



young chefs, inc.

President Brandman and members of the Board of Education, thank you for arranging two community forums to address budget priorities in the Strategic Plan. My name is Sheila Crye, and I direct an after-school cooking program at Sligo Middle School. I would like to address system goal #3, to strengthen productive partnerships for education, and I will use my cooking club program as an example.

When we think about building the capacity of schools in the area of family engagement, extracurricular activities are an important resource to consider. Young people learn in many ways. They need opportunities to integrate math and science concepts, for instance, to connect with basic skills that promote healthy habit formation. Nutrition education in health classes focuses on making healthy choices, but if children have a limited range of preferences, they may have head knowledge of nutrition without the know-how to improve their eating habits. Learning how to cook empowers young people to participate in the production of meals and snacks and exposes them to good tasting, non-obesogenic and thrifty dishes that expand their repertoire of healthy food preferences.

“One man’s meat is another’s poison.” This truism says that culture has much to do with food preferences. Children from various ethnic backgrounds learn mutual respect with a hands-on strategy when they learn cooking skills together. Additionally, if there are participants who have special diets due to diabetes, food allergies or sensitivities, the entire group learns how to accommodate to others’ needs.

The Board of Education has set an academic priority to develop, pilot, and expand improvements in secondary content, instruction, and programs that support students’ active engagement in learning. Out-of-school-time programs like mine should be included in this process. Activity providers care about the young people as much as teachers do, and we need to be included in the commitment to foster an organizational culture of respect. The Strategic Plan says that all employees, both school-based and nonschool-based, are essential to a successful learning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Please convey to school principals that after-school providers are there to enrich students' experience, to keep them safe between the hours of 3:00 – 6:00 p.m., and to engage families in their children's academic, social and physical development.
- Please give activity providers access to school-related data for the students they serve.

School-based data provides program directors with the tools they need to build successful programs and to evaluate progress. Demographic data and data on measures of school attendance, marking period averages, and academic eligibility are useful for ensuring that youth in the greatest need of having access to specific opportunities are served. It also gives the providers information about unique challenges their participants may face outside the program. This knowledge is also helpful in highlighting whether the program might have made a difference in the life of the students they serve. Did these students come to school more often? Were these students successful in school?

Amazingly enough, my recommendations cost nothing. My program is one of twenty-three programs funded through grants from the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families. From another perspective, however, what I am asking for is priceless: It is the opportunity for after-school activity providers to be considered full partners with school staff. We need to be considered insiders, not outsiders, and to be given a chance to show that we are trustworthy. Although I am lucky to have developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Sligo staff, this has not been universal experience of my colleagues.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of the issues I raised.

Respectfully submitted,



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