

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

February 10 2022

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Monifa B. McKnight, Interim Superintendent of Schools

Subject: School Meals and Nutrition (01-18-2022-03-A-B)

During the Operating Budget Hearing, Board members requested the following information:

Question A:

Ms. O’Looney requested information regarding the feasibility of bringing in a chef to review the school lunch menus and meals. She also asked the following: (1) Where do we buy the system’s food from and its nutritional value; and (2) what goes into the development of the school lunch menus?

Response:

The Division of Food and Nutrition Services (DFNS) employs registered dietitians and culinary experts within the central production facility (CPF). We have in-house chefs that collaborate with dietitians on menu planning and recipe development, food testing with stakeholders, and creating diverse offerings as well as innovative food concepts. Recently, we began a collaboration between specialty chefs and chefs on our culinary team to design new and innovative concepts and recipes for our diverse population of students. The first collaboration was held on February 8, 2022. This was an opportunity for professional development for our culinary team to partner with commercial chefs, share best practices, and develop new recipes. The innovative solutions that were created will be tested and analyzed for nutritional integrity. These concepts will then be field tested with our students for acceptability. The student input will be incorporated into the product concept. Once finalized, these concepts will be additions to our menu. We also plan an initiative with a specialty chef to develop ‘plant forward’ concepts. These may include entrees similar to our current Power Bowls, soups or salad dressings. We plan to actively engage in ongoing collaborations with professional chefs throughout the year resulting in products and concepts that are reflective of our students.

DFNS is dedicated to providing our students a variety of healthy and appealing meal options. Our menus and recipes are created by a team of registered dietitians and certified culinary professionals. DFNS, in collaboration with our Procurement Unit, publishes Bids and Requests for Proposals. These lists include every item that is planned for use on our menus.

Multiple manufacturers and vendors are used to procure the wide variety of food and supplies needed to meet the requirements of our meal programs. The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) *Foods in Schools* program also supports our nutrition programs and American agricultural producers through purchases of 100% American-grown and -produced foods for use by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. More information on these programs is available on the USDA [website](#).

All menus must meet the nutritional requirements of the USDA, which were established under the *Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2012*. Our menus exceed these requirements. Additional information about nutritional requirements specific to MCPS are set forth in MCPS Regulation, *JPG-RA: Wellness: Physical and Nutritional Health*. Our team of registered dietitian/nutritionists analyze our menus to provide the required nutritional components for each age group. The components that are the framework for the menus include meat/meat alternate, whole grains, fruits, vegetables (with five separate sub-groups), and milk.

Question B:

Ms. Harris requested information regarding the feasibility of using the system's culinary arts programs to reimagine school meals and come up with new menu ideas.

Response:

Our chefs constantly are exploring new and exciting options for our students, which involves new recipe development and testing on a frequent, ongoing basis. Recipes that we are testing this week include a Southwest Beef & Whole Grain Rice Bowl, Vegan Teriyaki Edamame & Whole Grain Rice, Creamy Cajun Chicken Whole Grain Pasta, Chicken & Broccoli over Whole Grain Rice, and Creamy Chicken Pot Pie. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically has changed the way we have been able to operate resulting in both labor and supply shortages. These constraints have impacted our ability to fully implement some of the innovative strategies we anticipated rolling out this year. However, we plan to continue moving forward with the development of these and more concepts.

We have collaborated with the award-winning culinary classes from Takoma Park Middle School for the Real Food for Kids annual regional culinary competition. Ms. Heather D. Davis, teacher and chef, has led her team to first place in the lunch category for three consecutive years. The competition involves middle school students designing a menu for use in school meals. The students also prepare and plate the recipe for the judges. DFNS has adapted the student recipes and added them to the menus. Their first recipe, "Blue Devil" Bowl, has been a successful addition to our power bowl line. We will be excited to review and test their entry for this year's competition in March 2022.

In 2020, to support Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in culinary arts, restaurant management, and hospitality, a new Foundations program was established: the Foundation of Hospitality and Restaurant Management (FHRM). With the support of FHRM, students

participating in hospitality and culinary programs will be able to serve as ideal thought partners and participants in the continued expansion of school meal and menu offerings. This will continue to expand opportunities for CTE students to participate in “real life” work settings within Montgomery County Public Schools. More information about FHRM is available on the [website](#). We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Culinary Arts programs in our high schools as well.

If you have any questions about school meals and nutrition, please contact Ms. Barbara W. Harral, director of food and nutrition services, via email.

MBM:ESD:BWH:lh

Copy to:

Executive Staff

Ms. Harral

Ms. Webb