

Learning and Leading with Equity
The Fierce Urgency of Now

The HCPSS Let's Rethink Lunch Program and Healthy Meals Initiative



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Introduction

HCPSS supports students each day by providing healthy, appealing and nutritious meals in a positive, safe and efficient environment. Our commitment is to continuously improve our services to support students as they are encouraged to make healthy choices and meet their highest learning potential.

Nutritious food is essential to a healthy life and good nutrition in childhood promotes growth, health, and learning and reduces risks for chronic diseases. A child who grows up without adequate nutrition will face significant barriers to academic achievement.

Recent federal standards and our school system's wellness policy all emphasize the importance of healthy eating. HCPSS's Food and Nutrition Services plans will therefore build on prior successes and reflect emerging issues that we face in ensuring that the meals we prepare and serve to children continue to be healthy, safe and nutritious to eat.

Our Current Meals Program

- Meets and exceeds USDA requirements of the NSLP & SBP programs.
- Provides more whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- Provides low-fat dairy products.
- Provides lower sodium foods.
- Provides less saturated fat.
- Meets children's calorie needs based on their age.
- Provides more choices and variety (leading with equity and taking care of **all** children).
- Follows local wellness programs.

Our Current Program

- Goes even further to offer fresh, local and tasty foods.
- Has been made healthier by eliminating fried foods and anything high in sugar, emphasizing baked foods, and offering fresh juices and locally sourced items.
- Has recorded extremely positive results, with 15 percent more students now participating in our lunch program, compared to three years ago.
- Was recognized with an A-plus rating from Healthy School Food Maryland, and that all HCPSS schools earned awards from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA): Healthier US School Challenge: Smarter Lunchrooms.

The 2016-2017 Let's Rethink Lunch Program

- HCPSS partnered with the Horizon Foundation in 2016-2017 to implement an innovative program focusing on promoting the link between nutrition, education, physical activity and living a healthy lifestyle.
- Fresh fruit and vegetable salad bars were implemented at Bollman Bridge, Laurel Woods and Talbott Springs Elementary schools to allow students the option to select additional fresh fruits and vegetables.
- In addition, revamped lunch menus were provided with more variety and choices, while meeting the meal pattern requirements.
- The results of the pilot were most encouraging -overall percent participation and average daily participation in the 3 schools increased by approximately 5% and 10% respectively.

Let's Rethink Lunch Program

- Other areas of success included:
 - Reinforcement of healthy eating habits.
 - Students' willingness to try new menu items.
 - Students' acceptability of new lunch menus with more choices.
 - Educating students on portion sizes, to minimize waste.
- Lessons learned included:
 - Parents and administrators being great resources of positive PR for the continually improving food service program.
 - Team work and staff dynamics made a huge difference in implementing the project at the pilot schools.
 - Students ate more fresh fruit and vegetables because they had more choices.
 - Food taste testing allowed students to try new lunch menu items, which increased their likelihood of trying them again when they appeared again on the menu.

Let's Rethink Lunch Program

- Impact Stories Experienced included:
 - Generation of positive press, locally and beyond (e.g., Wall Street Journal, Baltimore Sun, Howard County Times, Columbia Flier, WBAL, blogs, etc.).
 - Positive influence on school staff; providing easy and economical way for them to eat more fruit and vegetables as well as to share their healthy eating habits with their students.
 - Schools not included in the pilot asking when they would get a similar program.
 - Provision of another avenue to engage parents with their student's school and parents having opportunities to sample new items; provide feedback; and offer suggestions regarding future plans.

HCPSS's Food and Nutrition Services

Overall Successes in FY17

- As a result of continuous efforts to promote nutrition, health and well-being for all our students, in order for them to meet their highest learning potential, HCPSS's Food and Nutrition Services realized the following overall program performance outcomes in 2016-2017, compared to 2015-2016:
 - 30.99 % increase in breakfast average daily participation.
 - 8.22% increase in lunch average daily participation.
 - 28.74% increase in A la carte average daily participation.
 - 14.51% increase in average daily participation for all meals served.
 - 15.09% increase in the total number of meals served.
 - 30% increase in free and reduced-price breakfast participation.
 - 23.5% increase in free summer meals (over 51,000 meals)

The 2017-2018 Healthy Meals Initiative

- The 2017-2018 “Healthy Meals” initiative will ensure that all children in Howard County receive the most nutritious, appealing school meals along with effective nutrition education, so that they can achieve their full academic potential and learn to make healthful choices.
- As HCPSS continues to make positive changes with the meals program, a multi-faceted approach has been implemented, aimed at achieving the following outcomes:
 - Increasing healthy food consumption.
 - Increasing healthy food purchases.
 - Improving dietary choices.
 - Improving nutrition.
 - Increasing academic achievement.
 - Reducing food insecurity.
 - Increasing student participation in meal programs .

The Healthy Meals Initiative

- The 2017-2018 Healthy Meals Initiative includes:
 - Expanding fresh fruits and vegetable offerings by adding more stand-alone salad bars in elementary schools and modifying existing serving lines in other schools to offer the same fresh fruit and vegetables that would be offered on the stand-alone salad bars.
 - Expanding the number of healthy lunch entrees, from 26 to 34 within a 25-day cycle. This has created a healthier school environment by providing healthier food choices and is also making a difference in children's diets and positively impacting their present and future health.
 - Implementing food taste testing and sampling for students and parents at regular intervals during the 2017-2018 school year.
 - Increasing transparency of nutritional information posted on-line.
 - Maximizing free and reduced-price meals participation by eligible families.

The Healthy Meals Initiative

- Reducing sugar in breakfast meals by adding more hot breakfast items that are richer in protein and low in sugar.
- Expanding gluten-free menu options.
- Engaging with partners/organizations to initiate educational programs about healthy eating and fresh food.
- Expanding access to healthy meals during summer by expanding the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).
- Expanding the After School Meals Program to provide free snacks and supper to eligible schools.
- Heightening community awareness about healthy eating through the Ask the Dietician program.
- Implementing an effective meal charge policy to ensure that no child will be deprived of a healthy meal because of his/her ability to pay.
- Collaborating with the County Government, community-based organizations, and other partners to implement a 5-year plan to end childhood hunger.

Summary

- More students are eating school lunches and breakfast in FY18 (YTD Nov.) compared to FY17 (YTD Nov.). Average daily participation for breakfast has increased by 3.36%, while average daily participation for lunch has increased by 3.47%. In addition, after school meals have increased by 38.5%, with 24 schools participating.
- Good nutrition in childhood promotes growth, health, learning, and reduced risks for chronic diseases, and a well-balanced diet is necessary for children to do well in school and lead healthy and productive lives.
- “Obesity and food insecurity hunger are dual threats to many children. While the incidence of childhood obesity is higher than ever before, for many children, school meals may be the only meals they eat in any given day.”

Food Insecurity and the Impact on Health

According to the study *Hunger in America 2014*, which surveyed 60,000 Feeding America clients and 32,000 partner agencies:



24% of households had at least one member in poor health.



66% of households had to choose between food and medical care.



33% had a household member with diabetes.



58% had a household member with high blood pressure.