

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 15, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 62 : OPTIONS RELATED TO SCHOOL LUNCHES TO HELP FIGHT CHILDHOOD OBESITY

This memorandum responds to a question from Councilman Krupicka requesting staff to provide options related to school lunches that would help combat childhood obesity. **The information and recommendations on the following pages were provided by Alexandria City Public School (ACPS) staff.**

ACPS Staff Response

School nutrition falls under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Federal law requires that meals meet strict nutrition standards, following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. The department is audited annually to ensure these standards are consistently met. Meals are planned by a registered dietitian and represent the gold standard of the USDA's Healthier US Schools Challenge - focusing on fruits and vegetables, lower fat and whole grain items.

The required meal patterns for each meal are as follows. Meals must follow these patterns or ACPS is not eligible for reimbursement from USDA. Currently USDA meal funds represent \$4.2 million of the \$6.5 million in revenue supporting ACPS Food and Nutrition Services operations, or about two-thirds of all revenue. In SY 2010/2011, the maximum federal reimbursement for a lunch is \$2.72. This must cover food, supplies, labor and benefits, and other operating costs.

Lunch:

- 2 oz of meat or meat alternate
- 1 serving of bread/grain
- 2 servings of fruit/vegetables
- Low fat milk

Breakfast

- 1 oz of protein and 1 serving of bread/grain, OR
- 2 servings of bread/grain, OR
- 2 servings of protein
- Low Fat Milk
- 1 serving of fruit or 100% juice

After school snacks:

- ¾ cup fruit or 100% juice
- 1 serving bread/grain, OR
- 1 serving meat/meat alternate

School Nutrition Services provides nutritious meals every day that give our children the opportunity to make educated, healthy food choices that have positive, long-term health, academic and physical outcomes. The department is recognized as a national leader, initiating several changes over the last five years that have increased the nutritional value of meals. The program is evidenced based, reflecting the most current, valid research in nutrition.

ACPS has implemented several initiatives that have improved the nutritional content of meals:

- Breads offered are all whole wheat or whole grain
- Other whole grains such as brown rice are available
- Over 25 different fruits/veggies offered each month

- Lean meats
- Low fat and skim milk
- Age appropriate serving sizes - no supersized portions
- Continuing development of recipes that are lower in sodium

The department has had a parent advisory committee for a number of years. Invitations go out for participation to all PTA presidents annually. This year six schools were represented at the first meeting. Concerns have been expressed in two areas: flavored milk and snacks that are sold during lunch service. The director of Food and Nutrition Services has attended three PTA meetings this year, and several parents have expressed their support for flavored milk.

The research on the nutritional value of flavored milk shows that milk provides nine (9) essential nutrients in a one cup serving. The research indicates that those nine nutrients are very difficult to replace if milk is not consumed. If a child will drink 1 cup of flavored milk each day they are better nourished than if they do not drink milk at all. Unfortunately, milk is one of the most wasted foods in our cafeterias. Unflavored milk is not popular and when it is removed as a choice option the consumption of milk decreases by approximately one-third.

ACPS and School Nutrition is working with several chefs who are providing demonstrations in schools, working with parents to teach them how to shop and cook nutritious foods on a shoestring budget, and to help the department develop new recipes for our students. Registered dietitians from School Nutrition have taught nutrition classes to families at the Carpenter Shelter this year, and have participated in two health fairs in the community. We also work with the school garden coordinator for nutrition education, and participate in school health and safety committees. The general consensus is that the department is doing well in meeting the primary nutrition needs of children.

President Obama signed the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act in January. This law reauthorizes school nutrition programs. The department is ahead of the requirements in many areas since an emphasis has been on nutrient rich foods. To reduce childhood obesity takes a multi-pronged approach, addressing nutrition and physical activity. Teaching children to eat nutritious meals is a true partnership – parents and schools must work together. Much of the research shows that school meals are healthier than those brought from home, and students who eat school meals are at a better weight.

Changing what is offered at lunch will not impact obesity unless we change what students select, and why they make their selections. To do this, if there were external funding available ACPS would recommend adding more time for students, especially elementary students, to eat. We would also recommend funding the development and implementation of a nutrition education program integrated into many aspects of the curriculum for all students. This would include incorporating basic nutrition knowledge as a part of the required curriculum for middle school and high school students.