



December 18, 2015

Dear DCPS Families,

DC Public Schools (DCPS) is always looking for ways we can do things better – both inside and outside of the classroom. We recognize that the food your child receives at school each day from our food service providers is an important part of supporting their learning, and making sure they get the best food and service available is a priority. To make sure we keep improving, DCPS is going to develop a new food service contract with one or more new food service providers for school year 2016-2017.

The first step in that process is releasing what is called a “Request for Proposals,” or RFP, so interested food service providers can reply and let us know they want to work with DCPS. We posted our RFP for this contract this week. Then, over the next few months, vendors will share their proposals for why they would be the best food service provider for our students. DCPS will evaluate all of the proposals (with help from some lucky student taste testers!) and pick new food service providers in the spring.

We have spent a great deal of time over the last year talking with and surveying students, families, and others across all eight Wards to learn what the community would like to see in their school meals, and we want to take this opportunity to share the results of those conversations. We are proud to say that thanks to your input, we have added new requirements to the RFP that will help us make sure the food service providers selected for next year will better serve our students.

Here are a few examples of the new ideas we got from all of you:

- Satisfaction:
Vendors will be required to create a plan each year for how they will make sure students like the food they are served, and just like a report card, each vendor will have to share how they are doing every quarter. DCPS will measure food quality, menu offerings, customer service, student engagement, and other areas on these food report cards.
- Local Partnerships:
We know there are good ingredients, people, and groups right here in DC. Vendors will be required to work with DC businesses or DC community-based organizations that work on improving food and nutrition whenever possible.
- Staffing:
It is important that every school has the right number of people working in their kitchen and serving students. DCPS will set the number of staff required for each school based on each school’s unique needs. DCPS will also require that the current staff at each school be retained for at least 90 days to ensure a smooth transition.
- Training:
While we know many of the food service staff members in schools are great, the training they receive could be better. Every food service provider will have to provide more specific, detailed training on customer service, food quality, cooking skills, and other topics.

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- Consequences of Poor Performance:
We are confident that by entering into a new contract we will see our food service improve. If there are problems though, we have developed a plan for penalizing the vendors that do something wrong. Depending on how severe the issues are, we could withhold payment or schools may be reassigned to another vendor as a result of poor performance.
 - Waste Reduction:
A bunch of food ending up in the trash is a clear sign that students don't like the food they were served, and it's bad for the environment. The new food service providers will implement a new system at elementary schools where students are *offered* all 5 items on the menu but only have to take the 3 or more things that they like instead of being required to take all 5. Students will also be able to take double portions of the things they like if they don't select all five items.
 - Community-Based Food Organizations, Gardening & Nutrition Education:
We know from all of you that students like healthy food more if they know where it comes from or get to help make it. We will require all vendors to integrate school gardens and food and nutrition programs at schools that have these things and partner with community-based healthy food programs such as FRESHFARM Markets FoodPrints Program.

We will be following up in the coming months to keep the community informed on the progression in our new vendor selection, and we look forward to continuing to hear your feedback. As new information is available, we will look for feedback via the EngageDCPS.org website, social media, or electronic/paper surveys.

I want to thank all of the students, parents, families and community members that took the time to participate in this process so far. We are very excited about these changes and our ability to better meet the needs of our students. We are DCPS, and we can do this!

Sincerely,



Nathaniel Beers
Chief Operating Officer
District of Columbia Public Schools