

## Food Service Workers in Buffalo Public Schools Rachel Jones



### What are the duties of food services workers in the Buffalo school system?

Generally, employees are expected to assist the cook in the preparation and serving of the food. These workers are also required to clean all areas, as well as dishes and cooking utensils. They must maintain clean spaces in the kitchen and in the rest rooms. The food service worker could also be required to serve as a cashier or checker. There are other possible employment conditions.<sup>i</sup>



### What are the minimum requirements for employment?

Applicants for employment as a food service worker in a Buffalo Public School must have experience in domestic work focusing on serving areas, the preparation and serving of food, and kitchen maintenance. The school system will also accept a combination of training and experience that shows the applicant would have the ability to perform the task in a school cafeteria setting.<sup>ii</sup>

All workers must have physical strength and stamina because the position requires heavy lifting. They must be able to read and write in English, as well as being able to follow

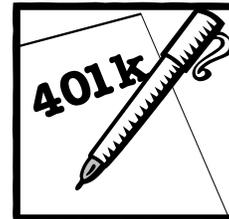


simple orders. They must have knowledge of the methods of serving food, as well as the proper care for kitchen appliances. <sup>iii</sup>

### **How can you apply for a food service worker job in the Buffalo Public Schools?**

You can apply for a food service worker jobs on-line at Food-Service Helper, Food Service, Other, Civil Service-Buffalo Public Schools. <http://www.applicantstack.com/client/buffaloschools/x/detail/a2gaqkzdz1k9>

Unfortunately, when an applicant applies for the position on-line there is no breakdown of salary or benefits available to potential employees. <sup>iv</sup>



### **What is the Coalition for Economic Justice?**

The Coalition for Economic Justice is currently engaged in a campaign to shine a light on Buffalo's school food service workers and bus aides in an attempt to promote an increase in pay to the living wage. <sup>v</sup>

CEJ is a group of students, community members, unions, and members of the religious community. They work together to create initiatives designed to promote community strength and economic stability. <sup>vi</sup>

### **What is the living wage?**

The living wage describes the minimum hourly wage that would be needed to meet the needs of a family (in Buffalo, the living wage is targeted to a family of three). This includes shelter, food and other things necessary to sustain a person. The goal of the living wage is to raise the standard of living for all workers, while lessening dependency on public assistance. <sup>vii</sup>

### **What is the difference between the minimum wage and the living wage?**

The living wage is designed to meet the actual needs of the individual. The minimum wage is set on a national and statewide level. It gives a legal floor to the amount that can be paid employees. <sup>viii</sup> The minimum wage leaves people below the poverty level; where as the living wage allows people to sustain themselves and their family at a reasonable level. <sup>ix</sup>



### **Does the City of Buffalo have a living wage law?**

The City of Buffalo unanimously passed a city living wage ordinance in 1999. This ordinance was amended in 2002 and 2007. The ordinance states that certain workers must be paid a living wage. These workers include all City employees and the employees of companies with ten or more employees that have a city contract worth \$50,000 or more.<sup>x</sup>

### **What is the current living wage under the City of Buffalo's living wage ordinance?**

As of January 1, 2010, the living wage in the City of Buffalo is \$11.87. If the employee is receiving medical coverage, the living wage is \$10.57. That is a \$.26 increase for workers with medical coverage and a \$.30 increase for those without from the living wage in 2009.<sup>xi</sup>

### **Does the City's living wage law apply to the Public Schools?**

No, the Buffalo Public Schools are a separate municipality governed by state laws and the policies set by the School Board. But in 2009 the School Board, at the urging of CEJ and others, adopted a policy calling for a living wage for all its workers by fiscal year 2011-2012.



### **Are food service workers being paid a living wage?**

No. Food service workers in the school system are not currently being paid the living wage.<sup>xii</sup>

## **Personal Account of ES, a Buffalo Food Service Worker, Provided By the Coalition for Economic Justice:**

### **Where does ES live and who makes up her household?**

ES has lived in City of Buffalo her entire life. She maintains a home with her school aged son.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **What is her current job?**

ES is currently working at Burgard High School. She is a Pre-pack leader/manager. This position is new to her after working in the district for 6 years. After her years of work and a 35 cent raise, ES now makes \$8.25 an hour. This is with her new managerial title.<sup>xiv</sup>

### **What are her work duties?**

ES starts her shift by tracking students through breakfast and making sure that they all get what they are entitled to. She has to set up for two lunches and do snacks for those periods. She is required to unpack heavy boxes of lunch trays, heat them in the oven, and make sure that they remain in a warmer until it is time to serve the students. ES also packs lunches for community based students. She has to stand in the freezer for an hour at a

time to make sandwiches and maintain freshness. Finally, ES does the paperwork for reimbursements, manages the cash box and makes bank deposits. It is clear that ES' job is substantial.<sup>xv</sup>

### **Does this job have an ill effect of ES' health?**

ES stated that the constant running back and forth was causing her knee pain. She was worried for her future and the possibility of her being unable to work.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Does ES have to rely on outside sources of financial support?**

Due to the low pay, ES lives within a very tight budget. Her son is eligible for the free lunches that she serves. She relies on Medicaid for her medical insurance, and she goes to HEAP each year to get assistance with her utilities. ES also stated that she can only afford to pay the minimum payments on her bills just to keep her services on.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Does ES have a retirement plan?**

ES did not indicate any retirement plan. She said that she has been trying to save so that she has money when she retires. She is aware that with her knee pain and age, she will not be able to work forever, and she has to try and prepare for that future on her own.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **How are food service workers treated?**

ES feels the food service workers are mistreated. She said that they make you feel like a second class citizen. Furthermore, she said that she felt invisible and unimportant.<sup>xix</sup>

### **How does ES feel about her job?**

Even with the negative feeling brought out by employers, ES enjoys her job and takes pride in her work. She feels like she is making a difference in the lives of children by teaching them how to be polite, follow rules and organizational rules. The job also gives her a sense of satisfaction when she knows that she is feeding a teenager who needs that meal to get by.<sup>xx</sup>



### **How might a higher wage assist ES?**

ES believes that a higher wage would allow her to provide more for her son and to maybe one day realize her dream of owning her own home.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **What does ES ask for?**

ES did not ask for a huge increase in funds. She is not looking for exorbitant amounts of money. As she says, "we are asking for fairness". This fairness could be met by increasing the wages of food service workers to the living wage.<sup>xxii</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Buffalo Public Schools. Openings-Food Service Workers. 2009  
<http://www.applicantstack.com/client/buffaloschools/x/detail/a2gaqkzdz1k9>
- <sup>ii</sup> Buffalo Public Schools. Openings-Food Service Workers. 2009  
<http://www.applicantstack.com/client/buffaloschools/x/detail/a2gaqkzdz1k9>
- <sup>iii</sup> Buffalo Public Schools. Openings-Food Service Workers. 2009  
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- <sup>iv</sup> Buffalo Public Schools. Openings-Food Service Workers. 2009  
<http://www.applicantstack.com/client/buffaloschools/x/detail/a2gaqkzdz1k9>
- <sup>v</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice <http://www.buffalojwj.org/>
- <sup>vi</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice <http://www.buffalojwj.org/>
- <sup>vii</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice <http://www.buffalojwj.org/livingwage.html>
- <sup>viii</sup> Hubpages. The Difference Between the Minimum Wage and the Living Wage.  
<http://hubpages.com/hub/Minimum-Wage-VS-Living-Wage>
- <sup>ix</sup> Penn State. Poverty in America: One Nation, Pulling Apart.  
<http://www.povertyinamerica.psu.edu/>
- <sup>x</sup> City of Buffalo Living Wage Commission  
[http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/CityServices/Living\\_Wage\\_Commission](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/CityServices/Living_Wage_Commission)
- <sup>xi</sup> City of Buffalo Living Wage Commission  
[http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/CityServices/Living\\_Wage\\_Commission](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/CityServices/Living_Wage_Commission)
- <sup>xii</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice. Personal Account
- <sup>xiii</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice. Personal Account
- <sup>xiv</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice. Personal Account
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- <sup>xxii</sup> Coalition for Economic Justice. Personal Account