

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Board Member

SUBJECT: ELIMINATION OF FOOD WASTE AND THE EXPLORATION OF FOOD SHARING PROGRAMS

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL, & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC

BLUEPRINT: SAFE, HEALTHY & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is committed to the education of its students, as well as to supporting and empowering families and members of the community. As the nation's 4th largest school district, M-DCPS has established and maintained a long and distinguished legacy of leadership in altruistic efforts designed to improve the quality of life of not only its students, but also of families and members of the community. Abating and eliminating poverty and hunger are significant ways to improve the quality of life of a community, especially among its children. This is especially invaluable in Miami-Dade County where over seventy-percent of children and families live in poverty and whose school-aged students qualify for free and/or reduced meals.

In fact, in 2018, Feeding South Florida announced the Map the Meal Gap 2018 report by Feeding America on food insecurity and the cost of food at both the county and congressional district levels. Map the Meal Gap 2018 uncovered that food insecurity existed in every county in Feeding South Florida's service area. According to the Map the Meal Gap report, a food budget shortfall of 120,661,900 meals occurs every week, a total shortfall of \$408.7 million per year in South Florida. These meals are missing from the tables of 706,130 people at risk of hunger in South Florida. Most striking about these statistics is that 19.4 percent of children in South Florida are food insecure, meaning approximately 240,190 children go to bed hungry every night. In Miami-Dade County 9.1% of the population is food insecure, with 241,620 people not knowing where they will get their next meal. The food budget shortfall in Miami-Dade County per person, per week is \$19.45, with a total shortfall of \$142,536,000. Clearly, the reality of these data have significant, adverse impact on many M-DCPS' students and their families.

Pursuant to School Board Policy 8500-Food Services, the district's *"Food and Nutrition service program shall strive to: (1) provide school food services consistent with the nutritional needs of students, and (2) provide school food services that contribute to the student's educational experiences and the development of desirable eating habits."* In addition, its stipulates that *"the director of food services is responsible for supervising and administering the food service program and shall provide system-wide coordination to achieve the most efficient and nutritional operation at the lowest possible cost to the student."* Tangential to these provisions are the notions of education, nutrition, and efficiency.

In addition, the notion of equity is reflected in School Board Policy 8531-Free and Reduced-Price Meals which asserts that *“All students determined to be economically needy shall be provided upon request a free or reduced price meal or meals at school...”*and that *“the Superintendent and the Food and Nutrition Director shall determine the eligibility of students for free and reduced-price meals according to Federal, State, and local guidelines and a publicly announced plan applied equitably to all families in the District.”*

Despite efforts to provide for and support nutritious, efficient, and equitable food service programs at schools at the local, state, and federal levels, nation's schools and districts continue to experience high levels of food waste. In fact, Americans waste enough food every day to fill a 90,000 seat football stadium. Approximately one-third of all food is wasted at the retail and consumer levels. While research has shown that food wasted by children is similar to the rest of the U.S. population, there are many ways schools can reduce food waste and teach students about the impact it has on the environment and in their community. K-12 schools have a special role in not only reducing, recovering, and recycling food waste on their premises, but also in educating the next generation about recovering wholesome excess food for donation and about reducing food waste to conserve natural resources.

In a June 2016 memo, the U.S. Department of Agriculture endorsed *“share tables”* as an *“innovative strategy”* to reduce food waste for national school meal programs. This provided both a level of approval and an avenue for school districts to explore, develop, and implement initiatives to abate and eliminate food waste in schools. Many schools and districts around the nation began to develop and implement initiatives, programs, and strategies to reduce food waste, teach students about the impact food waste has on the environment and in their community, and develop partnerships with local groups and organizations to provide food for families and members of the community. In fact, in Florida, Orange County Public Schools (OPS) in Orlando developed a novel solution to not only help feed hungry students and their communities, but to also abate and work to eliminate school waste.

For the past two years, about 20 public elementary schools in OPS have been using *“share tables”* with great levels of success. This program allows students to place their unwanted food on designated tables so others can eat them. Thus, the food doesn't have to be thrown out. Instead, fellow students who are still hungry can just grab the food themselves off the tables. At the end of the day, any food that remains on the tables is given to students from low-income families that struggle to make ends meet or is donated to local churches for distribution to the homeless. Also, Elkhart Schools in Indiana have addressed eliminating food waste and providing meals for their students by *“rescuing”* wasted meals and turning them into healthy, much needed meals for needy students at home afterschool hours.

As with OPS, Elkhart Schools, and other schools and school districts around the nation, M-DCPS, as with many school districts, have an opportunity to explore initiatives, programs, and strategies to reduce food waste, teach students about the impact food waste has on the environment and in their community, and develop partnerships with local groups and organizations to provide food for families and members of the community.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to research initiatives, programs, and strategies to reduce food waste, teach students about the impact food waste has on the environment and in their community, and develop partnerships with local groups and organizations to provide food for families and members of the community. It seeks to establish the aforementioned as a pilot program with an aspirational goal of no more than 27 schools across the elementary, middle, and senior high school levels in each of the nine voting districts in M-DCPS for the 2019-2020 school year, beginning no later than second semester of the 2019-2020 school year.

This item has been reviewed by the School Board Attorney for legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. STEVE GALLON III:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent to:

1. research initiatives, programs, and strategies, inclusive of marketing, to reduce food waste, teach students about the impact food waste has on the environment and in their community;
2. identify, establish, and/or affirm partnerships with local groups and/or organizations to provide food for children, families, and members of the community;
3. establish and implement a pilot program to eliminate food waste through student take home meals and partnerships that feed needy children and families, with an aspirational goal of no more than 27 schools, inclusive of elementary, middle, and senior high school levels in each of the nine voting districts in M-DCPS for the 2019-2020 school year, beginning no later than second semester of the 2019-2020 school year; and
4. provide an update to the Board, inclusive of an implementation plan and timeline, where practicable, no later than July 31, 2019.