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October 8, 2008

Dr. Ben Matthews
Director
School Support Services
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
6319 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6319

Dear Dr. Matthews:

As you are well aware, in North Carolina local school district child nutrition programs are audited on a five-year cycle. Chatham County Schools has recently been advised that a Comprehensive Review Effort has been scheduled for its child nutrition program this school year, a year earlier than designated by the five-year cycle.

Furthermore, it has been brought to our attention that the reason for this acceleration of the comprehensive review was at the request of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Apparently, while conducting general nationwide monitoring, the USDA noticed some concerns expressed by a Chatham County school board member in the local media regarding the status of the child nutrition program. During the July Board of Education meeting, the school board member's concerns were addressed by the superintendent. Copies of the school board member's concerns and the superintendent's responses are attached for your review. After the superintendent's response, the Chatham County Board of Education considered the matter closed.

It is true that the Chatham County Child Nutrition Program has been losing revenue, but so have many other North Carolina Child Nutrition Programs. Our Finance Officer recognized the loss and informed the Board of Education as early as the fall of 2007 that the program was losing money. The Board of Education and school district administration immediately took steps to rectify the problem.

October, 2007 a consultant was hired to conduct an internal review of the financial and operational aspects of the program. The review resulted in the Board of Education adjusting breakfast and lunch prices which had not been adjusted in over a decade. High meals per labor costs were brought back in line using the NCDPI Child Nutrition Meals Per Labor Hours. Principals were given increased authority and oversight responsibility of their school child nutrition programs, and initiatives are underway to increase school breakfast and lunch

participation. Additionally, at the district level, a new child nutrition business manager has been hired to oversee the finances of the program and a new child nutrition manager will be employed in November to oversee the food and nutritional aspects of the program.

First quarter child nutrition numbers for the district are showing favorable improvement; however we are showing a small loss because reimbursements have not yet been received. We feel that appropriate steps have been taken to correct our program losses and that these strategies should be given time to yield results.

As you are aware, a Comprehensive Review Effort (an audit) will be detailed and time consuming. We feel this is a distraction our program does not need at this time. Thus, we are requesting to remain on the original comprehensive review cycle and not to be audited during the 2008-09 school year. Any consideration you can give to this request will be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about the enclosed information, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,

Kathie Russell
Chair
Chatham County Board of Education

Robert L. Logan
Superintendent
Chatham County Schools

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