Imagine being a child who only gets to eat once a day and only when at school. Now imagine getting to the register and the teller says you cannot eat today. This in itself would be bad enough. But then the casher proceeds to dump your food into a trash bin in front of all your peers, and then brands you with a stamp that reads I need lunch money. This has become an all too familiar scenario for students in k-12 public schools. And the term given to these types of practices is lunch shaming.

What exactly is lunch shaming? Lunch shaming are tactics used by public schools in an attempt to regain lost income caused by student lunch debt. These tactics include, but are not limited to, stamping the hands of students who owe lunch money, throwing away the students meal, not allowing the student to participate in school events, make the student preform chores to work off the debt, and replacing a students meal with a cheaper, less nutritious, one. While the people who champion these tactics will argue that the practices work, and lunch debt is being reduced, what about the students who are hurt by these practices? Do the ends really justify the means? Unfortunately, some people think so. According to **Writers** people like Joe Zupancic, a Pennsylvania school bord member, think the practice of lunch shaming is ok because it is not meant to embarrassed students and because the practices are working. This is a very consequentialist way of looking at the issue of lunch shaming. In Zupancic’s mind there is nothing immoral about the practices of lunch shaming because he finds the end result agreeable.

But is lunch shaming truly ethical? Let’s look at the practice of food shaming through the lenses of different ethical standpoints. First let’s look at food shaming from a deontological ethical perspective. Deontology is pretty much the opposite of consequentialism. Where consequentialism deals with the end results, deontology deals with how the end result was reached. I cannot see many people arguing that the act of depriving a student of their lunch, while completely embarrassing them in the process, is ethical. Therefor from a deontological perspective food shaming is immoral. Now let’s look at food shaming from a Utilitarian perspective. Utilitarianism is an ethical standpoint that argues that actions that help the most people are the most ethical. I would argue that food shaming does not help the majority. Surely there are more students than people trying to reclaim lunch debts, therefor lunch shaming is not beneficial to the majority, making it immoral from a utilitarian standpoint. Finally let’s look at lunch shaming from a virtue ethics standpoint. virtue ethics looks at a person’s character in order to determine morality. Lunch shaming cannot exist without someone perpetuating it. In the case of lunch shaming the person perpetuating lunch shaming is the cashier. While some cashiers have quit their job due to lunch shaming, others carry on. If a person is unfazed by denying a child their daily meal, then that person’s character is probably that of an unempathetic and immoral being. On the other hand, the people who quit their job because they could not look a child in the eye and take their only meal away from them probably have a more empathetic and moral character.

Not only is lunch shaming immoral, but it also hurts a student’s academic performance. They say breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but what if you never get any? Now lunch becomes the most important, and many times the only, meal of the day. There are many studies showings that there is a link between academic performance, nutrition, and hunger. Students who are not hungry tend to do better in school. They are able to pay better attention in class and are generally happy. On the other hand, students who don’t eat before class have a harder time paying attention and are generally unhappy due to being hungry. You cannot expect a student to pay attention when all they can think about is getting something to eat. Therefor not only is lunch shaming immoral but it has a negative impact on students’ academic performance.

How are public schools funded? Public schools receive funding from three sources. State, local, and federal. If you work for a living, then you know that a large amount of your check is taken away from you to pay taxes. Some people loose as much as one third of their check. So why are parents expected to pay for lunches after already paying taxes that fund public schools? Even after all of my research I cannot explain why this is. It doesn’t seem fair or moral. And seeing as how nutrition, hunger, and academic performance are so closely linked, why is feeding students not just considered part of the education process?

What is being done to end school lunch shaming? On a local scale some lunchroom workers are simply quitting their jobs if it requires them to enact lunch shaming policies. On a larger scale there has been a senate bill passed to try and end school lunch shaming. The bill in question is senate bill 250 child hunger prevention and fair treatment act of 2017. What does senate bill 250 do exactly? According to **wclp.org** “SB 250 will ensure that school officials do not delay or deny food to punish students for any reason and would require districts to publish their policies for notifying and collecting debts from parents who have not paid school meal fees.” Does the bill work? Yes and no. While it may have reduced lunch shaming, there are still cases of lunch shaming happening after the bill was passed. But it is a step in the right direction. This bill has brough attention to the issue. And the more people who learn about lunch shaming the more likely it can be stopped. Because in my opinion the majority of people don’t want to see a child go hungry.

In conclusion, the practice of lunch shaming is immoral. No matter which ethical perspective you try to look at it from. A student cannot reach their full potential if they are too hungry to concentrate on their schoolwork. It is not a student’s fault if they don’t have money to pay for their meal. And they should not be treated as if it were.

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