

Contact: JoAnne Hammermaster
703-581-3085
JoAnne@Hammermaster.net

REAL FOOD FOR KIDS CONFIRMS FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS WILL MOVE FORWARD WITH IMPROVEMENTS TO SCHOOL FOOD

Assurance Signals School Division's Commitment to Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Legislation Despite Recent Vote

Despite a recent House vote on the provision that would allow school food programs to opt out of the school meal standards of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, Fairfax County Public Schools has indicated that it plans to move forward with a progressive strategic plan to make improvements in the quality of food served to its students.

The strategic plan, that was unveiled at an FCPS School Board work session on March 10, 2014, includes implementing fruit and vegetable bars in all middle and high schools over the next three years, eliminating additional artificial additives, dyes, and preservatives, providing more nutrition information to parents and students, implementing a local purchase preference policy, expanding the menu cycle, and developing a plan to phase out regular soda from student access areas in all schools.

These changes have been the result of the work by Real Food For Kids (www.realfoodforkids.org) who has been advocating tirelessly over the past 3.5 years to increase the quantities of healthy foods in the Fairfax County school food program. Their advocacy and strong collaborative support from the community have been the driver of numerous changes, recently outlined by the FCPS Food and Nutrition Services Department, that will take place over the next several years.

The provision passed by the House Thursday, May 29, 2014, moves on to the Senate this week. Supporters contend that some school divisions are finding it difficult to comply with the standards for more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains and lower sodium levels, and are seeing increased waste with new foods being introduced. However, the majority of school systems have been able to meet or exceed the new standards. There has been considerable work by First Lady Michelle Obama and other school food advocates to continue on the path forward with school food reform and to not take steps to undo the hard work put in place.

Fairfax County's pilot fresh food bar at George C. Marshall High School, The Statesmen Station, is one such example of positive reform. The Statesmen Station has been well received by students and is the model for food bars that will be rolled out in other schools. Students have responded enthusiastically to fresh food offerings such as self-select salads, wraps and yogurt parfaits. Meals served at the Statesmen Station not only comply with HHFKA but qualify for reimbursement on the USDA's Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

Dr. Karen Garza, Superintendent for the Fairfax County Public School system, has indicated that – regardless of changes that may happen in Congress with the HHFKA, Fairfax will continue to move forward with its progressive plan to improve the school food program.

Ryan McElveen, Fairfax County School Board Member At-Large, has been a strong leader in advocating for changes in the county. “Changes to a school food program take considerable time and effort. Students may not like some of the changes at first, and food and nutrition

departments will need to re-work some of their offerings. This is all a part of the process. There have been many districts showing great success, and we will be one of those districts.”

Real Food For Kids Executive Director, JoAnne Hammermaster, applauds the county for being a leader in this movement. “School food is an incredibly important determinant to children’s health outcomes as well as their academic success, behavior and well-being in and out of school. We cannot afford to take steps back at this juncture. FCPS’s commitment to changing school food signals their belief in what the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act is designed to achieve. We hope other school districts will see this commitment and follow.”

About *Real Food For Kids* As the local face of the national school wellness movement, Real Food For Kids is committed to working collaboratively to increase the quantities of healthy foods in Fairfax County Public Schools and the surrounding DC Metro area, and to supporting programs that educate students and their families to make healthier lifestyle choices. Real Food For Kids has successfully advocated for an independent assessment of the current food program, aiming to find innovative ways to bring more fresh, less processed foods to students. It also has spearheaded the move to a soda-free school pilot in eight middle and high schools that launched in fall 2013 and a pilot kitchen at George C. Marshall High School that opened in September 2013. Go to www.realfoodforkids.org for more information.