



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

June 23, 2025

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) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #25-87 Urban Agriculture Water and Power Grant

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #25-87 Urban Agriculture Water and Power Grant is likely to advance racial equity and social justice. Grant funds involved with this supplemental appropriation will enable the purchase and installation of water infrastructure for the urban farm at the A. Mario Loiederman Middle School (LMS) Resilience Education, Action, Climate, Habitat (REACH) Hub. Successful installation of the water infrastructure and implementation of the urban farm and REACH Hub programming is likely to help to address a number of inequities: disproportionate climate-related flood risk; a gap in outdoor and environmental education; and food insecurity risk factors that disproportionately harm communities of color and low-income residents.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #25-87 Urban Agriculture Water and Power Grant is to allocate \$122,000 in state funds from the Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program to Montgomery County Public Schools. MCPS is a sub-recipient of the grant made between the Charles Koiner Conservancy and the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The grant program is focused on “helping urban farms and community gardens purchase and install equipment to access water and electricity needed to sustain their operations”¹.

¹ https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/Infrastructure-Grants.aspx

Grant funds will support the installation of water infrastructure at The A. Mario Loiederman Middle School (LMS) Resilience Education, Action, Climate, Habitat (REACH) Hub. In partnership with the Charles Koiner Conservancy Urban Farm, it is estimated that the Hub will serve about 18,000 students (90 percent of whom are estimated by MCPS to be minority² students) from 20 MCPS schools within a two-mile radius.

In October 2024, ORESJ conducted a racial equity impact assessment (REIA) on Supplemental Appropriation #25-25 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grant, which allocated \$500,000 in federal funding for the creation of REACH Hubs within MCPS. In that REIA, ORESJ highlighted how the REACH Hub intends to address racial inequities in flooding hazards and resilience as well as shrink the “Nature Gap”³ and increase access to outdoor and environmental education. Supplemental Appropriation #25-87 will enable the REACH Hub’s progress on these goals by helping the site overcome “a significant hurdle for the success and sustainability of urban farms, [which] can be the challenges and initial costs associated with connecting to water infrastructure”⁴.

III. **ANALYSIS:** REIA #25-25 addressed the intersection of race and inequities in access to environmental and outdoor education as well as the disproportionate climate hazards low-income and BIPOC communities face in Montgomery County. The REACH hub aims to deal with these challenges. The addition of an urban farm, and funding for its water infrastructure is the focus of Supplemental Appropriation #25-87, therefore the remaining analysis will focus on the benefits of urban farming, who the primary beneficiaries of the LMS REACH Hub are, and whether the urban farm is likely widen or shrink racial disparities.

Urban farming involves growing plants and raising animals within and around cities⁵; the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) further defines it: “urban agriculture includes the cultivation, processing, and distribution of agricultural products (food or non-food) in urban and suburban areas. Urban farming can provide

² The term “minority” is used within the source material, so we have kept this language. ORESJ typically uses more specific and asset-based language like “Black Indigenous and People of Color or BIPOC”.

³ Emma Gosalvez. “Nature Gap: Why Outdoor Spaces Lack Diversity and Inclusion”. NC State University College of Natural Resources News. December 14, 2020. Available at: <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2020/12/outdoor-diversityinclusion/> and Jenny Rowland-Shea, Sahir Doshi, Shanna Edberg, and Robert Fanger. “The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America”. The Center for American Progress and Hispanic Access Foundation. Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-nature-gap/>

⁴ Information provided in the RESJ Template.

⁵ <https://attra.ncat.org/publication/urban-agriculture-in-the-united-states-baseline-findings-of-a-nationwide-survey/#1>

environmental, economic, and social benefits to the surrounding communities.”⁶ Specific production practices, sizes, and goals of urban farms vary, but some common benefits include⁷: green space, access to fresh food, community building, and education. Specific farms may be designed to achieve additional goals such as stormwater management, reduction in the urban heat island effect, increased biodiversity and habitat, reduced noise and air pollution, and carbon sequestration⁸. Specific details about the design and goals of the urban farm at the LMS REACH Hub were not available, but responses to the RESJ template state: “by cultivating fresh produce locally, the hub will enhance access to nutritious food options that might otherwise be scarce or too expensive in these areas”. Based on this, other research, and the aims of the REACH hub itself, it’s clear that LMS urban farm aims to increase access to healthy and fresh food for students and the wider community, as well as enable environmental improvements previously identified.

Lack of consistent access to healthy, fresh, and affordable food is a key driver of food insecurity and nutrition-related illness. Food insecurity is defined as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food”⁹. In Montgomery County these conditions affect about 14% of children, but even more live in households without sufficient income to meet their basic needs¹⁰. Poverty rates are often (but not always) an indicator of food insecurity; given the high cost of living in Montgomery County, the self-sufficiency standard is also a good measure. Below is a table comparing median household income and childhood poverty by race, the self-sufficiency standard, and the 2024-2025 FARMS income eligibility for a household of four people:

⁶ <https://www.nal.usda.gov/farms-and-agricultural-production-systems/urban-agriculture>

⁷ <https://attra.ncat.org/publication/urban-agriculture-in-the-united-states-baseline-findings-of-a-nationwide-survey/#2>

⁸ <https://nimss.org/projects/view/mrp/outline/19111>

⁹ https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ofsr/Resources/Files/StrategicPlan2023_rev9signed.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ofsr/Resources/Files/StrategicPlan2023_rev9signed.pdf

Race/ethnicity	Median Household Income 2019 ¹¹	Percent children living below the federal poverty level in 2019 ¹²	Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) 2023 ¹³	FARMS eligibility (below 185% of Federal Poverty Level) 2024-2025 School Year ¹⁴
Asian	\$121,004	8.0%	\$122,943	\$57,720
Black	\$72,617	17.7%		
Latino	\$75,547	14.2%		
White	\$135,635	4.3%		
Other	\$66,870	15.1%		

Data Sources: Author assembled data from multiple sources. Racial Equity Profile Update 2023. MCPS Free and Reduced-Price Meals. The Self Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County 2023.

Based on these data, it is clear that systemic economic inequities have led to racial disparities in food insecurity. Particularly given the gap between the FARMS eligibility (and eligibility for other means tested food assistance programs like SNAP) and the SSS, as well as the prohibition of non-citizens from accessing SNAP and other federal programs. Together these data suggest that lack of access to healthy, fresh, affordable foods and food insecurity risk factors disproportionately impact Black, Latino and other communities of color, particularly those facing language and citizenship status barriers.

According to information accompanying the supplemental appropriation request, the REACH Hub at LMS is located in a Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments (MWCOG) Equity Emphasis Area, signifying a high concentration of historically underserved populations, and is also designated as an Overburdened Community under Maryland House Bill 1200 (HB 1200) due to environmental, economic, and public health vulnerabilities. The location is also considered an overburdened or disadvantaged community as defined by Maryland HB550. In the 2023-2024 school year, LMS enrolled 979 students.

¹¹ “Median Household Income”.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ORE/Resources/Files/JUPITERRACIALEQUITYPROFILE.pdf>

¹² “Child Poverty”.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ORE/Resources/Files/JUPITERRACIALEQUITYPROFILE.pdf>

¹³ [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/MDMontCo2023_SSS\(1\).pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/MDMontCo2023_SSS(1).pdf)

¹⁴ <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/food-and-nutrition/meal-payments/>

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Student Population	Percent participating in Free and Reduced-Price Meals Program (FARMS)	Percent Emergent Multilingual Learner (EML)
American Indian or Alaska Native	<5.0%	<5.0%	<5.0%
Asian	<5.0%	<5.0%	<5.0%
Black or African American	12.2%	6.2%	<5.0%
Hispanic/Latino	65.2%	44.3%	34.1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<5.0%	<5.0%	<5.0%
Two or More Races	<5.0%	<5.0%	<5.0%
White	14.0%	<5.0%	<5.0%

Data Source: MCPS School Profile. A. Loiederman Middle School - #787. 2023-2024 School Year. "Enrollment Data". Available at:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoibWVjZjQ0NTUwLWFkOUMtNTUzYTl2ZDJmY2FkIiwidCI6ImRkZjc1NWU5LWJjZDYtNGE1ZS1hNDcyLTdjMzc4YTc4YzZjNyIsImMiOiF9>

More than 50% of students participate in FARMS and as many as 73% of students participated in the past or at the time of data collection. FARMS participation is primarily made up of Black and Latino students, though there are likely students in other racial groups but at a significantly lower rate (less than 5%). About one-third of Latino students are EML. Based on this data, it is reasonable to conclude that communities most likely to be impacted by food insecurity are the communities most likely to benefit from the water infrastructure investment in the LMS urban farm. Overall, the LMS urban farm could help to address a number of inequities: disproportionate climate-related flood risk; a gap in outdoor and environmental education; and food insecurity risk factors that disproportionately harm communities of color and low-income residents.

cc: Thomas W. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools
Tricia Swanson, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive