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Fairfax County School Board's Decision to Fund a School Pilot Kitchen is "a Golden Opportunity" according to *Real Food For Kids* Group

A recent budget meeting of the Fairfax County School Board ended in a second victory for healthier school food advocacy group, *Real Food For Kids*, which has been working to encourage Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) to provide more appetizing, healthier, whole foods made from scratch.

On May 24, 2012, the School Board voted to provide \$100,000 to retrofit an as-yet undetermined FCPS school kitchen to pilot a program to assist in the preparation of fresh school meals. Currently, all FCPS school kitchens are equipped only to reheat frozen and processed foods. "This is a golden opportunity to grow in terms of providing healthy, wholesome food. We have a responsibility to provide the healthiest food to our students, commensurate with the level of excellence we expect in the classroom," says JoAnne Hammermaster, president of Real Food For Kids.

Led by At-Large School Board member Ryan McElveen, the board agreed unanimously that this is a worthy expense, in terms of studying the feasibility and practicality of serving healthier foods in schools. "I was thrilled with the unanimous vote to fund a pilot kitchen renovation, but we still have much work ahead to bring the project to fruition. Community interest in providing fresh, healthy food for kids has played a key role in galvanizing this effort, and it's only a shame that all interested school communities won't be able to benefit at the outset. We have a long way to go, but this amendment is a promising start," says McElveen.

The FCPS FY 2013 Approved Budget also includes funding for a \$200,000 independent assessment of the current FCPS Food and Nutrition Services office. "The goal of the assessment is to provide a realistic roadmap to achieving our goal of providing healthier, whole food for the children in Fairfax County Public Schools," says co-founder Jocelyn Hsu. Real Food For Kids is hopeful that this assessment will be completed before the end of the current calendar year.

The \$100,000 for the pilot kitchen and \$200,000 for the assessment of FCPS Food and Nutrition Services both will come from the Food and Nutrition Services reserve fund, which will be approximately \$18 million for the 2012-2013 school year. Under U.S. Department of the Agriculture regulations, Food and Nutrition Services funds may only be used for the operation or improvement of school food services. School Board's decisions to retrofit a school kitchen and to obtain an independent assessment does not reduce the FCPS school operating fund, which is used to pay for teachers, aides, textbooks, and other instructional expenses.