



Madison Metropolitan School District School Food and Nutrition at MMSD - Basics

November 1, 2023

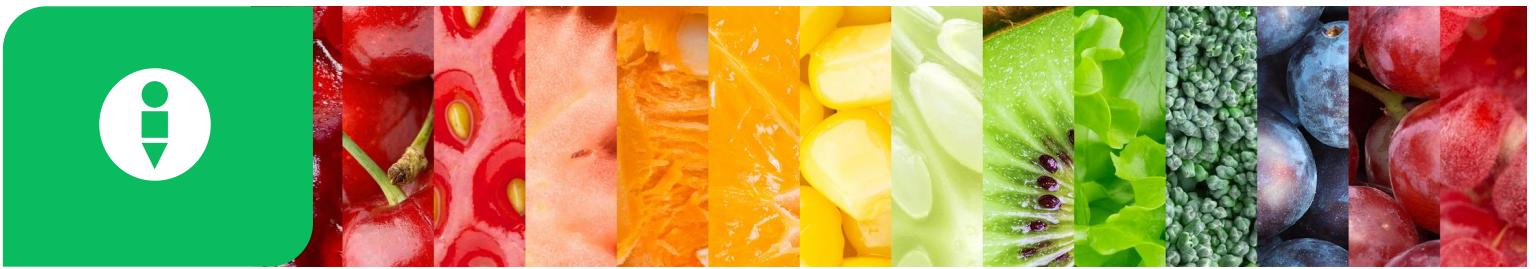
Madison Metropolitan School District serves hot and cold breakfast and lunch options in 52 schools. In September 2023, the number of meals served daily averaged just over 14,000 meals combining the two meal periods.

MMSD has focused on increasing both fresh fruit and vegetable offerings for students and increasing purchasing of locally grown produce in 2022-23, and this work continues. Specific to our high schools, we have initiated build-your-own food bars allowing and encouraging students to add fresh produce to their meals. MMSD also employs a full-time Registered Dietitian overseeing compliance with USDA Nutritional Standards and consulting with school staff on special nutritional needs.

Challenges in School Food & Nutrition

- Competition from the private sector, which does not follow USDA/NSLP nutrition guidelines - open campus
- Time and Space - service periods often compressed, limiting food variety and quality options and seating capacity
- Fiscal pressure to run meals at very low cost - can affect quality of ingredients and taking risks with new foods that may be more nutritious
- School food generally suffers negative perception and stigma
- School food can be seen as secondary or extraneous to academics - it is a support for these
- School staff skills have atrophied through shift to manufactured foods - fear of traditional cooking due to compliance with USDA requirements
- Public perception that school food is unhealthy, counter to results from research comparing school meals with purchased meals





Solutions to main challenges

- Increase access and decrease social stigma through funding to provide meals to all students, free of charge
- Promote the beneficial aspects of school food in terms of nutritional quality and academic/athletic support
- Seek funding for pilot or trial programs specifically aimed to increase access to fresh foods or food for more students who need it
- Develop further training resources for school staff on healthy scratch cooking
- Make school food more convenient, appealing, and cost-effective than foods purchased outside of school or brought in
- Consistently communicate with the community, build confidence and trust

The Role of the Federal Government

- Provides structure and regulation through National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program requirements
- Provides cost support through reimbursements and USDA Foods Entitlements
- Supports Nutritional Guidelines via Smart Snacks
- Supports and monitors staff training
- Provides guidance and support on accounting practices and free & reduced meal benefit process
- Governs products that may be served in school meals

Incentives for Healthier Choices

- Consistently offer a variety of high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables in all schools and service venues
- Use Farm-to-School funding to offset the cost of healthier choices such as entree salads and salad bars
- Ensure students have adequate time to consider good choices
- Conduct sampling tables to reduce perceived risk from unfamiliar foods
- Train staff on culinary skills that increase flavor and appeal within good health and nutritional guidelines
- Increase on-site cooking and in-person preparation (in student view) of healthier foods, such as made-to-order grain bowls, or salads

How Meal Programs Are Developed at Schools

- Basis is the weekly meal pattern requirement using 5 components - required
- Staff, budget, and infrastructure availability drive the scope of program variety and quality
- What foods are available? Can depend on location, vendor selection, procurement guidelines, cost supports - and more
- What foods are accepted or popular? Must meet public tastes and approval to keep the program viable
- Vision of school leadership and engagement with public to shape and evolve program

Recommendations to Increase Access to Healthy Options

- Remove cost and administrative barriers to program for students
- Find funding for healthiest ingredients (often premium cost)
- Find funding for higher-risk pilot programs emphasizing access to whole (unprocessed) foods and access in general, such as mobile service points
- Additional staff training
- Awards to schools featuring or increasing healthier food options
- Manage access to delivered retail food options to schools
- Promote connection between healthier foods and academic/athletic achievement and good behavior in school
- Educate students on long-term benefits of healthy eating