

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

5210
Policy No.

BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY

STUDENTS

Prohibition of Systemic Meal Shaming Practices and Board Regulation on a Universal Meals Program for Early Childhood, Primary, and Intermediate Grade Levels

The No More Student Hunger and Meals Expansion (SHAME) Policy

I. Policy Statement

This board policy shall serve as an encompassing measure that directs the development of administrative procedures to: 1. prohibit the act of *meal shaming* during all meal-related interactions that involve students through, but not limited to, employee professional development and fiscal allocation through the operating budget; 2. empower the Chief Executive Officer with the ability to develop appropriate, both operationally and fiscally, administrative directives to establish a Universal Meals Program; and 3. codify a specific funding account to accept charitable stakeholder giving for the purpose of addressing communal *food insecurity*.

II. Purpose

In 2011, the Board of Education (the Board) for Prince George's County amended a previously adopted policy regarding the wellness, nutrition, and physical activity of students within Prince George's County Public Schools. Through *Board Policy - 0116 - Wellness, Nutrition, and Physical Activity*, the Board recognized both its obligation to make healthy food and beverage choices available to students, as well as, the longstanding research that supports the academic success that is the result of a well-nourished student.

Studies published in both the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* and the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* document the negative effects in which hunger and food insecurity have on both the academic performance and behavior of students while they are in school, from lower test scores and poor social behaviors to higher truancy and suspension rates.

Food insecurity puts tremendous stress on families who worry about food running out before money becomes available to buy more. Food insecurity can damage a child's health and brain development long before they enter a classroom. By kindergarten, food-insecure children often are cognitively, emotionally, and physically behind their peers who are not hungry. Both medically-based and educationally-based research has shown that when children are hungry they are less likely to do well in the classroom, perform as well on standardized tests, or graduate from high school. Additionally, the practice of meal shaming in public schools has been linked to many disruptive behavioral practices and the depletion of students' social-emotional psyche.

III. Definitions

- a. *Early Childhood Grade Level* - the academic grade level that is offered at a PGCPS early childhood center, elementary, or academy school for pre-kindergarten (pre-K).
- b. *Food Insecurity* - the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food sources.
- c. *Intermediate Grade Levels* - any academic grade level that is offered at a PGCPS elementary or academy school between the grades of three (3) and five (5) [or six (6), when applicable at an elementary school].
- d. *Meal Shaming* - the public identification or stigmatization of a student who has a meal debt in the presence of any other students and/or the discarding of a meal after it has been served to a student due to their inability to pay for the meal or previous meal charges.
- e. *PGCPS* - Prince George's County Public Schools.
- f. *Primary Grade Levels* - any academic grade level that is offered at a PGCPS elementary or academy school between the grades of kindergarten (K) and two (2).
- g. *Secondary Grade Levels* - any academic grade level that is offered at a PGCPS academy, middle, or high school beginning with grade six (6).
- h. *The Excellence in Education Foundation* - a non-profit charitable organization that seeks to solicit, receive, and manage contributions to enhance learning opportunities for and augment the quality of services provided to students of

PGCPS.

- i. *Universal Meals Program* - a model that allows all students to eat school meals for free and incorporates the meal program into the overall curriculum, creating a learning environment for healthy eating and a mealtime experience where every kid, regardless of income, is equal and enjoys their meals together.

IV. Standards

The Board of Education (the Board) for Prince George’s County firmly believes that the unrestricted access to a quality, nutritious meal is just as vital of a resource to the academic prosperity of our students as any other educational tool. Furthermore, the Board is committed to removing any barrier, whether tangible or intangible, that prevents our students from learning and excelling in both their school and communities — including hunger and food insecurity.

Our school system, at all levels, shall play a critical role in the promotion of positive student health outcomes, the prevention of childhood obesity, and the problems associated with poor nutrition and physical inactivity. The Board believes that an early investment in a child’s nutritional behaviors by removing all potential barriers to access quality, nutritional meals will have a positive impact on their future academic performance and overall physical wellbeing.

V. Implementation Responsibilities

The Board of Education (the Board) for Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), given the aforementioned background and commitment, hereby authorizes the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PGCPS the authority, if necessary, to develop an appropriate course of action, through administrative procedure(s), to implement a Universal Meals Program (UMP) for early childhood centers, elementary schools, and academies with enrollment of students in the defined grade levels of early childhood, primary, and intermediate. This may include, but is not limited to, the expansion of the system’s utilization of federal, state, county, municipal, not-for-profit, community/civic, faith-based, and private sector partnerships, programs, and philanthropic opportunities.

Upon development and implementation, the CEO shall not be precluded from utilizing the Free and Reduced Meals application process as an aid in the enactment of this board policy and shall develop processes aimed at increasing governmental funding to support the fiscal cost of implementing a UMP for the aforementioned grade levels and is

required by the Board to progressively promote the necessary completion of the application processes needed for programmatic eligibility.

Additionally, the CEO is charged by the Board, through the school system's *Excellence in Education Foundation*, to establish a specified charitable fund to receive donations that shall be reserved solely for the regulated usage of schools to combat food insecurity for all PGCPS students.

Lastly, as a means to combat meal shaming in all staff-to-student interactions, the Board mandates the administrative development of and the proper staff enrollment in professional development courses that are designed to increase the understanding that PGCPS employees have on the topic of differing socioeconomic status levels and the impact these levels have on the financial stability of student households and the varying levels of food insecurity, as well as positive, respectful approaches to the engagement of students that are unable to fulfil the necessary cost of PGCPS-provided meals.

VI. References

Board Policy - 0116 - Wellness, Nutrition, and Physical Activity

The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition

The Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

VII. History

Policy Adopted

10/21/20