

Ms. Luisa Santos, Board Member

Co-Sponsors: Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas, Chair
Ms. Monica Colucci, Vice Chair
Mr. Roberto J. Alonso
Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall } REVISED AT DAIS BY BOARD ACTION
Ms. Mary Blanco
Mr. Danny Espino
Dr. Steve Gallon III
Mr. Joseph S. Geller

SUBJECT: EXPLORING NON-PLASTIC TABLEWARE

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS
RELEVANT, RIGOROUS, & INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS
EFFECTIVE & SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES**

At the School Board Meeting of July 23rd, 2025, the School Board unanimously approved School Board Agenda Item H-9, the *Food for the Future Policy Framework*. As outlined in Item H-9, the “Food for the Future Policy Framework” has four pillars as outlined below:

1. **Improve Student Health Through Balanced Nutrition:** Students and employees must have access to water dispensers in our cafeterias and menus that feature reduced sugar, whole carbs, healthy fats, and minimal processing.
2. **Support Local and Sustainable Food Sources:** Students and employees must have access to fresh, local foods and cafeterias that minimize waste.
3. **Foster Student Engagement and Nutrition Literacy:** Students and employees must be continuously involved in menu development and feedback mechanisms and engaged in nutrition education.
4. **Accountability:** M-DCPS must continuously review and regularly report qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess the success of our initiatives.

Every day, the District serves over 225,000 meals across 358 schools to more than 335,000 students and 34,000 employees.¹ ² At this scale, single-use plastic tableware generates a significant amount of garbage. In the 2024-2025 school year alone, M-DCPS procured 30,440,000 plastic sporks, resulting in substantial campus waste from single-use disposal.³

Plastic tableware poses a significant threat to public health. The energy-intensive manufacturing process of plastic tableware involves the use of hazardous chemicals, such as polypropylene or polystyrene, which can degrade into microplastics (MPs) when exposed to

¹ Dotres, Dr. J. L., Diaz, L., & Riaz, Dr. O. (2025, May). Statistical Highlights 2024-2025. Miami; Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

² Department of Food and Nutrition (2025, October 29). *Reimagining school meals: Food for the future policy framework* [Miami-Dade County School Board Workshop Presentation]. M-DCPS - Eduvision. <https://m-dcps.eduvision.tv/default.aspx?q=X3Y5NcZVhaDz%252fuyrAU4X53fJBhsJkHGrh7orwU%252f0YSfxT83%252flahepdynE2tfJF5I>

³ Office of the Superintendent. (2025, November 10). Response to Referral: SR#0564 (2025) (Referral No. 4646). Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

heat, moisture, or sunlight.⁴ Individuals who utilize plastic food containers and utensils can gradually accumulate MPs in their bodies, as polystyrene MPs have been demonstrated to adhere to food.^{5 6} In a study published by the American Chemical Society, children are projected to consume 553 MP particles daily.⁷ The accumulation of MPs inside the body is linked to oxidative stress, liver damage, respiratory inflammation, mitochondrial damage, and cancer.⁸ According to the Make America Healthy Again Report, the developing brains and bodies of youth are particularly vulnerable to synthetic chemicals, and cumulative exposure may provoke chronic disease.⁹

Studies have shown that the consumption of MPs not only threatens public health through adhesion to plastic tableware, but also through its disposal and subsequent contamination of drinking water and food sources.¹⁰ An estimated 10 to 40 million metric tons of MP particles are released into the environment annually, and, if current trends continue, this amount could double by 2040.¹¹ Florida ranks as the third-highest generator of plastic waste in the country.¹² These escalating levels of plastic waste and contamination underscore the urgent need for M-DCPS to explore sustainable alternatives.¹³

M-DCPS has demonstrated its commitment to sustainability initiatives and environmental stewardship. This has been exemplified by the Department of Food and Nutrition's promotion of Plastic-Free Lunch Day and Earth Day to reduce single-use plastics and raise environmental awareness among students and staff. Additionally, for the past 15 years, the department has been using compostable plates that do not contain PFAS, and continues to explore the use of sustainable paper goods.¹⁴

At the state level, M-DCPS Delegation Chair Senator Ana Maria Rodriguez has introduced SB 1464 (2026), with Representative Rayner's companion bill, HB 1523, "Food and Plastic Waste Reduction," which focuses on reducing both food waste and reliance on single-use plastics in school cafeterias.^{15 16} Additionally, Representative Meg Weinberger's HB 575, along with

⁴ Chia, R. W., Atem, N. V., Lee, J.-Y., & Cha, J. (2025). Microplastic and human health with focus on pediatric well-being: A comprehensive review and call for future studies. *Clinical and Experimental Pediatrics*, 68(1), 4–5. <https://doi.org/10.3345/cep.2023.01739>

⁵ Kedzierski, M., Lechat, B., Sire, O., Le Maguer, G., Le Tilly, V., & Brtheiruzaud, S. (2020). Microplastic contamination of packaged meat: Occurrence and associated risks. *Food Packaging and Shelf Life*, 24, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fpsl.2020.100489>

⁶ Chia, R. W., Atem, N. V., Lee, J.-Y., & Cha, J. (2025). Microplastic as and human health with focus on pediatric well-being: A comprehensive review and call for future studies. *Clinical and Experimental Pediatrics*, 68(1), 5-6. <https://doi.org/10.3345/cep.2023.0173their9>

⁷ Mohamed Nor, N. H., Kooi, M., Diepens, N. J., & Koelmans, A. A. (2021). Lifetime Accumulation of Microplastic in Children and Adults. *Environmental science & technology*, 55(8), 5084–5096. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.0c07384>

⁸ Chia, R. W., Atem, N. V., Lee, J.-Y., & Cha, J. (2025). Microplastic and human health with focus on pediatric well-being: A comprehensive review and call for future studies. *Clinical and Experimental Pediatrics*, 68(1), 6. <https://doi.org/10.3345/cep.2023.01739>

⁹ The White House. (2025, May). *Make our children healthy again assessment: MAHA report* (Report). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/MAHA-Report-The-White-House.pdf>

¹⁰ Borriello, L., Scivico, M., Cacciola, N. A., Esposito, F., Severino, L., & Cirillo, T. (2023). Microplastics, a Global Issue: Human Exposure through Environmental and Dietary Sources. *Foods (Basel, Switzerland)*, 12(18), 3396. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods12183396>

¹¹ Savchuk, K. (2025, January 29). *Microplastics and our health: What the science says*. Stanford Medicine News Center. <https://med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2025/01/microplastics-in-body-polluted-tiny-plastic-fragments.html>

¹² Adam, T., Alcocer, N., Di Perna, A., Egea, D., Guthrie, O., Perez, M., Read, G., & Stoddard, P. (2021). (issue brief). *Costs of Single-use Plastics Pollution in Florida* (p. 5). Miami, Florida: Florida International University.

¹³ Damgacioglu, H., Hornilla, M., Bafail, O., & Celik, N. (2020). Recovering value from single stream material recovery facilities – An outbound contamination analysis in Florida. *Waste Management*, 102, 804–814. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wasman.2019.11.020>

¹⁴ Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2022, February 7). *Clean energy report*. <https://api.dadeschools.net/WMSFiles/160/Clean%20Energy%20Report/Final%20clean%20energy%20report%20outline.docx%20-%20Google%20Docs.pdf>

¹⁵ Florida Senate Bill 1464, *Food and Plastic Waste Reduction* (2026). <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2026/1464>

¹⁶ Florida House Bill 1523, *Food Waste Reduction* (2026). <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2026/1523>

Senator Ileana Garcia's companion bill SB 240, proposes a limit on the distribution and use of single-use, nonrecyclable containers.^{17 18}

These efforts align with Agenda Item H-8, as proffered by Mr. Joseph S. Geller, Explore the Feasibility of Establishing a Partnership with Miami-Dade County for the Development and Implementation of an Early Childhood Recycling and Waste Reduction Curriculum, effective March 19, 2025; Agenda Item H-9 as proffered by Dr. Dorothy Bendross Mindingall, Environmental Sustainability in all M-DCPS Schools, effective December 15, 2022; Agenda Item H-9, Food Waste in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), proffered by Ms. Luisa Santos, effective October 5, 2023; Agenda Item H-11, Waste-Cost Realignment and Efficiency Review, proffered by Ms. Luisa Santos, effective December 17, 2025; and Agenda Item H-3, Elimination of Food Waste and the Exploration of Food Sharing Programs, proffered by Dr. Steve Gallon III, effective April 17, 2019.

To advance these agenda items and remain in compliance with School Board Policy 7410, "Maintenance," and School Board Policy 7460, "Conservation of Natural and Material Resources," this item directs the Superintendent to further advance the Food for the Future Policy Framework by having the M-DCPS Department of Food and Nutrition and other relevant departments explore infrastructure improvements that support environmentally responsible practices.^{19 20} If deemed feasible, this includes conducting a district-wide audit of school kitchen facilities to evaluate the existing dishwashing infrastructure and determine the possibility of implementing reusable, non-plastic tableware, a shift that would address public health concerns associated with microplastic exposure while also evaluating the long-term savings that can be achieved from investing in single-use tableware. This operational review should provide a foundation for future planning and funding with the goal of reducing reliance on single-use, plastic tableware.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
LUISA SANTOS:**

The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, directs the Superintendent to further advance the Food for the Future Policy Framework by:

1. Conducting a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis comparing the long-term costs of the current single-use model with those of reusable, non-plastic tableware, including capital, operating, and replacement costs over time per school site; and
2. Using the results of the financial analysis, as deemed feasible, to update standards for future kitchen and cafeteria renovations, ensuring specifications include dishwashers and reusable, non-plastic tableware; and
3. Exploring available grants and philanthropic funding to implement non-plastic, reusable tableware; and
4. Incorporating the reduction of single-use plasticware into the 2026-2027 M-DCPS Legislative Platform; and
5. Reporting findings back to the board no later than May 31, 2026.

¹⁷ Florida House Bill 575, *Auxiliary Containers* (2026). <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2026/575>

¹⁸ Florida Senate Bill 240, *Auxiliary Containers* (2026). <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2026/240>

¹⁹ Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2011, May 11). *BoardDocs® policy: PO7410 maintenance*. <https://go.boarddocs.com/fl/sbmd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=BK6KVV4FFE94>

²⁰ Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2011, May 11). *BoardDocs® policy: PO7460 conservation of natural and material resources*. <https://go.boarddocs.com/fl/sbmd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=BK6KXY4FFF59>