, buying non-local food contributes to the big-time fuel crisis. We can support our local economy by including local produce and food products in our school lunches. We want to support our local farmers, shrimpers and fishermen. You will hear from our shrimper and farmer friends in a minute.

The New Orleans region includes people of many different cultures, religions, and ethnic backgrounds. We have a united love for New Orleans and New Orleans food while we still

maintain our own ways. For instance, some students do not eat meat because of their religions. Others are vegan or vegetarian because of personal beliefs. We Rethinkers feel that all students, including vegetarians, should have a variety of healthy, tasty, food options every day.

This summer, some of us interviewed Ms. Sandra Booker, the head dietitian at the RSD. We were happy to learn that she has asked the RSD food provider service, Sodexo, to put more choices on the lunch menu. We hope the new choices will make lunch better for everyone including vegetarians.

So here are some more of our recommendations:

- **Number 3:** Buy fresh food from LOCAL farmers, fishermen and shrimpers. Local can include Mississippi and other nearby states.
- **Number 4:** Give us more local Louisiana dishes on our school menu. We love our food. It should be made with fresh local ingredients – shrimp, meat, okra, tomatoes, rice and more.
- **Number 5:** Present healthy, tasty food for vegetarians.

You will hear this morning from shrimpers and farmers from our region. We support them completely. They need to sell their food and we want to eat it at school. We may not have all the answers about how to make this work, but as you will hear, it's happening all over the country. If we sit down with the RSD, the Orleans Parish School Board, our principals, farmers and fishermen, why can't we find the answers? Why not New Orleans? Why not now?

Good fresh food is the best kind of love. Please don't deny us love.

Speech IV: We Value Our Earth

Hello, my name is Isaiah Simms and I am a Rethinker.

Hello, my name is Kayla Paul and I am a Rethinker.

As Rethinkers, we value our earth. We are very concerned about global warming and garbage that does not break down in the environment. We want to come up with ideas that will make a positive impact on these issues.

Therefore we recommend buying local food so you don't have to transport it and put all those gas emissions from fuel in the air. Also, how about if all our schools bought dishwashers, metal silverware and real trays or plates? Are some of you out there shocked to learn that a lot of our schools do not have dishwashers? Well, they don't. You don't need a dishwasher to wash sporks and Styrofoam lunch trays.

Last, why don't we try recycling food from our cafeterias and making it into compost? We could use the compost for our own school gardens! You'll hear more about school garden and composting later in the news conference when we unveil our 21st century green cafeteria.

Also, during the question and answer period, maybe Ms. Lona Hankins, head of Capital Improvements from the RSD, would say something. When we interviewed her, we were happy to learn that the new Quick Start Schools all have dishwashing equipment and some really nice features in their cafeterias.

Until we all get dishwashing equipment, a big problem is the use of all those disposable trays and sporks. Why can't we use bio-degradable products in our cafeteria made of corn and potatoes?

Our college interns this summer who go to the University of California at Berkeley, told us that every cafeteria on their campus has biodegradable silverware and plates made from corn and potatoes. So if Berkeley can do it, why can't we?

Kayla:

So here are more of our recommendations:

- **Number 6:** No more Styrofoam trays! Short term, let us eat off biodegradable items. Long term, buy real trays or plates and wash them in dishwashers.
- **Number 7:** Future school designs should include outdoor vegetable gardens. Students need to grow fresh foods and taste what they grow. Part of our education is learning that things taste better when coming right from the ground and not from a can. Food grown in our gardens is organic and healthy for us.
- **Number 8:** Use leftover food to make compost for school gardens. Compost acts as natural fertilizer for these gardens.

Speech V: We Value Beauty, Comfort, Cleanliness and Our Time Together Outside of Class

My name is Lynisha Jordan and I am a Rethinker

My name is Victoria Carter and I am a Rethinker

As students in public schools, we consider ourselves experts on the topic of education. Some of us begin school at 7am and finish after 5. Long days are hard and tiring. Our main time to relax is lunchtime. We want that time to be as nice as possible. Dingy cafeterias and long lines that cut into our already short lunch period are not okay.

As Rethinkers, we value our comfort, the beauty of our facilities and cleanliness at school. We believe that our learning spaces need to reflect our value as students, as members of this community and most importantly as human beings.

We have a list of recommendations to go along with our values.

- **Recommendation 9: Design cafeterias that you adults would like to eat in yourselves.** Give us better cafeteria lighting, comfortable chairs, murals on the walls and outdoor eating spaces. Check out our Rethink 21st Century Green Cafeteria Design for more ideas on how we think our cafeterias should look.
- **Recommendation 10: Install sinks so we can wash our hands before eating.**
- **Recommendation 11. Give us enough lunch time to enjoy our food and our friends.** No more herding students into the cafeteria, standing in long lines and rushing us to eat. Our time eating is as important as our time in class.
- **Recommendation 12: No more silent lunches for any reason.** Do not tie punishment to food and cafeterias. Why should students have to eat in silence? It's mean and denies our voice.

Many of these recommendations won't cost the school any money and are a simple sign of respect for New Orleans students. Others of these recommendations will cost money, and you'll hear about them soon when we show you the design of our 21st century green cafeteria.

