

Real Food For Kids

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For Immediate Release

Contractor Selected to Perform Independent Assessment of Fairfax County Public Schools' Food and Nutrition Services

February 3, 2013...The Fairfax County Public School Board voted January 25, 2013 to award a contract for an independent study of the school systems' Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) operations to [Prismatic Services, Inc.](#) of Huntersville, NC.

Funding for the study was allocated during a budget meeting last year when a \$0.2 million placeholder was created. Those monies will come directly from the FNS reserve fund which does not impact the FCPS operating budget. Real Food For Kids, the parent advocacy group who has been working to improve the quality of food served in FCPS, proposed this independent study to the School Board in the spring of 2012 in an effort to identify cost-effective ways of transitioning from the current meals program of highly processed foods to healthier, whole food options.

RFFK President JoAnne Hammermaster attended the school board meeting where the contract was approved. "We thank the school board for moving forward with this assessment. We are very optimistic about this project and look forward to working in collaboration with FNS and Prismatic as stakeholders in the process of bringing healthier whole foods to our students. Though the process will take time, we are encouraged by continued progress and the support of FNS for this project."

Prismatic Services, Inc. is a K-12 consulting firm that specializes in finding ways to improve food operations and support services programs that make school districts successful. They recently completed a diagnostic study of the school meals program in the San Francisco Unified School District, which was spearheaded by the Food Banks of San Francisco and Marin Counties, in an effort to improve the quality of meals served to students and increase participation in the school meals program.

Prismatic will focus heavily on stakeholder input during the assessment process, said Prismatic president Tatia Prieto. They will be meeting with FNS next week to finalize the project schedule so that the assessment can be completed by the end of this school year in preparation for 2013-2014. After that they will be scheduling several large community input sessions.

"I cannot stress enough stakeholder involvement," said Prieto. "Only through that can you get quality input that can be put into action." She added how much they are looking forward to working with the school district, noting that Fairfax County is large enough to have the resources to do some great things in line with what is happening with school food across the country.

Up until the last few years, much of Prismatic's work with school systems had focused on bringing lunch programs in line with federal guidelines. Now, in keeping with the nationwide movement toward healthier, freshly prepared foods, Prismatic's work goes beyond the minimum federal guidelines, reaching for even higher standards. Prieto shared that recent recommended changes to the school food program in San Francisco, where they had faced challenges, resulted in a 40% increase in participation.