

School cafeterias not receiving inspection

WASHINGTON (AP) - Millions of children eat in school cafeterias that don't get the twice-yearly health inspections required by Congress to help prevent food poisoning.

Schools are supposed to get two visits from health inspectors every year. But one in 10 schools didn't get inspected at all last year, according to Agriculture Department data obtained by The Associated Press. Thirty percent were visited only once.

"Do you want to go to a restaurant that hasn't been inspected?" asked Ken Kelly, attorney for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer group that has studied cafeteria safety.

Fewer inspections don't necessarily translate into more cases of food poisoning — "but it contributes to all the other little things — temperatures, rat droppings — to all those things that could make your child sick," Kelly said.

Inspections are meant to

ensure cafeteria workers wash their hands properly and that they keep lunchtime staples like pizza hot or milk cold to prevent germs from growing.

Common violations in cafeterias involve wrong temperatures — failing to keep hot food hot enough or cold food cold enough — or things like having an open dumpster outside the cafeteria.

Kelly's group issued a report in January that found:

--Rhode Island schools were commonly cited for cross-contamination of utensils, improper holding temperatures and the presence of vermin.

--Washington, D.C., schools had hot and cold holding equipment that needed repair.

--Schools in Hartford, Conn., have been cited for having dirty floors that needed repair and inadequate hand washing stations and sanitation.

Recent outbreaks of food poisoning in kid favorites

like peanut butter — and not-so-favorite spinach — have renewed the focus on safety.

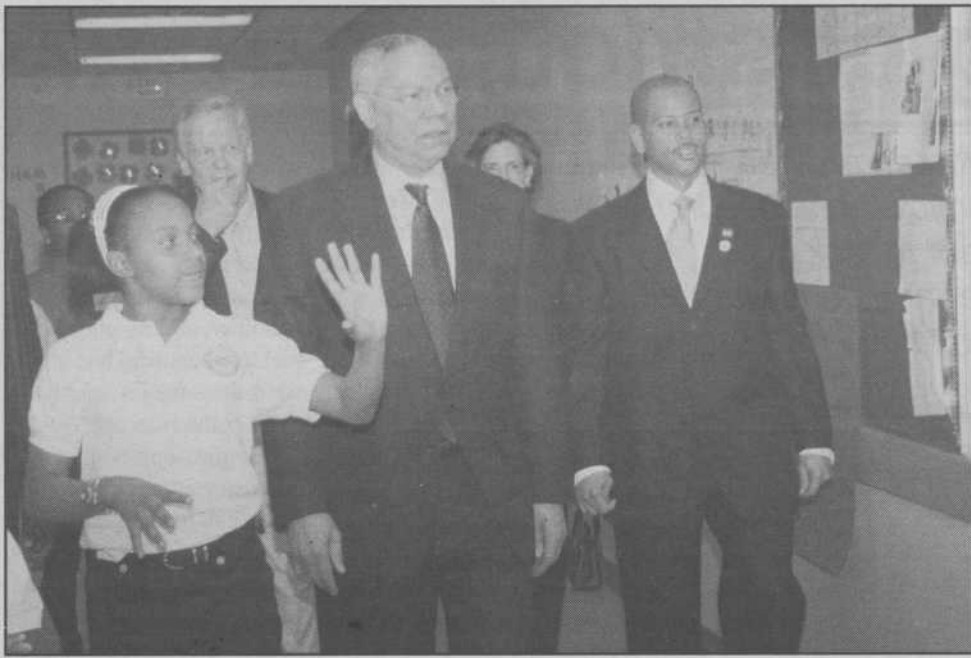
In school cafeterias, the news is not all bad: Sixty-one percent of schools got two or more inspections in the 2005-2006 school year. That was the first year Congress required two inspections; the old requirement was one inspection per year.

"We have some good news here, in terms of what states have already done, but now it's time to go and look at where we have challenges," said Agriculture Department spokeswoman Jean Daniel.

The inspection rules apply to all schools that participate in the federal school lunch program, which provides free and reduced-price meals to low-income children.

Nearly every public school participates in the program, which is run by the Agriculture Department.

Half of the nation's 60 million students eat lunches prepared in school, according to (See Cafeterias, Page 14)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Former Secretary of State and retired Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Gen. Colin Powell is given a tour by Malaysia Maye at the 100 Academy of Excellence.

Powell

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said, "There are many roads to life. Use reading and writing and performing and mastering the English language to get where you want to go."

On "Choosing the Right Course in Life," Powell said "There's a difference between right and wrong. Your conscience tells you the difference between right and wrong. Don't be fooled by anybody. Always go in the right direction."

On the topic "Have a Dream," Powell referenced Langston Hughes' poem, "A Dream Deferred." Urging the students to hold to their dreams, Powell said, "It's a shame if you don't pursue it, and everyone is a dreamer."

He talked about his own childhood and what he sees as future prospects for the students, all attentive to his words, a group of children predominantly African-American, diverse with Hispanic, White and other ethnic groups represented.

"You can't be sure what's going to happen with your life; you can't be sure..."

He said amusingly that when he was a youngster growing up in Bronx, N.Y., it wasn't easy to have held a dream that he would become an Army general, or Secretary of State Powell, or head the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

On "Self-discipline," Powell said, "A drill sergeant who asks you a question... you can respond in three ways — 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and 'No excuse.'"

He stated: "You must believe in yourself, and you must meet standards of self-discipline. You must listen to your teachers to be successful."

Powell said that in the U.S. today, there are more opportunities for people of color, but told the children, "Don't disappoint us. You are the youngsters that are up and

coming. Don't defer from your dream. Don't be afraid of failure; analyze what you did wrong... Don't waste time dwelling on it, always look ahead."

Powell, guided the students to stand tall, heads high and project their words. Several were tickled and surprised when he showed students how to stand erect, at attention, and to lift their chins.

It was nothing like a military drill, but a supportive demonstration, leading one little boy to break into laughter when the general lightly touched his chin to raise it.

Throughout the session, students were enthusiastic and did not have to be coaxed to get involved and participate.

Many of the children knew of Powell's name before he visited, but had very amusing answers when asked what his job entailed and his relationship to the president.

"The kids couldn't fathom the magnitude of who [General Powell] was. And one of the younger kids referred to him as 'the president,'" Clark said.

Some of the older children commented on what the secretary of state does.

Kiari Cook, a fifth grader at 100 Academy of Excellence was sure he knew. "A secretary of state is a person making sure that things are going well for the state [and] security."

His classmate Alexis Rubinstein said she understood the position as "a person at a job working for a boss."

Another classmate, Alexis Myles, said it's "basically a person that does things the president doesn't have time for — like security."

Powell fielded several questions from the students. He was even asked about the war in Iraq by one of the

visiting students who wanted to know, "Was it a good decision to go to war in Iraq?" Powell responded that the war helped "get rid of an evil dictator, but now we're having difficulties because of a civil war."

The question and answer period was made more personal for the children when they got to ask Powell about his background.

Powell told students he was born in Jamaica and that he has family in other places in the world.

"Are you going back to Jamaica?" several asked, to which he replied, "Yes, to visit my family."

"Did you serve in World War II?" a child asked amidst the onset of questions.

Powell said he was too young, he missed that one, but he was in Korea and Viet Nam, then had a little more fun with the children about his age: "How old do you think I am?"

The children listened, ready to answer when Powell hit the right number: "Forty? 'Fifty?' 'Sixty?'" he asked.

They all raised their hands when he got to the upper decades, so they all laughed.

"In two weeks, I'll be 70," he informed them.

Powell took pictures and spoke directly with some students after the presentation.

Powell's longtime mentor Brooks, who was instrumental in organizing the visit, said, "I've been involved with the 100 Black Men, and I started with them in California and have been involved with them for many years."

Brooks said he believes that children are "open to influence."

The star-filled day created an immediate positive reaction, and it is a day of lessons to be remembered for life.

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