

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

September 27, 2023

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Monifa B. McKnight, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Readiness for Schools—School Meals

During the August 24, 2023, Board of Education meeting discussion regarding agenda item *6.1—Readiness for Schools*, Board members asked the following questions:

Question

Ms. Harris requested updated information regarding the efforts to partner with local farms to provide produce for school lunches.

Response

During the 2022–2023 school year, the Division of Food and Nutrition Services (DFNS) sourced local produce from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia to include in school meals. The variety of local produce included green beans, corn, cucumbers, potatoes, peaches, tomatoes, and apples, amongst a variety of other items.

In addition, Farm-to-School Initiatives focused on procuring Montgomery County produce to feature in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). DFNS purchased locally grown produce for schools participating in the FFVP. DFNS fostered a relationship between the existing produce vendor and a Montgomery County farmer, resulting in the ability to procure local produce.

In the 2023–2024 school year, DFNS has been awarded \$200,000 through the [Local Food for Schools \(LFS\) Cooperative Agreement Program](#) to purchase local foods for school meals. The grant period is from July 1, 2023 to April 24, 2024.

Thus far, DFNS has purchased 2,400 pounds of potatoes from a local Montgomery County farm. The potatoes were processed at the DFNS Central Production Facility and served as either roasted potatoes or potato salads in summer meals, and at the Innovative Schools. DFNS, the Montgomery County Food Council, and a cohort of local farmers have collaborated to identify the next round of items that can be grown, procured, and served in Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) meals. DFNS continues to explore mechanisms for procuring these local foods.

Question

Ms. Silvestre requested information regarding the food and nutrition trends: There are a couple of new programs, but there is a national trend towards making school meals free. How is the system doing in the realm?

Response

In addition to the ways that MCPS strives to provide access to free meals for students, we continue to monitor the state and federal policy updates that may have implications on additional free meal options. Currently eight states have made free meals for all students permanent, including California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont. Proposed [legislation](#) in Maryland would have provided state funding for all schools participating in the federal meal program to offer school breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students. The legislation was not passed and it is not expected to be reconsidered in 2024.

MCPS has increased access to free nutritious meals for the 2023–2024 school year. Fifty-eight schools will be offering free breakfast and lunch through [The Community Eligibility Provision](#). Additionally, free breakfast in the classroom will be available at 117 sites (an increase of 28 sites) through the [Maryland Meals for Achievement program](#). Students automatically qualify for free meals if they are in a household that participates in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; Head Start program; or if they are identified as foster, migrant, runaway, homeless, or Medicaid-Free. Households are encouraged to apply for Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS). DFNS engages with schools and community partners to support the FARMS campaign. The [Dine with Dignity](#) program settles anticipated unpaid meal debt accrued by students while their families wait for approval to receive free meals through FARMS.

If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Dana E. Edwards, chief of district operations, Office of the Chief Operating Officer, via email.

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