



# Maryland Hunger Solutions

*Ending hunger and promoting well-being*

August 10, 2017

Mr. Andrew Smarick, President  
Maryland State Board of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear President Smarick:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on Maryland's ESSA plan. As you may be aware, Maryland Hunger Solutions is a non-profit, non-partisan organization working to end hunger in our state.

I am writing to encourage the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to include language in Maryland's ESSA plan that will promote increasing access and participation in the federal nutrition programs, particularly the school, summer, and afterschool nutrition programs. These programs are critical education supports, ensuring that students are well-nourished and able to focus, concentrate, and learn. Increasing student participation in these programs can help SEAs and LEAs meet the goals of ESSA.

## **Access to Nutrition and Student Success**

An extensive body of research demonstrates the negative impact of food insecurity on student academic and health outcomes and the role of the federal nutrition programs in reducing food insecurity. Ensuring students have access to nutritious meals through the child nutrition programs is an effective intervention that not only sets our students up for academic success but ensures they receive the nutrition they need to be healthy.

- The School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs ensure that students start their school day ready to learn and are able to remain focused and concentrate throughout the school day. The School Breakfast Program is linked to improved academic achievement and test scores; and reduced absenteeism, tardiness, and behavioral referrals. Yet, according to the Food Research and Action Center's annual School Breakfast Scorecard, our state serves only 47% low-income students for every 100 who participate in school lunch.
- The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides meals during the summer months often supporting educational and enrichment activities that can help counter summer learning loss. The meals can help draw children into quality summer programming and contribute to healthy growth and development during a time when food insecurity goes up. The program serves only 20% of low-income students for every 100 who participate in school lunch during the school year, leaving a huge summer nutrition gap.



- Afterschool meals help support student health and academic achievement by providing nutritious meals and snacks during educational and enrichment programming after school, on weekends, and during school holidays. The meals help combat hunger and improve nutrition and help draw students into afterschool educational and enrichment activities.

Maryland can take a proactive approach towards increasing participation in the federal school, summer, and afterschool nutrition programs, similar to the steps that are outlined in Oklahoma's state plan. It recognizes increasing participation in the federal nutrition programs and leveraging out-of-school time to address food insecurity among students as a necessary academic intervention. It also sets goals for increasing participation in each of the child nutrition programs.

Maryland's plan would benefit from additional language encouraging access to the child nutrition programs. The Maryland State Department of Education and numerous local educational agencies have been integral to the successes that have been made. Maryland Hunger Solutions requests that MSDE incorporate the following language, which urges LEAs to adopt best practices to maximize participation in the child nutrition programs:

***Increase Access to School Breakfast and Lunch:***

- Conduct outreach to all eligible schools to inform them of the benefits of electing community eligibility. Community eligibility allows high-poverty schools to offer school meals at no cost to all students and dramatically increases student participation in school breakfast and lunch.
- Encourage schools to implement breakfast after the bell models, especially breakfast in the classroom, in all schools that have adopted community eligibility and in schools with 70 percent or more students are certified for free and reduced-price meals.
- Improve and support direct certification systems. Strong direct certification results in easier implementation of community eligibility.
- Increase funding for Maryland's widely respected school breakfast program, Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) so that all eligible schools can participate.

***Increase Access to the Summer Food Service Program:***

- Urge LEAs to sponsor summer sites at schools and community-based sites.
- Conduct outreach to let families know where their children can access summer meals.

***Increase Access to Afterschool Meals:***

- Encourage LEAs to provide meals and snacks at educational and enrichment programming after school, on weekends, and during school holidays.
- Connect with emergency shelters that provide housing for students and encourage them to provide meals through the CACFP option for homeless and domestic violence shelters.

***Implement Best Practices:***

- Utilize best practice models from other states to improve participation.
- Share best practice models within the state.

ESSA directs SEAs and LEAs to utilize evidence-based interventions to improve student outcomes, therefore Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly encourages the inclusion of language that promotes access to child nutrition programs in Maryland's ESSA plan.

Thank you for your consideration of these views. We look forward to continuation to work with you, MSDE, local education agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure the best outcomes for Maryland students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. J. Wilson", written over a light gray circular watermark.

Michael J. Wilson