

Ms. Luisa Santos, Board Member

SUBJECT: FOOD WASTE IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (M-DCPS)

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL, & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC

PLAN: SAFE, HEALTHY & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) holds the distinction of being the third-largest school district in the United States, encompassing 347 schools and serving an enrollment exceeding 335,725 students. As delineated in School Board Policy 8500 Food Services, it is our duty to ensure that M-DCPS provides school food services that not only adhere to the nutritional needs of our students but also contribute to enhancing their educational experiences and instilling healthy eating habits.¹

In our steadfast commitment to meeting the diverse needs of our student body, the Food and Services Department has effectively addressed numerous challenges. However, one significant hurdle we face is substantial food waste.

In early 2023 the Sustainable Business program at the University of Miami initiated a research effort focused on food waste within urban and suburban American school districts. In their study, it was discovered that over the course of an entire academic year, M-DCPS generated an estimated total district plate waste of 8,639.68 metric tons, contributing to the release of 3,403.17 metric tons of carbon emissions². To put this in perspective, this level of emissions is equivalent to driving over 8 million miles in an average passenger vehicle or burning 3.7 million pounds of coal. Despite the daunting magnitude of this food waste challenge, our district has made commendable strides in addressing it, with a strong commitment to educating both our students and the broader community on this issue.

One of the ways we combat food waste in the district is through the provision of “Offer versus Serve” (OVS). The OVS initiative is a key element within the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), allowing students the option to decline certain offered food items. The primary objectives of OVS are twofold: to minimize food waste within school meal programs

¹ Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (n.d.). The School Board of Miami-Dade County Bylaws & Policies. <https://districtartifacts.dadeschools.net/Standard%204/4.07/School%20Board%20Policies.pdf>

² Dvorkin, D., Joyce, M., Mussie, L., Proctor, D., Salvucci, A., Silva, E., & Wagner, M. (2023). Food Waste in the Miami-Dade County Public School System A Study of the Composition, Disposal, and Management of Food Waste And their Subsequent Greenhouse Gas Emissions

while affording students the ability to abstain from selecting foods they do not plan to consume³. The M-DCPS Food Services and Nutrition Department has cited this provision as one of the keyways we aim to alleviate possible food waste during meal times. During lunch service, schools are obligated to offer students all five essential food components in at least the specified minimum quantities. These components encompass meats/meat alternates, grains, fruit, vegetables, and fluid milk⁴. In accordance with OVS principles, a student is required to select a minimum of three components in the prescribed serving sizes, with one selection comprising at least ½ cup from either the fruit or vegetable category.

As a result of the approval of item *H-3 Elimination of Food Waste and the Exploration of Food Sharing programs*, School Board Member Dr. Steve Gallon III (April 11, 2019), our district sought to implement Share Tables across our schools during the 2019-2020 school year. Share Tables are designated locations within schools where students can deposit or return whole, unopened food, and beverages they choose not to consume⁵. Any student desiring additional food is encouraged to take these donated items, either during or after meal service, at absolutely no cost. This process aims to minimize food waste by permitting students to place nonperishable food items they no longer want on a Share Table, ensuring that their peers can safely and hygienically access and enjoy these items at no expense⁶. In addition to Share Tables, the follow-up to item H-3 included the tentative launch of a Food Donation Agreement led by the District's Food and Nutrition Department. The agreement aimed to outline the procedures for non-profit agencies, endorsed by the board, to receive surplus food from school cafeterias that cannot be utilized in student meal programs.

M-DCPS' commitment to exploring ways to reduce waste is evident in items like *H-9 Environmental Sustainability in all Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS)*, School Board Member Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall (December 15, 2021), item *H-14 Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) Energy Cost Containment Program*, School Board Chair Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas (August 9, 2017), and *H-3 Miami-Dade County Public Schools 100% Clean Energy Commitment*, School Board Member Ms. Luisa Santos (April 21, 2021). The Clean Energy by 2030 report for M-DCPS also provides great insight into ways we can move towards a reduction of food waste and promoting more composting initiatives. The report recommends expanding the availability of Climate Friendly Lunches and collaborating closely with students to stimulate greater demand⁷. Furthermore, prioritizing local sourcing is crucial, as it can substantially diminish the environmental impact of food transportation. M-DCPS can establish partnerships with more local food providers, collaborate with volunteer groups to foster a healthier cafeteria culture.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Updated Offer vs Serve Guidance for the NSLP and SBP Beginning SY2015-16201*. Food and Nutrition Service . <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>

⁴ M-DCPS Department of Food and Nutrition. (n.d.). Meal Patterns. <https://nutrition.dadeschools.net/#!/rightColumn/139>

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2016). *Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs*. Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/use-share-tables-child-nutrition-programs>

⁶ M-DCPS Food and Nutrition Procedures, C15- Share Tables for Students (During Meals)

⁷ Miami-Dade County Clean Energy Task Force, Clean Energy 2030 Final Report

We have the opportunity to ensure our students are aware of ways to reduce food waste while moving closer to achieving our Strategic Plan goals. This agenda item seeks to explore M-DCPS' current food waste management practices in order to understand the best practices and potential policy solutions this board should consider moving forward.

This item has been reviewed and approved as to form and legal sufficiency by the Office of the General Counsel.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MS. LUISA SANTOS:**

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

1. Provide an update on the implementation of Share Tables within our district since the passing of H-3, Elimination of Food Waste and the Exploration of Food Sharing programs, including but not limited to:
 - a. M-DCPS procedure and protocols on the use of Share Tables;
 - b. The current outcomes of the schools actively participating in the implementation of Share Tables;
 - c. Plan of action to increase the amount of Share Tables and track their usage in M-DCPS; and
2. Provide an update on the District's pilot Food Donation Agreement initiative; and
3. Provide an update on the District's Strategic plan goal of 5% waste diversion; and
4. Provide a presentation to the board during the Personnel, Student, School, and Community Support committee meeting of November 2023.