



Healthy School Food
M A R Y L A N D

Public Schools - Healthy and Safety - Food Transparency

HealthySchoolFoodMD.org

Background

Federal and state regulations as well as local wellness policies govern the general parameters of the foods and beverages that can be sold in public schools. While these regulations eliminate some of the least healthy foods for children (e.g., candy, soda and deep-fried items), they still allow for the sale of a **large variety of processed, unhealthy foods**. These foods are sold in public school cafeterias in Maryland as a la carte items and **can often be purchased using a lunch card or pin number without the knowledge of the parents**. These a la carte or competitive foods are rarely mentioned on menus or listed on the public school food service web site, nor on the web sites of individual schools. Therefore, **parents are usually unaware of the availability of these items** or that children can purchase them instead of a complete meal. In addition, few school systems list the ingredients or full nutrition facts for foods served as part of meals. Parents do not have enough information on school food in order to make an educated decision as to whether they would like their children to purchase this food, from the perspective of nutrition or food allergies.



Purpose of the Bill

This bill requires each public school system to produce menus for all foods sold in their cafeterias, including a la carte or competitive foods, and post these menus to their web sites. It further requires that each individual school link to these menus from their web sites. If competitive foods differ from school to school within a system, it requires individual schools to send a list home to parents of competitive foods sold in their child's school. It also requires that school systems list ingredients and nutrition facts for all competitive foods on their web sites.

We will also seek to amend the bill to require that school systems list ingredient and nutrition facts for **all** foods sold in schools on their web sites.

Benefits to Our Children and Families

- Parents will have the information necessary to make educated decisions about which foods they would like their children to be able to purchase.
- Giving parents information about food sold in their schools will empower them to ask for changes to the school food so that lessons about good nutrition are reinforced rather than contradicted by the school cafeteria's offerings.
- Parents will be alerted to allergens in school foods to which their children are sensitive.
- 26% of Maryland's high school students are overweight or obese (CDC, 2013), yet many children do not eat the fruit and vegetables served as part of school meals because they are filling up on a la carte snacks such as chips, cookies and ice cream. Greater transparency about these offerings will alert parents to this reality and allow them to take action to better protect their children's health.

Responses to Potential Criticism

- *Producing a la carte menus is an onerous or costly burden to school systems. **False.*** Most a la carte menus change little from year to year and consist of a limited list of about 50 items. Once the original a la carte menu is produced, little additional work will be needed to keep this menu updated. Adding a document to a school system's web site and linking to it from an individual school's web site is a common and simple daily task for any school for any number of other documents.
- *Schools don't have access to ingredient lists or nutrition information on the foods they serve, or it is not in the correct format to post to their web sites. **False.*** Schools food services or their contracted providers typically keep printed binders of ingredient lists and nutrition facts on foods sold. With today's high speed scanners, scanning these files and posting them to web sites is a simple administrative task that can be done in a few hours by one person.
- *School systems have had to make a lot of changes recently, so now isn't the time to impose a new burden on them. **Response:*** Now is exactly the time. As the new "Smart Snacks in Schools" rules take effect, many parents are under the impression that all foods served in schools are healthy because of requirements for whole grains or additional fruit and vegetables. The reality is much different, however, and parents should be made aware of this.

Healthy School Food Maryland coalition partners:

Brickyard Educational Farm
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Coalition Halting Obesity Everywhere in Children (CHOICE)
Crossroads Community Food Network
First Bites
GrowingSoul
Healthy Kinder, Inc.
Maryland Environmental Health Network
Montgomery County Sustainability Network
Montgomery Victory Gardens
Prince George's County Food Equity Council
Real Food for Kids - Montgomery
Safe Grow Montgomery
Student Section of the Maryland Public Health Association
Young Activist Club