

Food Share Tables In Schools: Policy & Practice

Kris Lebron Romero¹, Joel Tolman¹, Abdellah Aly², Haley Jordan³
¹Common Ground High School; ²New Haven Public Schools Board of Education; ³UConn NRCA

Project Motivation & Goals

Humans only eat **1/3** of the food we produce (Feeding America). When food is thrown out, it is most commonly sent to incinerators—producing methane—which has **28 times** the global warming potential of carbon dioxide (Haven's Harvest).

One pound of food produces 3.8 pounds of methane



Now these numbers seem incredibly absurd to me. How come we are wasting so much food while there are tons of people facing food insecurity?

Malnutrition is a direct cause of food insecurity. A 2022 study showed that 148 million children experience a stunt in their growth due to the lack of access to food (Santilli, A. & O'Connor Duffany, K., 2018). In 2018, a study reported that over **56% of children in New Haven Public Schools rely on SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program); those numbers increase annually due to inflation on food prices.



By installing food share tables in New Haven public school lunchrooms (tables where students can place unwanted food for others to take), we will ensure students have enough food to focus on school, reduce the likelihood of malnutrition, and reduce our schools' carbon footprint.

Policy Forming

- Developed a **no-cost policy** requiring schools to install a food share table that is accessible to all in New Haven Public School lunchrooms.

A share table provides students with a reliable, accessible source of free food while reducing waste from uneaten and untouched school meals.

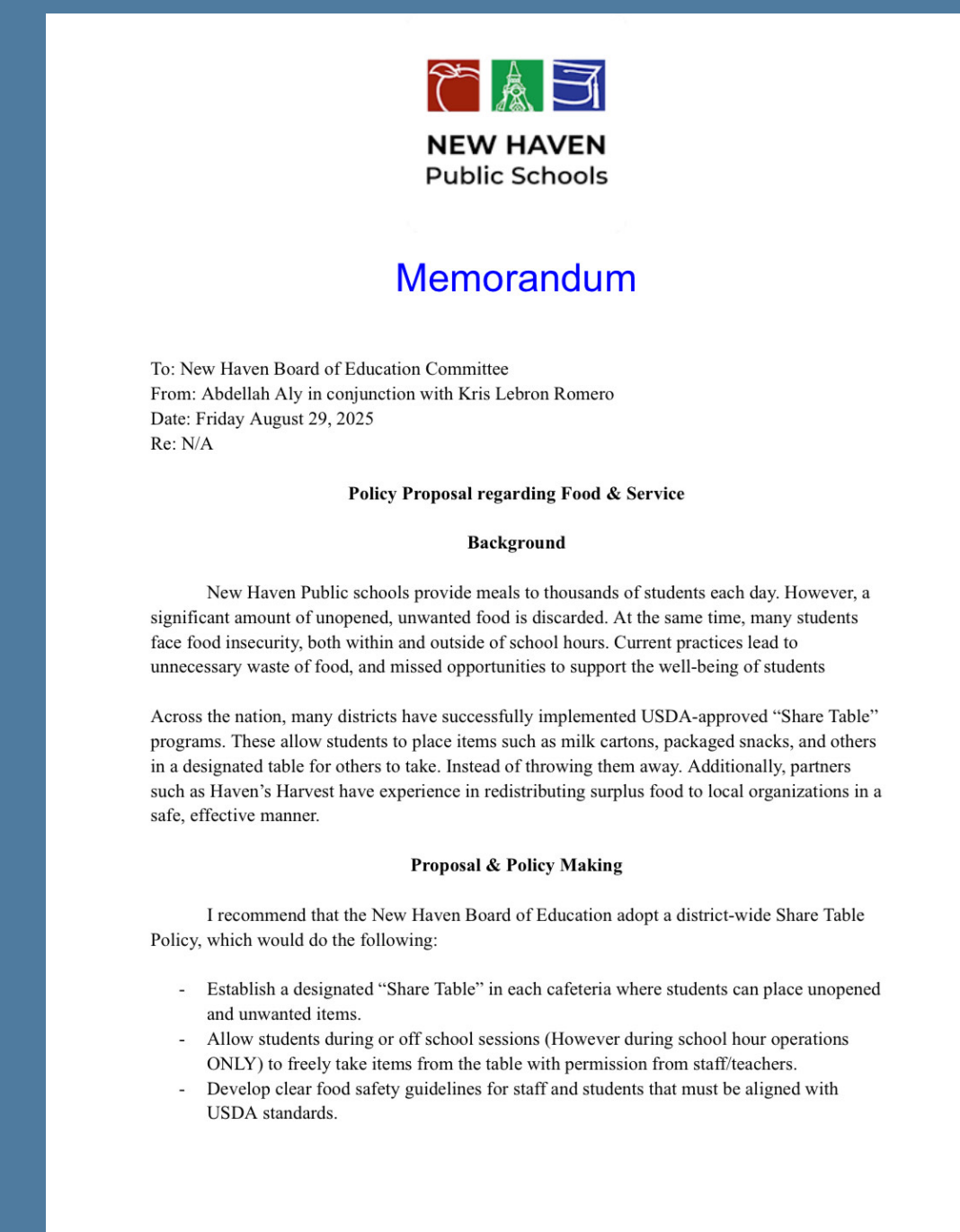
- Goal:
 - Reduce **food waste** and address **student food insecurity**, not just at one school but throughout New Haven.
 - Address stunted growth due to malnutrition, lack of food and vitamins. Public schools are required to have certain vitamins in their food. So, school cafeteria food is a nutritious source that can be taken home.

- Partnered with **Abdellah Aly (Student Representative, New Haven Board of Education)** to propose the policy.

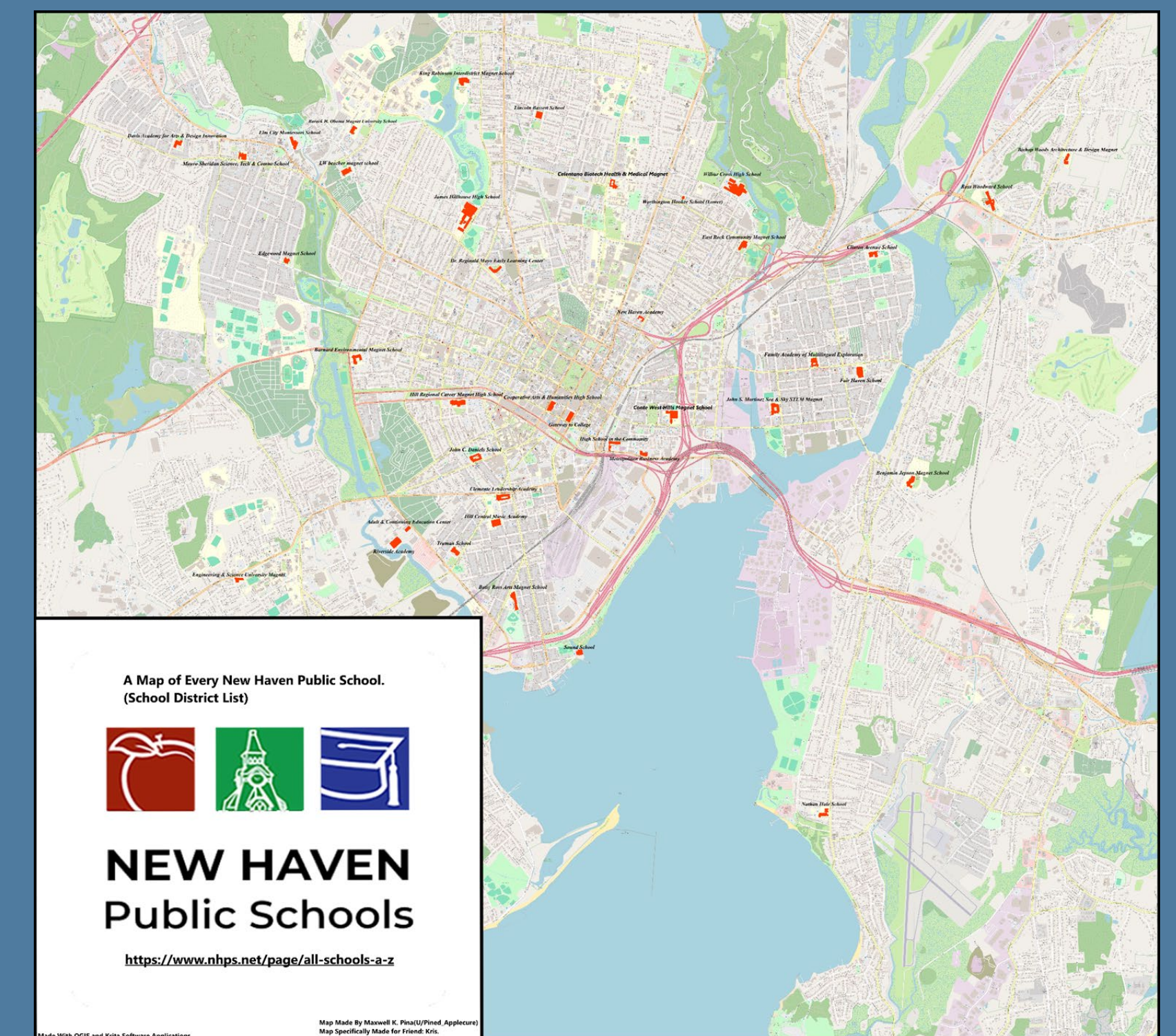
- Shared my policy idea and a document with an implementation plan, and responses to common concerns.

- After a long process of various types board meetings within the span of 3 months, the policy was approved through the governance process.

- Share tables provide students with reliable access to nutritious food already available in schools.



The policy made by me, Abdellah Aly, and the Board of Education, developed to accommodate schools' and children's needs. Scan the QR code with your phone to access the policy!



This is a map of the 43 New Haven Public Schools that the policy will be affecting.



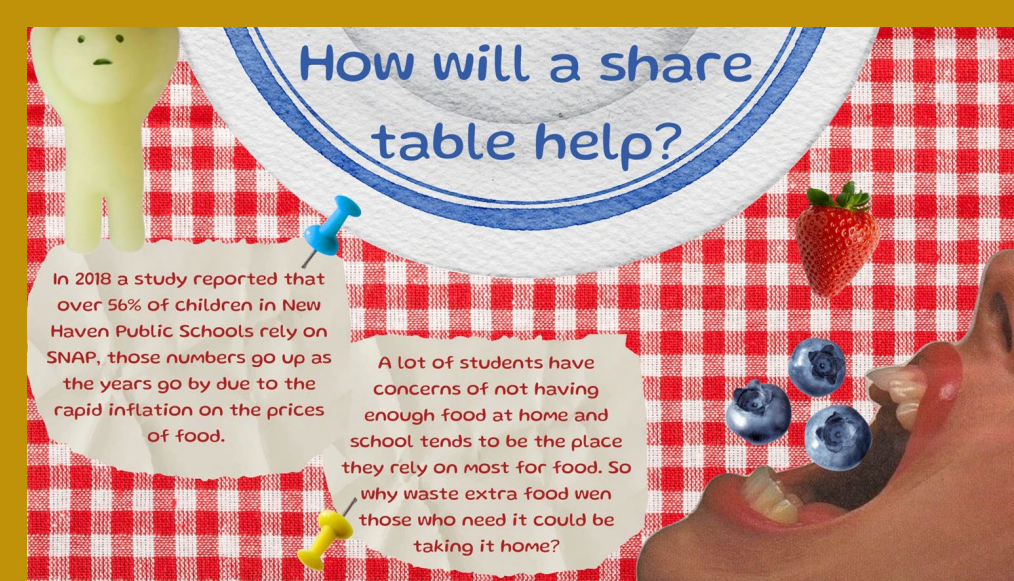
Share Table at Common Ground High School!

Teacher Training & Implementation

- Due to my school (Common Ground High School) not being part of the New Haven school district, the policy I created did not apply. **This led me to redo the entire process** in my school, but with more practical and logistical involvement.
- In order to implement the share table into my school's cafeteria, I had to put all the staff at Common Ground through a training.
- Designed and led a **training for teachers and cafeteria staff**. Training covered:
 - Purpose of share tables
 - Food waste impacts
 - Guidelines for safe food sharing
- Collaborated with **Joel Tolman (Common Ground High School)** to coordinate implementation and secure approval from executive leadership.
- Peers (Vinny Ortiz, Maxwell Pina, Aiden Esposito) supported **setup, materials, and training activities**.
- Staff engagement ensured consistent and effective use of share tables.
- Learning outcomes: Teachers and staff were actively engaged throughout the presentation and even had moments where they explained to one another on what could and couldn't go on the share table since not everyone picked it up so quickly.



Teacher training by me



Slides from teacher training



Conclusions

- 43 schools will be affected by this policy.
- Share tables are a **simple, no-cost solution** to reduce food waste and address student food insecurity.
- After the press release of my project, I had various people tell me that they had similar efforts in the area of greater New Haven as well as other towns, demonstrating the need and buy-in!
- With this policy in place, I hope that the rest of the county and state someday will follow this as an example.



Acknowledgements & References

As a final, huge, and obvious thanks I would like to shout out my amazing mentor Haley and director Laura for being incredibly patient and supportive through this whole messy but meaningful process!

- Haven's Harvest (2023). Mission: Why did this begin? Haven's Harvest.
- Luna, E. & Venkat, A., (2025). Reduce Food Loss & Waste: Project Drawdown.
- Santilli, A. & O'Connor Duffany, K. (2018) the STATE of HUNGER in NEW HAVEN: Report on Food Insecurity & Recommendations for Action.

