



## OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Tiffany Ward  
Director and Chief Equity Officer

### MEMORANDUM

March 8, 2024

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director  
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director  
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) for Supplemental Appropriations #24-61, the *FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools Supply Chain Assistance Fund* (SA #24-61) and Supplemental Appropriation #24-63, the *FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools Supply Chain Assistance Fund* (SA #24-63)

- I. **FINDING:** These supplementals improve health, well-being, educational and economic outcomes for Black and Hispanic residents in Montgomery County. If approved, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) would receive state funds to minimize the disruptive impacts caused by inflation and supply chain delays. MCPS would use those funds to ensure MCPS students continue to have access to healthy food options. While the supplemental funding does not tackle the root causes of food insecurity, it does provide crucial support to students most in need, mainly Black and Hispanic students. This finding supports prior conclusions that underscore the role access to nutritious meals can play in fostering student academic success.
  
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriations #24-61, the *FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools Supply Chain Assistance Fund* (SA #24-61) and Supplemental Appropriation #24-63, the *FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools Supply Chain Assistance Fund* (SA #24-63) adds \$4,504,719 to the MCPS Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget. MCPS would receive the funds from the Maryland Department of Education through a state grant and would be eligible to use those funds to purchase unprocessed or minimally processed foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and milk products.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) for Supplemental Appropriations #24-61, the *FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools Supply Chain Assistance Fund (SA #24-61)* and Supplemental Appropriation #24-63, the *FY24 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools Supply Chain Assistance Fund (SA #24-63)*

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According to the Superintendent of Schools, the supplementals are necessary to offset increased food service costs created by supply chain disruptions, which refer to difficulties in obtaining essential food supplies and materials. SA #24-61 adds \$1,161,003 to the MCPS operating budget, and SA #24-63 adds \$3,343,716.

**FREE AND REDUCED-PRICED MEALS PROGRAM:**

As a participant in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), MCPS can receive funds from the Maryland Department of Education.<sup>1</sup> The NSLP and SBP are federally assisted meal programs operating in public and nonprofit private schools. The NSLP provides low-cost or free lunches, focusing on nutritional balance and healthy options such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.<sup>2</sup> The SBP reimburses schools with Federal dollars for breakfast meals provided those meals comply with Federal nutrition standards.<sup>3</sup>

MCPS also participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The CEP allows schools with more than 40 percent of students from households with low incomes to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students without having to submit individual applications. As of the 2023–2024 school year, 58 MCPS schools operate under the CEP.<sup>4</sup> Students at these schools receive breakfast and lunch at no cost, no matter their household income.

Schools that do not use the CEP use the Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARMS) program to determine individual student eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. Eligibility for the program is determined based on household size and income under federal guidelines. Families receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), or Medicaid benefits may also qualify. Together, these programs play an important role in removing barriers to healthy food access and helping eliminate school hunger.

**PROCESSED FOODS AND HEALTH OUTCOMES:**

The state requires MCPS to use funds only to purchase unprocessed or minimally processed foods. Processes that have been altered from their original form, typically for preservation or convenience.<sup>5</sup> They often undergo extensive industrial processing, including adding artificial colors, flavors, and emulsifiers.<sup>6</sup> Processed foods usually have high sugar, fat, and salt levels yet offer minimal nutritional value. According to a recent study, consuming ultra-processed foods has been linked to several harmful health outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and mental health disorders.<sup>7</sup>

Processed foods are more readily accessible and cheaper than non-processed foods. This means that it is easier for many low-income students and families to access unhealthy processed foods than healthier, unprocessed foods. This remains true for adults. A recent

study by the American Heart Association discovered that Black adults who eat a lot of processed foods are 55% more likely to have high blood pressure than white adults who eat the same amount. The study also found that Black adults (27%) are among the top eaters of processed foods compared to white adults (24%)<sup>8</sup>.

III. **ANALYSIS:** Recent Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) assessments illustrate how food insecurity in Montgomery County hits immigrant communities and communities with low incomes the hardest. In most cases, members of these communities are Hispanic or Black. This is particularly true in the southern and eastern parts of the County. One ORESJ assessment noted that “32.5% of MCPS students were recipients of the FARMS program... Of these FARMS recipients, over half were Latinx while approximately a third were Black.”<sup>9</sup> By comparison, less than five percent of Asian Pacific Islander students and less than five percent of white students are FARMS recipients.<sup>10</sup>

Several ORESJ assessments bring attention to food insecurity in Montgomery County, MD. These assessments show how systemic and institutional barriers to government assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) further restrict access to healthy food. These assessments also demonstrate how other challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and inflation, have significantly increased the demand for food support, especially among low-income families with children.

ORESJ has previously documented the increased need for food support, particularly for immigrant families and communities in the County that are primarily low-income in the following REIAs:

1. REIA of Supplemental Appropriation Food Security Bridge Funding Proposal <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/FoodSecurity.pdf>
2. REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #22-27 Food Security Bridge Funding Proposal <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-27.pdf>
3. REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #22-79 Bridge Funding for the Food Security Task Force <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-79.pdf>
4. REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #23-25 FY23 Operating Budget Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Supply Chain Assistance (SAC) Fund <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-25.pdf>

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These supplementals improve health, well-being, educational, and economic outcomes for Black and Hispanic residents in Montgomery County. The latest supplemental appropriations offer timely financial support to schools within MCPS experiencing inflation and supply chain delays. Access to school meal programs has become even more vital, providing a crucial safety net for students facing these challenges. Through this support, MCPS will be able to ensure students within MCPS have access to healthy food options. While the supplemental funding does not tackle the root causes of food insecurity, it does provide crucial support to students most in need, mainly Black and Hispanic students.

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Office of Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive  
Monique Felder, Interim Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools