



Good Laws, Good Food for Our Schools

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE
SCHOOL FOOD IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY
AND WINSTON COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

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I. INTRODUCTION

Communities around the country are interested in improving the quality of food served in their schools because they recognize the importance of nutritious, wholesome food for children. Many children eat a significant portion of their daily food at school, and many others go home to low-income households that have limited capacity to afford healthy foods. Therefore it is vital that the meals and snacks they receive at school provide ample nourishment to help them learn and grow. In addition, just as we expect our schools to teach children core subjects like math and reading, we should expect them to teach our children about nutrition and healthy lifestyles, instilling in them good habits to carry into adulthood. Eating a nutritious diet can protect children from developing type 2 diabetes and other diet-related diseases, and enable them to live healthy, long lives.

To encourage healthier school environments, many communities have worked with their local policymakers, school boards, and school staff to improve local policies on school foods. The Winston County and Montgomery County diabetes coalitions have provided many important services to their communities to prevent and combat diabetes, and have recently expressed interest in improving school foods in their communities. They asked the Harvard Mississippi Delta Project¹ to develop this report to provide ideas, examples, and case studies of how similar communities have improved school foods, and to provide background on current school food policies at the federal, state and local level. Local coalitions can play an important role in improving school foods by ensuring that federal, state and local laws are being implemented, and advocating for policy changes at the local level. This report aims to provide helpful research and ideas for advocates to improve school food policy with the goal of reducing obesity and type 2 diabetes among Mississippi's youngest residents.

A. Defining the Problem

In 2012, 12.5% of the adult population in Mississippi had type 2 diabetes- the second-highest rate in the nation.² Diabetes caused four of every 1,000 Mississippi deaths.³ Exceeding the state average, 16.3% of the adult population in Winston County and 16.2% in Montgomery County have type 2 diabetes.⁴ The costs of diabetes can be significant to both individuals and the communities in which they live. In terms of individual health, diabetes increases the risk for stroke, blindness, kidney failure, and leg and foot amputations, and increases the risk of pregnancy complications.⁵ For communities, diabetes significantly increases health care costs. In 2012, America spent \$245 billion dollars directly on diabetes health care, and experienced lost earnings from increased absenteeism (\$5 billion), reduced productivity at work (\$20.8 billion), and the inability of some to work because of disease-related disability (\$21.6 billion).⁶

To address the root causes of diabetes, it has become increasingly important to improve the diets and lifestyle habits of children. Between 2001 and 2009, the rate of incidence of type 2 diabetes in youth ages 10-19 increased 30%.⁷ This is attributed to the increase in the prevalence of obesity in that age group.⁸ To improve the quality of children's' diets, it is important to address the quality of school meals. Children eat between 19% to 50% of their total daily calories at school.⁹ Many of these children eat meals and snacks prepared by the school; 62% of students nationally receive free lunches from the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and another 8 % of students receive reduced-priced meals through NSLP.¹⁰

While federal and state laws require that school meals meet certain nutritional guidelines, there are still many improvements that can be made to both school meals and other food available on school property, including snacks, vending machines, concession stands, and classroom parties. Improving the school food environment can help children adopt healthy habits that will enable them to live healthy, long lives.

B. Overview of the Report

This report is organized in three sections. Section II describes how federal, state, and local laws impact school foods. Section III provides an overview of demographics in Montgomery County and Winston County schools that could be helpful for the coalitions as they advocate for school food improvements. Section IV covers five policy areas in which advocates can improve school food policy. These include:

- 1. Improving the Nutritional Quality of School Meals and Snacks**
- 2. Changing the Cafeteria Environment to Promote Healthy Eating**
- 3. Offering More Health and Nutrition Education**
- 4. Expanding Access to Free and Reduced Price School Meals**
- 5. Creating Farm to School Programs**

II. CURRENT POLICIES ON SCHOOL FOOD

In order to improve school food policies, it is helpful for advocates to understand how federal, state, and local laws regulate school foods. School food service directors must meet complex nutrition standards and serve a certain amount of meals while working under an extremely tight budget, and advocates should understand these requirements and identify where schools have flexibility to innovate or improve their food offerings. Mississippi public schools have to meet the standards laid out by the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) and Mississippi's Healthy Schools Act (HSA). The state also leaves certain powers to its localities, so some policies may vary between districts or counties. This section describes each of these layers of school food policy in turn.

A. Federal Level

The federal government began regulating school foods in 1946 when it passed the National School Lunch Act. The Act declared that childhood nutrition is an issue of national security, and that states should therefore receive guidelines and funding from the national government to nourish the nation's children.¹¹ Today, the main piece of federal legislation on school foods is the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, which is reauthorized every 5 years.¹² The last reauthorization occurred in 2010 and was called the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA).¹³ The next reauthorization will be in 2015.¹⁴

The HHFKA requires that public schools follow certain nutrition standards in order to receive federal funding for school meals. The HHFKA funds both the National School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which provide free and reduced-priced meals to children under certain income levels.¹⁵ Children are eligible for free meals if they come from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level.¹⁶ Children between 130 and 165% are eligible for reduced-priced meals. The SBP rates increase if a school qualifies as having "severe need."¹⁷ The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has discretion to determine what qualifies as "severe need," which they set based on how many students qualify for a free or reduced price lunch.¹⁸

For both meals, the HFFKA sets target levels for nutrition. Certain calorie, sodium, and fat amounts must be met,¹⁹ and schools must offer fruits, vegetables, meat/meat alternative, and grains in every meal.²⁰ These nutrition standards can be found in the Tables in Appendix B of this report. Under HFFKA, the USDA also enacted nutrition standards for competitive foods—those which are sold à la carte, through vending machines, or any other snack or beverage vendor—which went into effect in the 2014-2015 school year.²¹ These standards limit the caloric, fat, sodium, and sugar content of these foods. The USDA also advises (but does not require) that state departments of education limit fundraisers offering unhealthy foods.²²

School districts participating in SBP or NSLP are also required to form their own wellness policy under the direction of at least one local school official.²³ This policy must support the health goals of the SBP and NSLP through nutrition and physical education. Though this policy must remain open to input from community members, there are no federal guidelines or requirements for establishing a council or committee to implement the policy.

In addition to funding for the NSLP and SBP, the federal government provides other funding for schools to offer healthy foods to students. Schools and community members can pursue these federal funding opportunities to provide students with healthy foods throughout the year.

First, the **Federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** provides funding for community centers, schools, and other sites to provide breakfast, lunch, and snacks over the summer.²⁴ When school is out, many low-income students experience hunger because they do not have access to school meals.²⁵ In addition, children are at increased risk of obesity, with some children gaining weight two to three times faster than during the school year.²⁶ To respond to this need, SFSP sites are approved by the state, and can include non-profits, civic centers, and camps as well as “open” sites in areas that are easily accessible to children eligible for free or reduced-price meals.²⁷ Section IV(E)(2)(c) of this report includes more information about how to apply to be a SFSP site.

Second, the federal **Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program (FFVP)** provides state departments of education with additional funding to help high-need schools purchase fruits and vegetables.²⁸ Each school is given \$50-75 per student per school year.²⁹ Schools with the highest percentage of students receiving reduced-price and free meals are given priority to receive FFVP funding.³⁰ In Mississippi, this program is administered by the Mississippi Departments of Education.³¹ Section IV(E)(2)(a) includes more information about how to apply to receive funding through FFVP.

Third, the **Afterschool Snack Program** operates similarly to the National School Lunch Program. Public and private schools and childcare facilities can receive cash subsidies from the USDA for nutritious snacks that meet the federal nutrition standards, which include meeting two of the following components: “a serving of fluid milk; a serving of meat or meat alternate; a serving of vegetables or fruits or full strength vegetable or fruit juice; a serving of whole grain or enriched bread or cereal.”³² To learn more about the program and to help schools apply, advocates can visit the USDA Food and Nutrition Service Fact Sheet about the Program.³³

Finally, the **USDA Farm to School Grant Program** was established under HFFKA to change students’ relationship to their food and their community through introducing locally-grown food into school cafeterias, providing students with hands-on learning opportunities such as school gardens, farm field trips, and cooking classes, and integrating food education into the standard curriculum.³⁴ Section IV(F)(2)(b) of this report includes more information about what types of projects are eligible to receive USDA farm-to-school grant funding and how to apply.

B. State Level

In 2007, Mississippi passed the Healthy Students Act (HSA), which set more stringent standards than federal regulations at that time. The HSA enacted requirements and guidelines for nutrition, food preparation, food marketing.³⁵ Like the HHKFA, the HSA requires that schools provide students with at least one fresh fruit or vegetable every day.³⁶ School menus must offer a minimum of three different fruits and five different vegetables a week, and are encouraged to serve “dark leafy green vegetables or broccoli and/or orange vegetables (high in vitamin A) or fruits three times per week.”³⁷ For competitive foods, HSA limited the calories, fat, and sugar that these products could contain.³⁸ However, compliance with these standards was only 20-60% for the 2011-2012 school year.³⁹ Given these low rates of compliance, advocates can play a key role in ensuring that schools are complying with existing laws.

The HSA also regulates some aspects of how schools prepare food. For example, schools must develop a long-term plan to replace fryers with combi-oven/steamers as budgets allow.⁴⁰ HSA also provides marketing strategies and resources to encourage students to eat the healthier food, such as tasting parties, line sampling, and line promotion.⁴¹ The Mississippi Office of Healthy Schools recognized that students are more likely to eat the healthier food if they see it being promoted by their peers and role models, so HSA regulations require a Whole School Approach, in which administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents be solicited to be part of new wellness programs’ implementation.⁴² These regulations also require that children have a minimum of 24 minutes for school lunch and recommends at least 10 minutes for breakfast after a student has received his meal.⁴³ Finally, the Office of Healthy Schools offers training tools for school staff such as Marketing Sense, a best practices guidebook for food service administrators.⁴⁴

Notably, HSA went above federal school foods standards by mandating that local school boards establish local school health councils for each school to strengthen and implement the school wellness policy.⁴⁵ These boards must have one member from a wide range of groups, including students, teachers, law enforcement, senior citizens, clergy, nonprofit health organizations, faith-based organizations, and the business community. In addition to ensuring compliance with nutrition standards, the council can recommend how many hours should be spent on nutrition and health education, what types of foods should be offered through fundraisers and at school events, and many other policies.⁴⁶ To get ideas of what a school health council could add to a wellness policy, we have included a model school wellness policy in Appendix A of this report.

C. Local Level

The HSA gives local governments and school districts authority to go above the state standards in several areas. School districts are free to strengthen their school wellness policies through increased physical and health education programming, and more stringent nutrition standards than those provided in the HHKFA and the HSA. Local authorities can also work to ensure that schools are fully complying with both federal and state laws on school foods. Local authorities are only limited in that their policies may not conflict with federal or state laws.⁴⁷

III. SCHOOLS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY AND WINSTON COUNTY, MS

As mentioned above, a large number of students in Montgomery and Winston Counties receive free and reduced-price school meals. Winston County schools are part of the Louisville Municipal School District.

This District includes seven schools with a total of about 3,000 students.⁴⁸ In the 2010-2011 school year, 76% of students in the District qualified to receive free meals, and 8% receive reduced price meals.⁴⁹ Montgomery County includes two smaller school districts. Winona School District has three schools with around 1,200 students.⁵⁰ 67% of those students qualify for free meals, and 8% for reduced meals.⁵¹ Montgomery County School District includes two schools with about 300 students.⁵² 91% of students in the District qualify for free meals, and 4% for reduced meals.⁵³ These numbers are significant as they inform advocates how many students school food policy would affect, and how many students receive reimbursable meals. Smaller school districts will have fewer resources, but might be able to be more flexible in trying out new, innovative approaches to school meals.

Both counties have implemented policies to improve school food within their respective school districts. For example, Winston County has worked to build school gardens and to incorporate the gardens into the school curriculum.⁵⁴ In Montgomery County, a community member successfully piloted a Summer Food Service Program, which expanded access to nutritious food to children through the summer months.⁵⁵ To build upon these efforts, advocates in both counties can identify ways to further improve school foods in their communities using some of the strategies described below.

Winston County Profile	
Winston County ⁵⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27% below the poverty level • 48% minority
Louisville Municipal School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven schools:⁵⁷ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fair Elementary School (673 students) ○ Louisville Elementary School (465 students) ○ Eiland Middle School (250 students) ○ Louisville High School⁵⁸ (483 students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 70.9% below poverty level ▪ 81% minority students ○ Nanih Waiya Attendance Center (469 students) ○ Noxapater Attendance Center (391 students) ○ Winston Louisville Vocational Center • In 2010- 2011:⁵⁹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 76% of students had free meals ○ 8% of students had reduced meals

Montgomery County Profile	
Montgomery County ⁶⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23% of the county is under 18 • 32% below the poverty level • 47% minority
Winona School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three schools:⁶¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Winona Elementary School (711 students) ○ Winona Secondary School⁶² (467 students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 56% below poverty level ▪ 55% minority students ○ Winona Vocational Complex • In 2010 – 2011:⁶³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 67% of students had free meals ○ 8% of students had reduced meals

<p>Montgomery County School District</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two schools:⁶⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Montgomery County Elementary School (165 students) ○ Montgomery County High School (157 students) • In 2010 – 2011:⁶⁵ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 91% of students had free meals ○ 4% of students had reduced meals
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IV. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL FOOD POLICIES

A. Introduction

Advocates can advocate for changes in school food policies in several ways. First, they can ensure that schools are following federal and state laws on nutrition standards, physical activity, and other policies that promote healthy school environments. Second, they can encourage local policymakers and school districts to create new policies to improve school foods. Third, advocates can educate policymakers and school districts by providing examples of how other school districts in Mississippi and other states have improved school foods. Fourth, advocates can help school districts identify financial and community resources for implementing policy changes.

The following sections provide information to help advocates meet each of these goals. They describe five general areas for improving school foods, and give specific examples of how other schools in Mississippi and other states have enacted policies to improve school foods in each area. Each section also provides information about financial, educational, and community resources to help them implement policy changes within their community. Additional resources can be found in Appendix C.

1. Note on School Wellness Policies and School Health Councils

Before diving into each of these policy areas, it is important to note that many of these policies can be included in a school wellness plan and implemented by a school health council. Schools that receive federal funding must create a school wellness plan. In 2010, the HHFKA strengthened the local school wellness plan requirement by providing minimum standards for what a school wellness policy must include, such as specific plans for nutrition education, physical education, and school nutrition guidelines.⁶⁶ According to these regulations, wellness policies must be reviewed by the community and must include an implementation plan that meets new assessment standards.⁶⁷

In Mississippi, the HSA requires that school districts establish local school health councils to create and implement school wellness plans.⁶⁸ As a result of this law, 92% of schools in Mississippi have a school health council compared to 57% among other states.⁶⁹ However that means 8% of Mississippi schools are not following the state law. And among the 91% of schools with councils, only 18% of school councils have representatives from administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents.⁷⁰ Advocates should determine whether schools in Winston and Montgomery Counties have active school health councils with broad representation. If they do not exist, advocates should push for them to be created. If they do exist, advocates should see if there are ways the council or the wellness plan can be strengthened (see the model school wellness policy in Appendix A).

B. Enforcing and Improving Nutrition Standards

1. Overview

Schools must meet nutrition standards required by federal and state laws, and are allowed to impose nutrition standards that are higher than these requirements. This means that advocates can work with schools to both ensure these standards are being met and improve upon them. Notably, there are two main categories of food available in schools that each must meet different nutrition standards.

Reimbursable meals are food items for which the school can be reimbursed by the federal or state government, such as SBP and NSLP meals. **Competitive food** is anything sold in competition with reimbursable meals. The school does not get reimbursed for these meals, and thus students or parents pay full price for these foods. This includes food sold in cafeterias outside of reimbursable meals such as pizza or chips (“a la carte”), or food sold in vending machines or at fundraisers. There are less stringent federal and state nutrition standards for competitive foods than for reimbursable meals.

This section discusses three strategies to ensure that schools meet federal and state nutrition standards, and to encourage them to exceed these standards in some cases. While there are many other ways to improve the nutritional quality of school foods, this report focuses on these three strategies because they can be low/no cost and effective at improving the school food environment.

2. Best Practices

(a) Helping Schools Fund Healthy Foods

Advocates can assist schools in applying for federal funding for healthy food through the four programs listed in Section II: (1) the Federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), (2) the Federal Summer Food Services Program (SFSP), (3) the Afterschool Snack Program, and (4) the USDA Farm-to-School Program. This section describes the FFVP and Afterschool Snack Program. The SFSP is described in detail in Section IV(E)(2)(c); the USDA Farm-to-School Program is described in detail in Section IV(F)(2)(b).

Under the FFVP, elementary schools may receive \$50-\$75 per student through the school year.⁷¹ In Mississippi, the Department of Education (MDE) decides the per-student amount for the selected schools each year based on the number of participating schools and the total amount of funding available. Each year, the MDE solicits applications from elementary schools with the highest need. Each school must submit an application that includes:⁷²

- The total number of students and the percentage eligible for free or reduced meals;
- A certification of support for participating in the program signed by the food service manager, school principal, and district superintendent; and
- A program implementation plan with how the program will integrate with other healthy nutrition activities.

In Mississippi schools where the FFVP was piloted, the program was well received. The produce was usually distributed during the morning break, and schools reported that students tried new fruits and vegetables, and teachers supported the program.⁷³ Advocates should start by asking schools if they are currently receiving any of the funding sources described above. If not, advocates can help the school apply by assisting with forms and bringing together key players, such as the school food service manager, school principal, and superintendent (who must sign a certification of support for the FFVP). The USDA explicitly encourages schools “to develop partnerships with one or more entities that will

provide non-Federal resources,” so advocates can also help to connect schools with other possible funders.⁷⁴

(b) Increasing Student and Staff Engagement to Improve School Meals

Schools can work to improve their school meal offerings and increase meal participation at the same time. A good place to start is by gathering information through a “Quality Score Card” designed by the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) at the University of Mississippi.⁷⁵ School food service staff can fill out these score cards when they receive food shipments and prepare the food for meals. These cards measure several factors, such as Distance Shipped, Appearance, Texture, Consistency, and Flavor.⁷⁶ Food service staff can use these cards to better understand where they are having trouble with the quality of their meals. Students can fill out different versions of the Score Card to “grade” the food based on how much they liked it, thereby allowing schools to better understand student preferences. NFSMI has created a five-step guide to healthier meals that includes model quality scorecards.⁷⁷ In addition to these scorecards, NFSMI has step-by-step guidelines for school food professionals working to create healthier meals for students.⁷⁸

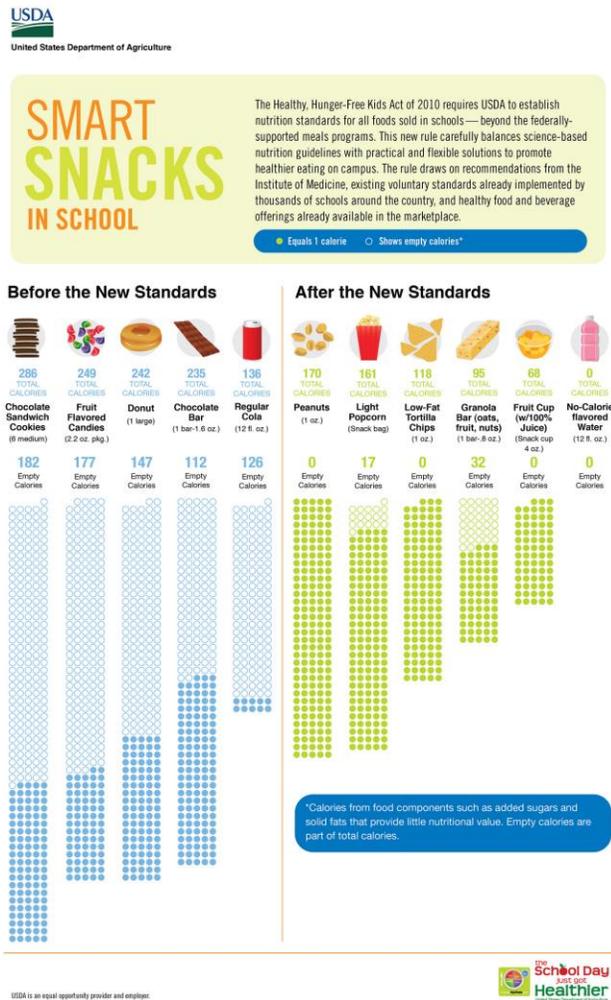
Advocates can introduce these resources to schools. They could also offer to help school implement the scorecards and to help analyze the results of the scorecards.

(c) Improving Competitive Foods

(i) During the School Day

Schools can create their own nutrition standards for competitive foods that go above federal and state standards. Advocates can push for more healthful standards by showcasing research and examples of successful initiatives, such as those collected by the USDA.⁷⁹ At the Austin Independent School District in Austin, Texas, the superintendent enacted strict nutrition standards for food sold in school vending machines.⁸⁰ The vendor replaced the old snack options with healthier options selected by the District principals.⁸¹

Related, schools can limit the à la carte section of the cafeteria to only healthy items. For example, West Lake Middle School in Thornton, Colorado ran a focus group with students to determine their preferences, replaced unhealthy à la carte items with healthy items based on those preferences (such as replacing potato chips with whole grain crackers), and required the purchase of an entrée in order to buy an à la carte item.⁸² While some schools



USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s new standards for competitive foods restrict the sale of some unhealthy items in schools.

might be concerned that this switch might lead to decreased revenue for the school, the Thornton school found that à la carte sales increased in both the first and second years after the launch of the program.⁸³

Schools can also offer a healthier variety of drinks for children. The HHFKA prohibits schools from selling regular (full-calorie) sodas in schools, but still allows for some sugary beverages, such as flavored milk and fruit juice.⁸⁴ High schools are allowed to offer low-calorie sugary beverages to students as well, such as sports drinks and flavored waters.⁸⁵ Sugary drinks, even if they have some nutritional value, still get children used to drinking sweet drinks, and contribute to weight gain and development of diabetes.⁸⁶ Even sugar substitutes, like those found in diet sodas (allowed in high schools) can lead the body to crave sugar later in the day.⁸⁷ Schools should focus on increasing access to water both in the cafeteria and throughout the school day, and take all sugary beverages out of schools.⁸⁸ Advocates can encourage schools to discontinue offering sugary beverages and increase access to water.⁸⁹

Success Stories	
Perry School District, Alabama	The school district replaced all unhealthy competitive foods with healthy items. They extended their new competitive food nutrition standards to classroom celebrations. Parents can now send in healthy snacks for celebrations, but no birthday cake. While parents were initially resistant, the school did extensive community engagement to get the parents on board with improving children’s health. ⁹⁰
Plattsmouth High School, Nebraska	The high school started a fruit cart, which offers fresh fruit at affordable prices. It also revamped every venue selling snacks and beverages, including vending machines, the school store, snack cart, and cafeteria à la carte line to offer only healthy products. ⁹¹
Middle School in Whitefish, Montana	The Parent Teacher Association of Central Middle School purchased a vending machine for the school. It stocked the vending machine with milk, yogurt, pudding, string cheese, beef jerky, baked chips, and fruit. ⁹²

(ii) Outside of School Hours

While concession stands have traditionally focused on generating funds rather than providing nutritious foods, concessions present an opportunity to improve student wellness while continuing to generate revenue for the school. Muscatine High School in Muscatine, Iowa, for example, instituted a program in 2009 to introduce healthier foods in their concession stands during football games, volleyball games, and swim meets.⁹³ Instead of replacing their entire concession menu, they incorporated new healthful foods into the existing menu.⁹⁴ They started with apples, carrots, grilled chicken sandwiches, pickles, soft pretzels with no added salt, string cheese, and trail mix without candy.⁹⁵ They also substituted the oils and cheese used in some of the traditional menu items, such as nachos, for varieties that did not have trans fats.⁹⁶ Rather than a decrease in sales, Muscatine actually saw their concession profits for these events increase by 4% in one year, with most new sales coming from the new healthier foods.⁹⁷ Patrons also reported no difference in the taste of the better oils and cheese. In fact, the food items using these ingredients (e.g. nachos, popcorn) saw a 7.6 % increase in sales.⁹⁸

Muscatine found that gradual transitions were important; they successfully introduced five new healthful items that resembled more traditional items. Trail mix without candy, for example, can be an easy trade for sugary trail mix. As sales of the healthier items increase, the traditional items can slowly be phased out or replaced with healthier or smaller versions. Concession stands can offer “Fun Sized” rather than “King Sized” candy, or can modify ingredients by improving the types of oil or toppings.

Many schools are also reconsidering traditional fundraisers, which often sell unhealthy foods and beverages such as chocolate bars and flavored popcorn. One study found that completely eliminating unhealthy fundraisers is associated with a 10 % drop in students' body mass indexes (BMI).⁹⁹ Unhealthy fundraisers can negate the benefits of healthy school meals, and pressure parents and community members to purchase unhealthy foods to support their local schools. It also reinforces the message to children that unhealthy foods are desirable rewards. In contrast, healthy food or non-food fundraisers allow schools to send consistent, positive health messages and reinforce messages about healthy eating within the community. For example, Cooleemee Elementary in North Carolina hosted a scavenger hunt for kids, with hidden fruits, vegetables, and other healthy snacks.¹⁰⁰ The scavenger hunt was part of the school's year-long wellness plan and part of its health education month.¹⁰¹

Non-food fundraisers, which do not use food as the revenue-raising item, have also proven successful. The wellness council at Long Mill Elementary School in North Carolina hosted a talent show called "An Evening FITT for the Stars" to raise funds to build a community walking trail.¹⁰² Students and staff participated by singing, playing instruments, dancing, and stepping. The show sold out with a \$2 entry fee, and the school was able to raise over \$800 through the event.¹⁰³ This event directly encouraged healthy habits using fun physical activities, rather than unhealthy foods, to raise money for the school.

Advocates can assist in the implementation of a healthy concession or fundraising pilot. They can coordinate directly with school organizations to inform students and faculty about the viability of healthier alternatives. For more healthy fundraising ideas, see the online resources in Appendix B.

C. Changing the Cafeteria Environment

1. Overview

The cafeteria environment plays an important role in healthy eating at school. While the quality and variety of food is critical, creating a physical space that promotes healthy eating can make kids more likely to try new foods and adapt to healthier menus. By altering food presentation, location, and the time allocated for eating, students can be "nudged" to make healthier choices. Small changes in lunch room seating and organization can also make the cafeteria a welcoming, health-promoting environment.

2. Best Practices

(a) Reorganizing the Cafeteria Layout

There are a variety of steps that schools can take to make healthier foods more appealing to students. First, changing the way food is presented can affect what students eat. The "first sight" theory finds that students are more drawn to food that they see first and can access most easily.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, schools should make fruit and vegetables one of the first items students can put on their trays (and if there are less healthy à la carte items, offer those last.) Schools can also work to make healthier food more appealing. The USDA "Meal Appeal" guide recommends having taste tests of healthy foods, highlighting seasonal food, and stimulating appetite by serving foods of various textures and temperatures.¹⁰⁵ One study found that when vegetables were given exciting names, such as "broccoli bites" and "x-ray vision carrots", students were 27% more likely to choose them.¹⁰⁶

Notably, allowing students to sample healthier foods while waiting in line can also increase consumption of these foods. For example, if a cafeteria is phasing out white bread for whole wheat bread, giving students samples of the whole wheat bread while they are in line will make them more comfortable

Case Study 2.1. Scottsdale, AZ

North Ranch Elementary Schedules Recess before Lunch

Strategy: The school rescheduled its recess to be prior to lunch rather than afterwards.

Outcome: Students ate more healthy foods, produced less waste, visited the nurse less often, and cut down transition time into class by 15 minutes.

Key Takeaway: Changing recess time can increase consumption of healthier foods without adding time or cost to the schedule.

Source: Tara Parker-Rope, *Play, Then Eat: Shift May Bring Gains at School*, N.Y. Times (Jan. 26, 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/26/health/26well.html>.

with the new product when they order. In a pilot program, Siwell Middle School in Jackson County, MS found that students provided with healthy samples selected healthier foods more and wasted less.¹⁰⁷

The tables, plates, and food disposal available also impact the amount of food eaten and wasted. Tables should be laid out in a manner that prevents congestion and allows students more personal space while eating, which can decrease stress while increasing awareness of satiety.¹⁰⁸ Adjusting the sizes of the plates for students based on their age can greatly decrease food waste in addition to preventing children from over-consuming food.¹⁰⁹ Lastly, teachers can set up a “for-later” basket where students place healthy items like whole fruit and vegetables that they do not want to eat at lunch. Teachers can then use those items as classroom snacks and prizes when they students are hungry again in the afternoon.¹¹⁰ Decreasing food waste reduces the amount of funds spent on food that is never eaten, and helps make cafeterias more financially efficient.

(b) Timing and Length of Mealtimes

Schools should also consider the time of day and length of meal times. When possible, recess should be scheduled before lunch. When students can be physically active prior to meal time, they tend to eat more fruits and vegetables, drink more milk, waste less food, and be better-behaved in the cafeteria.¹¹¹ After adopting this kind of schedule, North Ranch Elementary in Scottsdale, Arizona found that they not only achieved the above benefits, but also found a 40% decrease in nurse visits, largely because of a drop in headaches and stomachaches which occurred when students ran around after eating.¹¹²

Increasing the length of mealtime can also promote a healthier eating environment. Short meal periods contribute to student stress, increasing their likelihood to choose less healthy foods and to over-consume since they are in a rush.¹¹³ Additionally, eating quickly on a regular basis has been linked to an increased risk for obesity and diabetes.¹¹⁴ When students are given more time to eat, they are more inclined to listen to natural feelings of satiety and are more willing to try new and different foods.¹¹⁵ Mississippi law requires 24 minutes for lunch, which is among the highest mandatory time in the nation, surpassed only by New Mexico and D.C. (30 minutes).¹¹⁶ Mississippi schools can consider going above the state requirement and allowing children 30 minutes for mealtime.

(c) Equipment Improvement

While equipment is vital in the preparation and presentation of healthy foods to students, it can sometimes be challenging to afford the necessary equipment to make these changes. While from-scratch cooking can save costs, since whole foods like raw chicken will be cheaper than processed foods like chicken nuggets, this type of cooking requires an investment in equipment and labor. Schools on a tight budget often cannot afford ovens, preparation appliances, and display cases that make healthy food taste delicious and look appealing.

Preparation equipment can also be key to serving more healthy foods. For example, removing deep fryers and replacing them with oven steamers would enable school food service staff to prepare healthier meals. Schools in Gulfport County, Mississippi have begun phasing out their fryers and the student body has been just as accepting of the oven-steamed food as they were the fried options.¹¹⁷ Winston County has successfully phased out fryers as well.¹¹⁸ Another piece of equipment that can help schools serve more fresh food is a produce washer. These appliances help school service staff wash potatoes, lettuce, and other produce that is otherwise labor-intensive to wash by hand.¹¹⁹ Advocates can help schools fundraise for this type of equipment or other appliances that school staff believe would make it less expensive and time-intensive to prepare healthy foods.

One helpful source of funding is the Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools Program, inspired by Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign, which donated 2,800 salad bars to schools in 49 states between 2010-2014.¹²⁰ 57% of schools "saw an increase in student participation in the school lunch program" after they received salad bars.¹²¹ The Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools website has extensive information about the benefits of salad bars and the application process.¹²² It also includes an advocacy toolkit for parents to ask schools to apply for a salad bar.¹²³ For schools that have salad bars, improving or installing salad bar lighting helps showcase the varieties of vegetables as well as their colors and textures, which makes students more likely to take the food.¹²⁴

D. Health and Nutrition Education

1. Overview

Health and nutrition education for students, teachers, school staff, and families can promote healthy eating habits during and after the school day.¹²⁵ Health and nutrition curriculums should both reflect best practices from other school districts, and also reflect the unique food cultures and habits of each school's community. Local advocates can provide schools with health and nutrition education resources and rally community leaders to spread these health messages to the wider community.

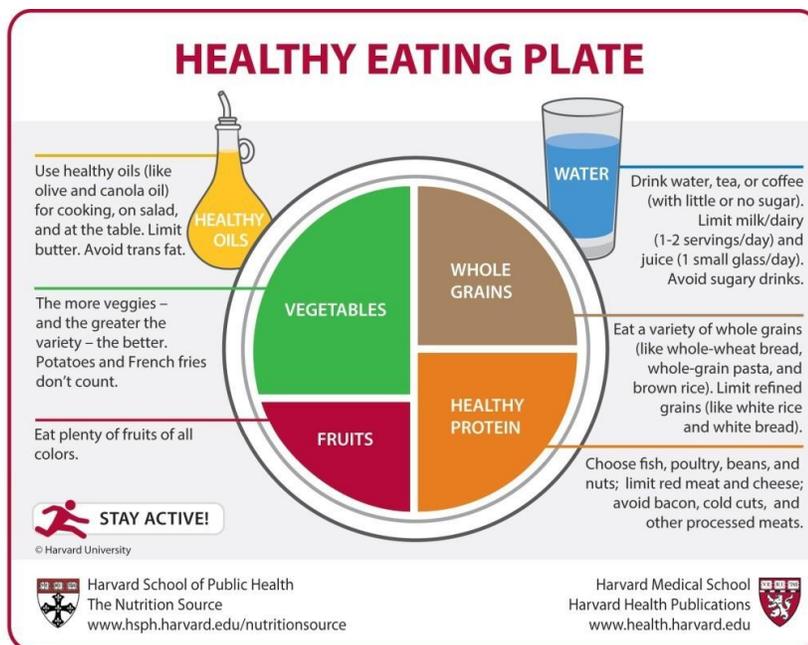
School nutrition educators should engage teachers and school food service staff in health and nutrition education initiatives, as their attitudes can either support or hinder the success of an initiative.¹²⁶ If teachers and staff can be encouraged to model healthy eating and praise children for choosing healthy options, this can significantly contribute to the success of a program.

Community members, such as church leaders, farmers, and local business coalitions can also play important roles.¹²⁷ In particular, organizations such as diabetes coalitions that are already leading health and nutrition education initiatives in the community may be able to offer their expertise to a school-based program. Other possibilities for community involvement include: local businesses providing healthy rewards to classrooms that win contests, caterers or restaurant chefs providing cooking classes,

and local universities providing nutrition classes.¹²⁸

Getting students engaged and excited can be one of the central challenges of a new program.¹²⁹ For example, some programs have offered contests and competitions to incentivize changes in student behavior.¹³⁰ Cooking classes and gardens can help students to explore new tastes while learning about how to choose and prepare healthy foods. Simple,

visually-appealing nutrition guides can be made widely available through posters at the point-of-purchase, and also through tools like the Harvard Healthy Eating Plate, their suggested amended version of USDA's MyPlate.¹³¹



The Harvard School of Public Health's Healthy Eating Plate, a revised version of the USDA's MyPlate, gives detailed recommendations for a healthy diet.

The following section will detail examples of school health and nutrition education initiatives, including how schools incorporated these initiatives within their curricula and how they worked with community leaders to generate support for the program.

2. Best Practices

(a) Incorporating School Gardens into Nutrition Education

School gardens can be a powerful component of an overall nutrition education program. Students active in school gardens eat a greater variety of vegetables, are more willing to try new vegetables, and consume more vegetables at school.¹³² Furthermore, school nutrition classes that incorporate garden education are more successful in altering eating habits than nutrition classes alone.¹³³

There are several common hurdles to starting a school garden program. In a 2005 survey of California teachers, the greatest challenges were lack of time (88%) and a lack of sufficient curricular materials linked to educational standards (74%).¹³⁴ For those without gardens, the greatest barrier was a lack of funding (60%).¹³⁵ Therefore, it is important that schools be connected with resources for funding and curricular materials. The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) offers a grant program called Growing Lunch specifically for developing school gardens.¹³⁶ Through Growing Lunch, public schools can receive a grant up to \$500 to develop a school garden.¹³⁷ Furthermore, to avoid placing too great a burden on teachers, community members could help teachers maintain the garden. Alternatively, community centers or churches near schools could build a garden that the students and teachers can access.

FoodCorps is an organization of young volunteers that are dedicated to helping schools start and

Case Study 3.1. Oxford, MS Good Food for Oxford Schools (GFOS)

Strategy: GFOS combines school gardens and locally-produced food with classroom lessons at elementary, middle, and high schools in Oxford. The program started in 2008 with funding from the Ole Miss Department of Nutrition and Hospitality Management and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to improve cafeteria menus while educating students about food.

Outcome: The program currently maintains four active gardens with three more in the works. The Oxford school menu is now 75% cooked-from-scratch, with local food offered whenever possible.

Key Takeaway: GFOS offers a model of sustainable program growth, as they experiment and build upon their successes in schools. GFOS has received support from Let's Move Salad Bars and USDA, demonstrating how Mississippi can leverage national resources to improve school foods.

Source: *UM Grant Puts Gardens in Oxford Schools*, OLE MISS: UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI NEWS (Oct. 8, 2014), available at <http://news.olemiss.edu/um-grant-puts-gardens-in-oxford-schools/#.VGoEm76yglJ>; *Good Food for Oxford Schools: Bringing Healthier Food to Oxford Cafeterias*, VOLUNTEER OXFORD, <http://volunteeroxford.org/2013/10/good-food-for-oxford-schools-bringing-healthier-food-to-oxford-cafeterias/> (last visited Nov. 17, 2014).



maintain school gardens as an educational resource. Hosted by community organizations around the state, FoodCorps members work to teach and connect children with healthy and fresh food, focusing on creating school gardens to be used as teaching platforms.¹³⁸ As of 2014, FoodCorps Mississippi members have created 18 school gardens in Biloxi, Greenwood, Jackson, Louisville, Petal, and Shelby counties.¹³⁹ School districts interested in bringing on a FoodCorps member for a Farm-to-School or school garden project should visit the FoodCorps Mississippi website¹⁴⁰ and submit a request during the application cycle.

(b) Teaching through Cooking Classes

Cooking classes can be effective tools to educate students and their families about health and nutrition.¹⁴¹ Classes can be as simple as cutting different foods into bite-size pieces and having the students conduct taste tests. Classes can also be targeted at adults, such as school food service staff and parents, to teach them how to prepare healthy meals for children both at school and at home.

Cooking Matters, a program designed by the non-profit Share Our Strength, is an example of an effective cooking-based nutrition education program. *Cooking Matters* teams up with local partners around the country to offer courses, instructional materials, and supplies to teach participants to cook healthy and affordable meals.¹⁴² Given that *Cooking Matters* already provides the necessary materials, evaluation measures, and curricula aimed at both adults and children, it is a great resource for educational programs at schools.¹⁴³ A school may develop a partnership with *Cooking Matters* to offer six-week cooking courses for students and/or parents and school staff.¹⁴⁴ A spin-off of *Cooking Matters*, *Shopping Matters* is a one-hour grocery store tour designed to teach participants how to shop for healthy foods on a low budget.¹⁴⁵ Anyone with a background or strong interest in food preparation or health education can lead a *Shopping Matters* course with resources from Share Our Strength.¹⁴⁶ *Shopping Matters* classes are geared towards adults, and could be targeted to parents or school staff. Information on starting either of these programs is available through the Share our Strength website, which is also a good resource of information on how to shop for and make inexpensive and healthy meals.¹⁴⁷

Case Study 3.2. Jackson, MS

Martin East Elementary Successfully Incorporates Food Staff Outreach Programs

Strategy: Cafeteria workers were offered a seminar about the health benefits of food items being offered in the cafeteria as well as provided with recipes to use those foods in their own home.

Outcome: Staff more freely suggested healthy items to students who in turn selected more of these items.

Key Takeaway: Wellness programs for staff can be beneficial to students as well.

Source: St. Martin Elementary, *Local School Wellness Policy 8* (2012), http://www.jcsd.k12.ms.us/smee/wellness_policy.html; Telephone Interview with Carla Meadows, Jackson School District (Nov. 12, 2014) (speaking about additional details of the wellness policy) (notes on file with authors).

Additionally, cooking classes offer a way to utilize some of the produce from school gardens. While the size of school gardens limits the amount of produce that they will grow, students may find the process of growing food more rewarding when they are able to eat the food. Teachers can coordinate taste tests of the garden produce in the classroom, or engage students in chopping/washing vegetables for snacks.

Case Study 3.3. Los Angeles, CA Seed to Table Program

Strategy: Based in Los Angeles, the Seed to Table Program focuses on health and nutrition education for K-5 children.¹ The program incorporates over 120 lesson plans that pair state and common core standards into garden-based activities. The garden produce is used for tasting lessons and cooking demonstrations.

Outcome: Since inception, the program has partnered with Santa Monica farmers to fund the program. More than 1,100 students have been introduced to fresh produce and farmer's markets through the program.

Key Takeaway: The program demonstrates that students benefit from hands-on engagement with food, where they participate in the entire process of producing and consuming food.

Source: *Seed to Table Program*, GARDEN SCHOOL FOUNDATION,
<http://www.gardenschoolfoundation.org/seedtotable> (last visited Nov. 17, 2014).



To ensure good food safety practices, schools can refer to USDA's recommended growing practices for school gardens that are growing food for school meals/snacks.¹⁴⁸

E. School Meal Access

1. Overview

Low-income children face several barriers to accessing free or reduced-cost school meals. For many, their schools are not accessing all of the resources available to them to feed their students. While the NSLP and SBP are intended to provide reimbursements so that low-income children can receive free or reduced-price meals,¹⁴⁹ participation rates for the programs can vary widely and not all eligible students are being served. For example, in Mississippi in the 2011–2012 school year, while over 317,000¹⁵⁰ of the state's 486,000 K-12 students¹⁵¹ received free or reduced-price school lunch through the NLSP, less than 60 % of those students received breakfast through the SBP.¹⁵² And while 933 Mississippi schools participated in the NLSP, only 874 participated in the SBP.¹⁵³ Thus many low-income children are not receiving the free or low-cost nutritious breakfast they are eligible for. Similarly, while 53 Mississippi school districts qualify for the Community Eligibility Program (CEP), a new USDA program¹⁵⁴ that enables

school-wide free meals, only 38 have enrolled in the program.¹⁵⁵ Finally, only 6.7% of the students who receive free or reduced-price lunches in Mississippi receive nutritious food during the summer through the SFSP, placing Mississippi's summer participation rate second-to-last among the 50 states.¹⁵⁶ This section will describe several strategies for increasing access to healthy foods in schools and during the summer.

2. Best Practices

(a) Moving Towards Universally Free School Meals

Schools should consider moving towards universal free school meals. For children with low-income parents who may be working several jobs, the application process for reduced price or free meals—with its income verification forms and other paperwork—can be a major obstacle to meal access.¹⁵⁷ Also, in schools where only low-income students get free meals, students face social stigma that discourages them from taking the meal.¹⁵⁸ However, under a new USDA program called the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), if 40 % or more of a school's student population are "identified" as being enrolled in a number of government programs—including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Head Start attendance, or homelessness—the school can receive reimbursement for universal free meals.¹⁵⁹

Unlike the NSLP application, which individual families must fill out every year, schools only submit the CEP application once every four years, which significantly decreases administrative work for school staff.¹⁶⁰ One challenge with CEP is that for schools with a high percentage of low-income children whose families are not identified, it seems possible that the school might get a lower reimbursement amount than under the NSLP.¹⁶¹ CEP reimburses schools for 1.6 times as many students are identified, so a school with 50% of identified students will receive reimbursement for 80% of student meals.¹⁶² For a school with 90% of students enrolled for free lunch under NSLP, but only 50% identified under CEP standards, the school could end up receiving less reimbursement.

Unfortunately, Mississippi is one of the leading states with citizens eligible for SNAP but not enrolled,¹⁶³ so schools should first check the number of identified students to see if they will lose money by signing up for CEP. That being said, the decrease in administrative work for the school, and the increase in well-nourished children, could still yield long-term benefits for the school even if they lose some money in the short term. The USDA and Mississippi Department of Education provide resources and worksheets on their websites for determining whether to apply for CEP.¹⁶⁴ Advocates can help school administrators determine whether CEP would be a good option for the district.

Public officials can also be trained to further simplify the benefits system for the families of students through direct certification. Direct certification allows families to automatically receive free or reduced-price school meals when they are approved to receive other benefits such as SNAP.¹⁶⁵ This presents several advantages: less paper moving between families and schools, fewer resources required to send and receive it, and more eligible children getting a free meal at school. Advocates can push for this process to be implemented by local government social services agencies.

CEP is one version of universal free meals, but states and localities can create their own universal free meal programs as well. West Virginia, Washington D.C., and Texas have made bold steps towards this goal.¹⁶⁶ The Feed to Achieve Act, passed in West Virginia in 2013, requires that schools provide universal free meals to students, use innovative strategies to increase school meal participation, and create a fund that solicits donations to help support free universal school meals.¹⁶⁷ In D.C. in 2005, the City Council

voted to create universal free breakfast.¹⁶⁸ School breakfast participation soared 32% among low-income children and the District now has the highest school breakfast participation rate in the country.¹⁶⁹ While these are state-wide policies, universal free school meal programs and direct certification could be implemented on the local level as well. Communities and schools can help bring about such changes by raising awareness with local officials about the benefits of increased school meal participation and the need to expand it to all students.

Case Study 4.2. Hamilton County, FL

In-Class Breakfast Success for Hamilton County Public Schools

Strategy: The elementary school served individually-wrapped items that were easy to open and eat for in-class breakfast. Each morning, school nutrition staff delivered breakfast to the classrooms in insulated carriers and placed the containers on a rolling cart to make transportation easier. Leftover items are placed outside of the classroom for school nutrition staff to pick up to ensure the class is not disturbed and instruction can begin on time.

Outcome: Participation in the school breakfast program increased from 40 to 90% and initially hesitant teachers became big advocates for the program.

Key Takeaway: Concerns about mess and decreased class time can be addressed with thoughtful innovations. The principal was a big advocate in getting the program started, which was key to the success.

Source: Spotlight on Success: Hamilton Public Schools, Florida School Breakfast Program, http://www.floridaschoolbreakfast.org/resources/2013-Success_HamiltonV2.pdf (last visited Jan. 29, 2015).

(b) Implementing Breakfast Innovations

Many school districts across the country are working to increase breakfast participation rates.¹⁷⁰ Serving breakfast to students in the classroom has been one successful innovation.¹⁷¹ In addition, some schools serve breakfast on the bus, some at the very beginning of the day, some wait until after the first period when the students have settled down, and others run a “Grab and Go” system in which students can quickly and easily pick up pre-packaged breakfasts from the cafeteria or food carts.¹⁷² For instance, a high school in Murfreesboro, Arkansas started a 15 minute period for breakfast after first period (also called “second-chance” breakfast), and saw a dramatic increase in participation.¹⁷³ Administrators attribute the success to decreased stigma and a better alignment with teenager’s sleep and hunger cycles.

Many schools have had success with an in-class breakfast program. In Memphis, Tennessee, schools have breakfast delivered to all students in all classrooms before the morning attendance.¹⁷⁴ Two concerns that schools have when implementing in-class breakfasts are that clean-up will be a burden on the teachers and that time will be taken away from class learning.¹⁷⁵ To address these concerns, schools can offer neat, portable food and extra breakfast-specific, in-class trashcans, such as those piloted at the Highlands County High School in Florida.¹⁷⁶ Public schools in Wisconsin also offer extra trashcans for

Case Study 4.3. Memphis, TN

Memphis City Schools Expands Breakfast in the Classroom

Strategy: All students were offered breakfast regardless of income. Food is delivered before a teacher takes attendance, and children can choose a hot item, like a sausage biscuit, or a cold item, such as yogurt and granola. The teachers check roll and explain their morning board while the children eat.

Outcome: Memphis increased breakfast participation by more than 3,000 students. Teachers say that students are more focused, and more children are on time for class so they can eat breakfast.

Key Takeaway: In-class school breakfast does not need to take away from teaching time and can help students with attendance and level of focus.

Source: *School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010—2011*, FOOD RESEARCH & ACTION CTR. 8 (Jan. 2012), http://frac.org/pdf/urban_school_breakfast_report_2012.pdf.

breakfast as a cheap, effective way to keep classrooms clean.¹⁷⁷ In Colorado, schools have students assist in cleanup.¹⁷⁸ Having someone on staff who's a strong advocate for the program can help to address staff concerns.¹⁷⁹ Community members can help gather information about other schools' best practices so that their local schools can implement a strong breakfast program.

In Houston, Texas, school officials designed a quick distribution system: when the morning bell rings, a cafeteria staff member hands out meals to students at the classroom door.¹⁸⁰ The city's breakfast participation rate rose 34%.¹⁸¹ Well-fed students are better students: in Houston, attendance rates improved,¹⁸² students who ate a school breakfast made significant test score gains across all grade levels, and well-fed middle school students performed 77% better in math scores than those who did not eat breakfast.¹⁸³ "Kids that are not hungry, they behave better, and there's no question that they also learn at a higher level," stated Dr. Terry Grier, Superintendent of Houston public schools.¹⁸⁴

(c) Providing Nutritious Meals in the Summer

Low-income students still need nutritious food once school closes for summer. The USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) provide federal reimbursements for nutritious meals distributed to low-income students at school or at other community sites during the summer.¹⁸⁵ The two programs differ mainly in who can administer them: while local government agencies, private non-profit organizations, universities or colleges, and community and faith-based organizations can administer SFSP, only a school food authority that is currently administering the NSLP can run SSO.¹⁸⁶

Any community member or organization can start an SFSP site.¹⁸⁷ The site can be a church, civic center, camp, or other location where children can easily stop by or where they already congregate.¹⁸⁸ After going through training about nutrition requirements, logistics, and reimbursement procedures, sponsors

can prepare and serve meals and get directly reimbursed. They also hire staff and keep track of spending. In Montgomery County, Sonya Stokes-Greenleaf from the Montgomery County Diabetes Coalition piloted a SFSP program in the summer of 2014 that was successful in the community.¹⁸⁹

There are many benefits to running a SFSP, such as increased revenue for the school or organization running the program. For example, in Oxford, Mississippi, organizers charged adults who came in with the children \$3 a meal.¹⁹⁰ This created revenue that could be spent on healthier food items in school meals during the school year.¹⁹¹ Since SFSP programs are on a smaller scale than the NSLP, organizers have more flexibility to experiment with purchasing local foods.¹⁹² This is also peak harvest season for some Mississippi produce, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, and watermelons.

The federal funding for the summer meals flows through the MS Department of Education, which also serves as a key supporter and certifier of the sites.¹⁹³ Interested community members can contact Lenora Phillips at MS Department of Education for more details.¹⁹⁴

F. Farm to School Programs

1. Overview

Farm to school has several benefits. It can strengthen the local economy, provide more fresh and healthy foods to students, and help schools meet federal and state nutritional guidelines. Farm to school programs can strengthen the local economy by keeping more public dollars within the community, supporting local farmers. Farm to school programs, such as one in Mound Bayou, MS facilitated by Delta Fresh Foods,¹⁹⁵ also increase the availability and attractiveness of fresh fruits and vegetables for students. There is evidence that students eat more fruits and vegetables “when the product is fresh, locally grown, picked at the peak of their flavor, and supplemented by educational activities.”¹⁹⁶ Finally, farm to school initiatives, with an emphasis on fresh, healthy produce can help schools abide by federal and state nutritional standards, such as serving a certain amount of orange and dark green vegetables each week (which coincide with Mississippi crops like sweet potatoes and greens).

Farm-to-school programs come in many different shapes and sizes; they can include one-time orders from a local farmer, asking the school’s distributor to purchase local produce, or developing a year-long contract with a farmer. The gold standard for farm to school programs are “farm-direct” purchases, where schools purchase a portion of their food directly from local farmers. This type of program keeps the most money within the local economy, and enables schools and students to develop relationships with farmers, including field trips, agriculture education, and other collaborations. Yet other farm-to-school programs, such as ordering local produce from distributors, can also significantly contribute to the local economy and teach students about where food comes from.

The primary hurdles for starting a farm-to-school program are finding suitable local farmers, staff resources, and equipment. Foodservice directors may need to train staff on handling uncut, unprepared produce, which can also take significantly more time to prepare for a meal.¹⁹⁷ Schools might also not have the necessary kitchen equipment to prepare foods from scratch, such as produce washers or large ovens. New equipment may help staff work more efficiently, but the equipment may be expensive to purchase. Further, farmers may lack knowledge about farm-to-school programs and school food directors may not know which farmers would be interested in partnering with them. The most commonly cited reason that Mississippi farmers do not sell to schools was the lack of relevant information on how to market to schools.¹⁹⁸ The following section aims to address each of these challenges.

Case Study 5.1. Vicksburg County, MS

Farm to School Program Starts Small, Grows to Regular Shipments

Strategy: Vicksburg County food service director Gail Kavanaugh began featuring local produce during Farm to School Week, then scaled up to create a contract with her distributor that stated he would provide her with locally grown produce whenever possible.

Outcome: Vicksburg schools receive regularly-scheduled shipments of Mississippi-grown produce to serve in school meals. Ms. Kavanaugh won the Local Food Warrior Award at the 2013 Mississippi Farm to Cafeteria Conference for her farm-to-school efforts.

Key Takeaway: School districts do not have to bear a large initial risk to engage in farm-to-school programs. Food service directors can work with their distributors to introduce small purchases locally-grown produce into meals, then scale up local deliveries as it suits their needs.

Source: Gail Kavanaugh, Vicksburg Warren School District Nutrition Director, Presentation at the Mississippi Food Policy Council October 2013 Meeting (Oct. 15, 2013), *available at* <http://mississippifoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com/minutes-and-reports/october-2013>.

2. Best Practices

(a) Schools Should Enact a Preference for Local Foods

One way that schools can purchase more food from local farms is through implementing geographic preference in school purchases. In 2011, the USDA published a rule that allows schools to implement a geographic preference during the formal procurement process in favor of local, unprocessed agricultural products.¹⁹⁹ The federal rule leaves the power to the school district to define “local,” as long as the school does not say it is “exclusively purchasing Mississippi products” because this is not a preference, but a requirement.²⁰⁰ Mississippi schools generally utilize an Invitation for Bid (IFB) method, rather than a Request for Proposals (RFP) method.²⁰¹ Under the IFB method, schools can write specifications for the order.²⁰² For example, an IFB could state, “We will preference produced picked within one day of delivery.”²⁰³ Schools could also provide a price preference for local products. For example, the school district could decrease the proposed price of bids for local products that meet its procurement specifications by 10 cents per unit.²⁰⁴

(b) Leverage Existing National and State Resources

The federal government strongly supports farm-to-school programs. In 2010, Congress approved a resolution to officially designate October as National Farm to School Month, to highlight the value of farm-to-school programs.²⁰⁵ Congress has also established the Farm to School Grant program through the USDA to assist school districts or schools to plan, design, implement, or expand farm-to-school programs. These grants range from \$20,000 to \$100,000 per award, depending on the type of project and anticipated project costs.²⁰⁶ School districts in Mississippi, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and Louisiana have successfully applied and received grant funding.

One local success story is Oxford City School District in Oxford, Mississippi, which successfully applied for and received a USDA Farm to School Grant.²⁰⁷ They were awarded \$38,145 in 2013 in order to begin their planned farm to school program.²⁰⁸ Their plan included: “Coordinating with local farmers and partners; preparing kitchens and training staff; making classroom connections for deeper student learning, and; engaging and educating parents on how to keep this going at home.”²⁰⁹

However in the 2015 cycle, no school districts in Mississippi received the grant.²¹⁰ To apply for the grant in future cycles, advocates and schools can visit the USDA website and start the 2016 application once it is posted in February 2015.²¹¹

Mississippi also contains a number of resources to help schools implement farm-to-school programs. In 2012, the Mississippi Legislature created a statewide Farm to School week during the first week in October.²¹² The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) provides educational resources and encourages schools to purchase food from local farms during the week.²¹³ Mississippi Farm to School Week provides an excellent opportunity for schools to pilot farm-to-school by purchasing a small amount of local produce, testing out the quality and figuring out logistics with the farmer. Through its Farm to School Week website, MDAC provides resources for participating schools, including

Case Study 5.3. Starkville, MS Emerson Farm to Pre-School Program

Strategy: Local parents teamed up with the Gaining Ground Institute of Mississippi to establish a Farm to Preschool program in Starkville, Mississippi.

Outcome: Preschool food service director purchases local produce three times a week from D&G farms. The preschool has changed its menu to include this local produce. The school also built a community garden with help from MSU Extension Service’s Master Gardner’s Program, relying on the labor of MSU students and interns.

Key Takeaway: Bringing together parents, school staff, local universities, and community non-profits can create an effective coalition of people to implement a Farm-to-School program.

Source: Nathan Rosenberg and Emily Broad Leib, *Expanding Farm to School in Mississippi*, HARVARD LAW SCHOOL HEALTH LAW AND POLICY CLINIC AND HARVARD LAW SCHOOL MISSISSIPPI DELTA PROJECT at 20-23, 30-33 (May 2011), available at <http://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Expanding-Farm-to-School-in-Mississippi.pdf>.

educational posters, sample menus, and suggested healthy food related games designed to educate students about the benefits of eating locally-grown healthy foods.²¹⁴

(c) Connect Schools with Local Farmers

Advocates can share several resources with schools to connect with local growers. For example, Mississippi MarketMaker (<http://ms.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>) is an online database where schools can find farms that are willing and able to sell to them. Schools can specify what types of products they are interested in purchasing, and narrow their farmer search to those growers that are selling these products. MDAC also offers information about where to find specific types of produce in an online directory of fruits and vegetables.²¹⁵ Schools can also connect with farmers market managers for opportunities to purchase from farmers offering produce in those markets, or connect with local university extension services to connect with local farmers.

School can also use their federal entitlement dollars to purchase fresh, local produce. Through the Department of Defense Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program (DoD Fresh), schools can choose to spend

Case Study 5.2. Mound Bayou, MS Farm to School Program

Strategy: Rose Tate, the Mound Bayou Food Service Director, thought children might be hesitant to try new vegetables that would be served in school meals under the new nutrition standards. She and her staff started a school garden to introduce kids to the foods they would be seeing in the lunch line. She started buying local produce, including collard, turnip, and mustard greens from the Alcorn University Extension Service, which is 10 miles down the road from her school. Lastly, the teachers started educating students about healthy eating.

Outcome: The students began to eat more of the fruits and vegetables served to them and to understand how certain foods were good for them. Community members helped to harvest foods from the garden. Ms. Tate found that with some local products, they were the same price as what she was receiving from her normal distributor, but lasted much longer than produce shipped from far away.

Key Takeaway: To start a farm-to-school program, schools can work with local university extension services, and brainstorm with their staff about how to get children to eat new, healthy foods. Local products are not necessarily more expensive, and are often fresher and last longer than conventional produce.

Source: James Tolleson, *Mississippi-Grown Food Service: An Interview with Rose Tate*, FOODCORPS MISSISSIPPI BLOG (Jan. 23, 2014), <http://mississippi.blog.foodcorps.org/2014/01/23/rose-tate/>.

their entitlement dollars on fresh produce.²¹⁶ The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has adjusted the system to encourage schools to purchase more Mississippi-grown produce through the program.²¹⁷ Due to MDE's efforts, this program has grown rapidly; there are many more Mississippi products available, such as corn on the cob, green beans, seedless watermelons, satsumas and turnip greens, and between the 2013-2014 school years, the amount that schools spent on Mississippi produce through the DoD Fresh program increased from around \$265,000 to over \$1 million (out of a total \$2.5 million budget).²¹⁸

While the DoD Fresh Program has helped to greatly expand farm-to-school in Mississippi, there are some challenges with the program. First, DoD Fresh requires farmers to transport their products to central locations to be inspected before being distributed to school districts.²¹⁹ The FFVP's centralized drop-off locations saves money for farmers selling food to multiple school districts; for small farmers, however, it may be more cost efficient to sell food directly to a local school district. Second, DoD Fresh requires that farmers have the USDA's Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification.²²⁰ GAP/GHP certification is optional and can be costly for small farmers (including getting the farm outfitted so that it can pass the certification process and paying for the certification itself).²²¹ MDAC and Partnership for a Healthier Mississippi offer reimbursements for GAP certification, which helps to offset the expense.²²² Nevertheless, the process can be costly and burdensome for small farmers.²²³ For these reasons, schools should consider purchasing local produce directly from farmers in addition to purchasing local produce through the DoD Fresh Program.

V. CONCLUSION

There are a variety of ways that the coalitions in Montgomery County and Winston County can improve the school food environment in their communities. This report has explored five main ways that advocates can recommend policy changes to improve the quality of school foods: meeting or exceeding federal and state nutrition standards, improving the school cafeteria environment, increasing participation in school meal programs, implementing health and nutrition education, and adopting farm-to-school programs. Many of these interventions can be included in the school wellness plan, which is a policy that the school must follow. Advocates should encourage schools to strengthen and fully implement their wellness plans, and develop inclusive and effective school health councils to implement these changes.

The authors recognize that the approaches highlighted within each section are not "one size fits all." Schools have varying needs, resources, and priorities, which will make some policies more feasible and effective than others. We hope that this report will provide a starting point for those advocating for policy changes that support healthier school environments.

VI. APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A. Excerpt from the Mississippi Model Wellness Policy

*Mississippi Model Wellness Policy*²²⁴

Commitment to Nutrition

Minimum requirements:

The _____ School will:

- Offer a school lunch program with menus that meet the meal patterns and nutrition standards established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Child Nutrition Programs.
- Offer school breakfast and snack programs (where approved and applicable) with menus that meet the meal patterns and nutrition standards established by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Child Nutrition Programs.
- Promote participation in school meal programs to families and staff.
- Operate all Child Nutrition Programs with school foodservice staff who are properly qualified according to current professional standards (Mississippi Board of Education Policy, Code 2001).
- Follow State Board of Education policies on competitive foods and extra food sales (Mississippi Board of Education Policy, Code 2002).
- Include goals for nutrition promotion, nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities to promote student wellness.
- Implement Nutrition Standards as adopted by the State Board of Education in accordance with the Mississippi Healthy Students Act (State Board of Education Policy 4011),
 - Healthy food and beverage choices;
 - Healthy food preparation;
 - Marketing of healthy food choices to students, staff and parents;
 - Food preparation ingredients and products;
 - Minimum/maximum time allotted for students and staff lunch and breakfast;
 - Availability of food items during the lunch and breakfast periods of the Child Nutrition Breakfast and Lunch Programs;
 - Methods to increase participation in the Child Nutrition School Breakfast and Lunch Programs.
- Establish guidelines in accordance with the Mississippi Beverage and Snack Regulations for all foods available on the school campus during the school day with the objective of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity.

Optional policy statements (adopt as appropriate for local school goals):

- Encourage students to make food choices based on the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) and the ChooseMyPlate resources, by emphasizing menu options that feature baked (rather than fried foods), whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and reduced-fat dairy products.

Read more about HHFKA at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-06-28/pdf/2013-15249.pdf> and ChooseMyPlate at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>.

- Establish a cafeteria environment conducive to a positive dining experience, with socializing among students and between students and adults; with supervision of eating areas by adults who model proper conduct and voice level; and with adults who model healthy habits by eating with the students.
- Replace deep fat fryers with combination oven steamers. Schedule recess before lunch, in order to increase meal consumption and nutrient intake at meals and to improve behavior in the dining area.
- Make school meals accessible to all students with a variety of delivery strategies, such as breakfast in the classroom, grab-and-go lunches, or alternate eating sites.
- Provide nutrition information for parents, including nutrition analysis of school meals and resources to help parents improve food that they serve at home.
- Add nutritious and appealing options (such as fruits, vegetables, reduced-fat milk, reduced fat-yogurt, reduced-fat cheese, 100% juice, and water) whenever foods/beverages are sold or otherwise offered at school, including vending machines, school stores, concession stands at sporting and academic events, parties, celebrations, social events, and other school functions.
- Eliminate use of foods as rewards for student accomplishment and the withholding of food as punishment (e.g., restricting a child's selection of flavored milk at mealtime due to behavior problems). Also, do not use any type of physical activity as a means of punishment.
- Encourage all school-based organizations to use services, contests, non-food items, and/or healthful foods for fundraising programs. The sale of candy as a fund-raiser is strongly discouraged (or prohibited). Alternative fundraising ideas can be downloaded at <http://www.healthysd.gov/Documents/HealthyFundraisingIdeas.pdf>.

B. Additional Information on Nutrition Standards and Reimbursement Rates for Federal School Meal Programs

Table 1. National School Lunch Program Nutrition Standards Before and After the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 ²²⁵		
Food Group	Previous Requirements (K-12)	Current Requirements (K-12)
Fruits and vegetables	½ - ¾ cup of fruit and vegetables combined per day	¾ – 1 cup of vegetables AND ½ - 1 cup of fruit per day
Vegetables	No specifications as to type of vegetable subgroup	Weekly requirement for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark green • Red/orange • Beans/peas (legumes) • Starchy • Other²²⁶
Meat/ Meat Alternate	1.5 – 2 oz eq. (daily minimum)	Grades K-5: 1 oz eq. daily min., 8-10 oz weekly Grades 6-8: 1 oz eq. daily min., 9-10 oz weekly Grades 9-12: 2 oz eq. daily min., 10-12 oz weekly
Grains	1 serving daily min., 8 servings per week	Grades K-5: 1 oz eq. daily min., 8-9 oz weekly Grades 6-8: 1 oz eq. daily min., 8-10 oz weekly Grades 9-12: 2 oz eq. daily min., 10-12 oz weekly
Whole Grains	Encouraged	Beginning July 1, 2012, at least half of the grains must be whole grain-rich. Beginning July 1, 2014, all grains must be whole grain rich.
Milk	1 cup daily Variety of fat contents allowed; flavor not restricted	1 cup daily Must be fat-free (unflavored/flavored) or 1% (unflavored)

Table 2. HHFKA National School Lunch Program Nutrition Guidelines for Certain Key Nutrients ²²⁷						
Grades	K-5		6-8		9-12	
Goal Must Be Met By	July of 2014	July 2022	July of 2014	July of 2022	July of 2014	July of 2022
Min-Max Calories	550–650		600–700		750–850	
% Calories from Saturated Fat	<10		<10		<10	
Trans Fat (g)	0		0		0	
Sodium (mg)	<1,230	< 640	<1,360	<710	<1,420	<740
Protein (g)	9		15		19	
Calcium (mg)	266		400		400	

Iron (mg)	3	4	4
Vitamin A (RE)	233	333	333
Vitamin C (mg)	15	20	20

Table 3: Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods²²⁸		
Food/Nutrient	Standards	Exemptions to the Standard
General Standard for Competitive Food	<p>To be allowable, a competitive FOOD item must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. meet all of the proposed competitive food nutrient standards; and 2. be a grain product that contains 50% or more whole grains by weight or have whole grains as the first ingredient*; or 3. have as the first ingredient* one of the non-grain main food groups: fruits, vegetables, dairy, or protein foods (meat, beans, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, etc.); or 4. be a combination food that contains at least 1/4 cup fruit and/or vegetable; or 5. contain 10% of the Daily Value (DV) of a nutrient of public health concern (i.e., calcium, potassium, vitamin D, or dietary fiber). Effective July 1, 2016 this criterion is obsolete and may not be used to qualify as a competitive food. <p>*If water is the first ingredient, the second ingredient must be one of items 2, 3 or 4 above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruits and vegetables with no added ingredients except water are exempt from all nutrient standards. • Canned and frozen fruits with no added ingredients except water, or are packed in 100% juice, extra light syrup, or light syrup are exempt from all nutrient standards. • Canned vegetables with no added ingredients except water or that contain a small amount of sugar for processing purposes to maintain the quality and structure of the vegetable are exempt from all nutrient standards.
NSLP/SBP Entrée Items Sold A la Carte.	Any entrée item offered as part of the lunch program or the breakfast program is exempt from all competitive food standards if it is sold as a competitive food on the day of service or the day after service in the lunch or breakfast program.	
Sugar-Free Chewing Gum	Sugar-free chewing gum is exempt from all competitive food standards.	
Grain Items	Acceptable grain items must include 50% or more whole grains by weight, or have whole grains as the first ingredient.	
Total Fats	Acceptable food items must have ≤ 35% calories from total fat as served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced fat cheese (including part-skim mozzarella) is exempt from the total fat standard. • Nuts and seeds and nut/seed butters are exempt from the total fat standard.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added nutritive sweeteners or fats are exempt from the total fat standard. • Seafood with no added fat is exempt from the total fat standard. <p>Combination products are not exempt and must meet all the nutrient standards.</p>
Saturated Fats	Acceptable food items must have < 10% calories from saturated fat as served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced fat cheese (including part-skim mozzarella) is exempt from the saturated fat standard. • Nuts and seeds and nut/seed butters are exempt from the saturated fat standard. • Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added nutritive sweeteners or fats are exempt from the saturated fat standard. <p>Combination products are not exempt and must meet all the nutrient standards.</p>
Trans Fats	Zero grams of trans fat as served (≤ 0.5 g per portion).	
Sugar	Acceptable food items must have $\leq 35\%$ of weight from total sugar as served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried whole fruits or vegetables; dried whole fruit or vegetable pieces; and dehydrated fruits or vegetables with no added nutritive sweeteners are exempt from the sugar standard. • Dried whole fruits, or pieces, with nutritive sweeteners that are required for processing and/or palatability purposes (i.e., cranberries, tart cherries, or blueberries) are exempt from the sugar standard. • Products consisting of only exempt dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added nutritive sweeteners or fats are exempt from the sugar standard.
Sodium	<p>Snack items and side dishes sold a la carte: ≤ 230 mg sodium per item as served. Effective July 1, 2016 snack items and side dishes sold a la carte must be: ≤ 200 mg sodium per item as served, including any added accompaniments.</p> <p>Entrée items sold a la carte: ≤ 480 mg sodium per item as served, including any added accompaniments.</p>	

Calories	<p>Snack items and side dishes sold a la carte: ≤ 200 calories per item as served, including any added accompaniments.</p> <p>Entrée items sold a la carte: ≤350 calories per item as served including any added accompaniments.</p>	Entrée items served as an NSLP or SBP entrée are exempt on the day of or day after service in the program meal.
Caffeine	<p>Elementary and Middle School: foods and beverages must be caffeine-free with the exception of trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine substances.</p> <p>High School: foods and beverages may contain caffeine.</p>	
Accompaniments	Use of accompaniments is limited when competitive food is sold to students in school. The accompaniment must be included in the nutrient profile as part of the food item served and meet all proposed standards.	
Beverages	<p>Elementary School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain water or plain carbonated water (no size limit); • Low fat milk, unflavored (≤8 fl oz); • Non fat milk, flavored or unflavored (≤8 fl oz), including nutritionally equivalent milk alternatives as permitted by the school meal requirements; • 100% fruit/vegetable juice (≤8 fl oz); and 100% fruit/vegetable juice diluted with water (with or without carbonation), and no added sweeteners (≤8 fl oz). <p>Middle School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain water or plain carbonated water (no size limit); • Low-fat milk, unflavored (≤12 fl oz); • Non-fat milk, flavored or unflavored (≤12 fl oz), including nutritionally equivalent milk alternatives as permitted by the school meal requirements; • 100% fruit/vegetable juice (≤12 fl oz); and • 100% fruit/vegetable juice diluted with water (with or without carbonation), and no added sweeteners (≤12 fl oz). 	

	<p>High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain water or plain carbonated water (no size limit); • Low-fat milk, unflavored (≤ 12 fl oz); • Non-fat milk, flavored or unflavored (≤ 12 fl oz), including nutritionally equivalent milk alternatives as permitted by the school meal requirements; • 100% fruit/vegetable juice (≤ 12 fl oz); • 100% fruit/vegetable juice diluted with water (with or without carbonation), and no added sweeteners (≤ 12 fl oz); • Other flavored and/or carbonated beverages (≤ 20 fl oz) that are labeled to contain ≤ 5 calories per 8 fl oz, or ≤ 10 calories per 20 fl oz; and • Other flavored and/or carbonated beverages (≤ 12 fl oz) that are labeled to contain ≤ 40 calories per 8 fl oz, or ≤ 60 calories per 12 fl oz. 	
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Table 4. Reimbursement Amounts for NSLP and SBP in the Contiguous States

National School Lunch Program²²⁹	Reimbursement for Non-Severe Need (<60% Free or Reduced Price)	Reimbursement for Severe Need (>60% Free or Reduced Price)
Paid	0.28	0.30
Reduced Price	2.58	2.60
Free	2.98	3.00

National School Breakfast Program²³⁰	Reimbursement for Non-Severe Need (<40% Free or Reduced Price)	Reimbursement for Severe Need (>40% Free or Reduced Price)
Paid	0.28	0.28
Reduced Price	1.32	1.63
Free	1.62	1.93

Table 5. Reimbursement Amounts Under SFSP

Meal under SFSP²³¹	Reimbursement for Sites in Rural Areas or Sites Serving Homemade Food	Reimbursement for All Other Sites
Breakfast	2.02	1.98
Lunch or Supper	3.5	3.48
Snack	0.84	0.08

C. Online Resources

General

- *Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) Mississippi Fact Sheet*
About: Provides an overview of key nutrition and federal program statistics for the state. May serve as a helpful background resource.
<http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/ms.pdf>
- *United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Fact Sheet*
About: Provides an overview and basic primer about the NSLP, including information about school reimbursements for each meal.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NSLPFactSheet.pdf>
- *Mississippi Food Policy Council*
About: The Mississippi Food Policy Council advocates for food and farm policies that build healthy communities and strengthen local food systems. The Council is a unique forum for diverse stakeholders to come together and address common concerns regarding food policy including food systems, food security, farm policy, food regulations, health, and nutrition. Consider becoming a member or attending a quarterly meeting, or the annual conference.
<https://mississippifoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com/>

Community Eligibility

- *Mississippi Department of Education Website*
About: Provides links to forms, worksheet, FAQ's, and other resources about how to apply for state and federal school nutrition programs. For example, the website provides information about how school districts can apply for the community eligibility provision.
[http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/healthy-schools/nutrition-services/nutrition-services---resources/community-eligibility-provision-\(cep\)](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/healthy-schools/nutrition-services/nutrition-services---resources/community-eligibility-provision-(cep))
- *Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Community Eligibility Program (CEP)*
About: Provides links related to CEP, including rule language, guidance, Q&A's, rate estimator, and more. Provides more information for school districts considering CEP and whether CEP would be appropriate for the school district.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>
- *Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) In-Depth Report*
About: Provides background information on initial results from states adopting CEP and the schools which have used CEP.
http://frac.org/pdf/community_eligibility_report_2013.pdf

Direct Certification

- *Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Report to Congress*

About: Provides background information about Direct Certification in the National School Lunch Program, initial results, and direct certification best practices. May be a helpful resource for school districts considering direct certification.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NSLPDirectCertification2013.pdf>

Farm to School

- *Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, Farm to School in Mississippi: A Step-by-Step Guide to Purchasing Mississippi Products*
- About: A comprehensive guide to planning, funding, and implementing a farm to school project, specific to Mississippi. Explains how to interact with farmers, community leaders, and school leaders to develop farm to school programs. Includes examples from nearby cities and towns, as well as sample ordering sheets and additional resources.
<http://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/MSPurchasingGuide-9-28-final.pdf>
- *United States Department of Agriculture, Farm to School Website*
About: Provides information about federal initiatives to support farm to school, including the Farm to School Grant Program. The 2016 Farm to School Grant application will be posted in February 2015. Also contains webinars on farm to school initiatives, updates from the USDA Farm to School Team, and an overview of federal regulations and policies.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school>
- *National Farm to School Network*
About: Contains a database of farm to school programs. Provides a state-by-state look at farm to school programs, groups, and legislation, including topics such as buying and selling local foods, how to get started, and other resources.
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/>
- *Mississippi Farm to School Network*
About: Contact the coordinators of the statewide Farm to School coalition to be added to the listserv, where you will hear about upcoming events, conference calls, and other farm to school opportunities. This website also provides some online resources.
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/Mississippi>

Summer Feeding Program (SFSP)

- *Food and Nutrition Service Summer Meals Toolkit*
About: Provides links for individual toolkits covering state agencies, partner organizations, sponsors, meal sites, USDA resources, and communication strategy to help implement a successful Summer Feeding Program.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>
- *Mississippi Office of Healthy Schools Website:*
About: Provides resources for school districts implementing a summer feeding program, including FAQs, summer feeding sites, and demonstration project instructions. Serves as an additional resource for schools considering Summer Feeding programs
http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/nutrition_services/sfsp.htm

School Breakfast

- *Mississippi Office of Healthy Schools National School Breakfast Program*
About: Provides reimbursement rates, income eligibility requirements, applicable forms, statistics and background information on the SBP as it is administered in Mississippi. Also contains links to federal information about the SBP.
http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/nutrition_services/nsbp.htm
- *Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010–2011*
About: Examines the performance of school breakfast programs in 26 large urban school districts. Provides additional case studies for schools who have taken different approaches to increasing participation in school breakfast.
http://frac.org/pdf/urban_school_breakfast_report_2012.pdf
- *Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) Breakfast Scorecard*
About: Explores laws on school breakfast by state. Provides a helpful comparison for where Mississippi stands on school breakfast compared to other states and would be helpful for those considering state legislative action.
http://frac.org/pdf/school_breakfast_scorecard_2010-2011.pdf

School Wellness Policies

- *Mississippi Office of Health Schools Local Wellness Policy*
About: Provides links and resources for developing a local school wellness policy. Link provides an example of a model wellness policy.
http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs_main/initiatives/school_wellness_policy.htm
- *Mississippi Office of Health Schools Resources for Implementing School Health Councils*
About:
http://www.healthyschoolsms.org/ohs_main/initiatives/councils.htm

Healthy Fundraising Ideas

- *USDA and Connecticut Department of Education Healthy Fundraising: Supporting a Healthy School Environment*
About: Provides background information on the benefits of healthy fundraisers and the downsides to unhealthy fundraisers. Provides dozens of examples of non-food and healthy food fundraisers.
http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Connecticut/Healthy_Fundraising.pdf
- *Alliance for a Healthier Generation Fundraising Ideas*
About: Provides three pages of non-food and healthy food fundraisers. Must be a registered user to access. Membership is free.
https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/snacks_and_beverages/fundraisers/

- *East and Central Harlem District Public Health Office and the Strategic Alliance for Health, Yes, You Can!*
 About: Provides creative, fun ideas for non-food and healthy food fundraisers, as well as a detailed implementation guide and contact information for vendors who could provide materials for fundraisers. Includes information on finding local businesses to sponsor fundraisers, as well as sample letters that ask local businesses for their support.
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/dpho/dpho-fundraiser-guide.pdf>
- *National Alliance for Nutrition & Activity Healthy Fundraisers Factsheet*
 About: Provides background information on the benefits of healthy fundraisers and the downsides to unhealthy fundraisers. Also provides easily-substituted alternatives to traditional unhealthy fundraisers.
http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/Healthy_School_Fundraising_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- *National Alliance for Nutrition & Activity Healthy Fundraising Ideas*
 About: Lists ideas for healthy fundraisers and compares them with unhealthy fundraisers.
http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/Fundraising_Ideas_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- *National Alliance for Nutrition & Activity Healthy Fundraising Success Stories*
 About: Provides examples of successful healthy fundraisers from school districts across the U.S., with a focus on schools in the Southeast.
<http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/healthy-school-fundraising-success-stories.pdf>

Endnotes

- ¹ The Harvard Mississippi Delta Project is a student practice organization supervised by attorneys in the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic. To learn more about the Delta Project, visit: <https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/deltaproject>.
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- ⁴ *Diabetes Interactive Atlas*, CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/atlas/countydata/atlas.html> (last visited Jan. 15, 2015).
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- ⁶ *Economic Cost of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2012*, AMER. DIABETES ASS'N 8, 10 (Mar. 6, 2013), available at <http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/early/2013/03/05/dc12-2625.full.pdf>.
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- ⁹ Mary Story, Marilyn S Nanney, and Marlene B Schwartz, *Schools and Obesity Prevention: Creating School Environments and Policies to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity*, THE MILBANK QUARTERLY 87(1): 71-100, 73 (Mar. 2009), available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2879179/pdf/milq0087-0071.pdf>.
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- ¹³ Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, 45 U.S.C. § 1751 (2013).
- ¹⁴ *Summary of Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (By Program)*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. FOOD AND NUTRITION SERV., http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/PL111-296_Summary.pdf (last visited Jan. 14, 2015).
- ¹⁵ 45 U.S.C. § 1751, sec. 201(f)(ii) (2013).
- ¹⁶ *National School Lunch Program Fact Sheet*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. (Sept. 2013), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NSLPFactSheet.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ *School Breakfast Program Fact Sheet*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. (Sept. 26, 2013), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/fact-sheet>.
- ¹⁸ *Id.*
- ¹⁹ *Comparison of Previous and Current Regulatory Requirements under Final Rule*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. (Jan. 6, 2012), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/comparison.pdf>.
- ²⁰ *Fact Sheet: Calories in School Meals*, U.S. DEP'T OF AGRIC. (2013), available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HHFKAfactsheet-calories.pdf>.
- ²¹ 7 C.F.R. § 210, 220 (June 28, 2013).
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