

Response to Questions on the FY 2012 Budget

Request By: Board of Supervisors

Question: The number of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals is up 42 percent since 2006, to the point that now one in every four students in the County school system is in that category according to FCPS budget documents. This seems counterintuitive in a county with the highest average household income in the nation and less than 5 percent unemployment.

Here are some questions that might help us understand this better:

1. What is happening that causes this trend?
2. What are the criteria for eligibility?
3. Is this (1 in 4) a higher or lower percentage of the school population than other school systems in Virginia? How much?

Response: The following response was prepared by the Fairfax County Public Schools:

The Free and Reduced-Price Meals Program (FRM) is the fastest growing program for students with additional needs in the school system. Families qualifying for the FRM program must meet established federal guidelines of income and household size. In FY 2012, the number of students eligible for FRM services is projected to be 45,170, or 25.5 percent of all students.

Given the nature of the FRM application, we cannot respond conclusively as to the exact causes of this trend. Anecdotally, the Office of Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) has observed the following:

- Each year, the state of Virginia sends the FNS a master list of students in families receiving aid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These students automatically qualify for free meals and do not have to complete an application. Students receiving free meals in the division through this program have doubled in number to 10,500 since FY 2006.
- Homeless students automatically receive free meals, and the number of students in this category increased by over 200 students from October 2009 through October 2010.
- With consistently higher food, gasoline, and unemployment rates, many parents and guardians who bring applications to the FNS office report that they have lost their jobs.

A copy of the annual letter from Dr. Dale sent to parents and guardians each August is attached to this response. Federal guidelines for eligibility are:

- Automatically receiving free meals: food stamp, SNAP, and TANF program participants, and homeless students
- Free meal applicants: 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (Currently \$28,665 for a family of four)

- Reduced-price meal applicants: 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines

The state compiles comparison information on total FRM eligibility percentages across school divisions. All Virginia school divisions can be found on the Virginia Department of Education website: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/statistics/index.shtml>.

The most recent comparable information is for school year 2009-2010. During this timeframe, FCPS has 24.76 percent of its students eligible for FRM. This percentage was the third lowest out of a total of eight school districts in Northern Virginia. FCPS' FRM percentage is also the 16th lowest percentage out of a total of 132 Virginia school divisions, and is lower than the average school division total of 37.02 percent. The highest percentage of FRM school divisions was Sussex County Public Schools with 79.69 percent.

School Division	SNP Membership	Free Eligibility	Free %	Reduced Eligibility	Reduced %	Total F/R Elig	Total F/R %
Falls Church City Public Schools	1,994	102	5.12%	49	2.46%	151	7.57%
Loudoun County Public Schools	60,735	6,526	10.75%	2,310	3.80%	8,836	14.55%
Fairfax County Public Schools	170,464	32,539	19.09%	9,665	5.67%	42,204	24.76%
Arlington County Public Schools	20,424	5,464	26.75%	1,418	6.94%	6,882	33.70%
Prince William County Public Schools	77,054	20,109	26.10%	6,507	8.44%	26,616	34.54%
Manassas City Public Schools	6,848	2,651	38.71%	562	8.21%	3,213	46.92%
Manassas Park City Public Schools	2,714	1,113	41.01%	203	7.48%	1,316	48.49%
Alexandria City Public Schools	11,501	4,949	43.03%	1,316	11.44%	6,265	54.47%
<i>State School Division Totals</i>	<i>1,220,362</i>	<i>365,467</i>	<i>29.95%</i>	<i>86,349</i>	<i>7.08%</i>	<i>451,816</i>	<i>37.02%</i>

Not included in the Virginia statewide data, Montgomery County Public Schools' FRM percentage for the school year 2009-2010 was 29.26 percent (Source: Maryland Department of Education; <http://www.msde.maryland.gov/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/docs/Free+and+Reduced-Price+Meal+Data>).



Jack D. Dale, Superintendent

FAIRFAX COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

August 9, 2010

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Children need healthy meals to learn. Fairfax County Public Schools offer nutritious meals every day. Lunch prices will be \$2.65 for elementary students, \$2.75 for middle, high, and secondary school students. Breakfast, where offered is priced at \$1.50. Meals are also available free or at a reduced price for eligible students.

All meals served must meet standards established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. However, if a child has been determined by a doctor to be disabled and the disability prevents the student from eating the regular school meal, the school will make substitutions prescribed by the doctor. If a substitution is prescribed, there will be no extra charge for the meal. If your student needs substitutions because of a disability, contact the Office of Food and Nutrition Services at 703-813-4800.

Children who are members of a household receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, (formerly the Food Stamps Program) or who receive Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) are eligible for free meals regardless of income. Children who are members of households participating in WIC may also be eligible for free or reduced priced meals based on the household's income.

FEDERAL INCOME GUIDELINES: Your child(ren) may be eligible for free meals or meals at a reduced price if your household income is within the limits on the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines. If your total household income is at or below the federal income guidelines your children may be eligible for free lunch and breakfast or lunch at the reduced price of 40 cents and breakfast at the reduced price of 30 cents. Your child(ren)'s application from last school year is only good for the first few days of this school year. You must send in a new family application for this school year. Please refer to the application instructions regarding foster children.

Households that are receiving SNAP benefits or TANF for their children may not have to fill out an application. School officials will notify you of your child(ren)'s eligibility and they will be provided free benefits, unless you tell the school that you do not want benefits. If you are not notified by August 16, 2010 submit an application. The application must contain the child's name, the SNAP or TANF number, and the signature of an adult household member.

If you are eligible and feel a need for such assistance, complete the confidential household application and **return it in the pre-addressed envelope to the Office of Food and Nutrition Services, 6840 Industrial Road, Springfield, Virginia, 22151**. If you do not list a SNAP or TANF case number for the child(ren) you are applying for, then the application must have the names of all students, the names of all other household members, the amount of income each person received last month, and how often the income is received. An adult household member must sign the application and include his/her social security number. If the person does not have a social security number, check the box provided. You or your children do not have to be U.S. citizens to qualify for free or reduced priced meals. You may apply for free and reduced price meals any time during the school year. An application that is not complete cannot be approved. An application that is not signed is not complete.

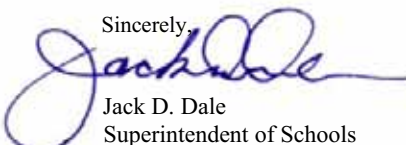
Your child(ren) may be eligible for other benefits such as the Virginia children's health insurance program called Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS) and/or Medicaid. The law allows the school division to share your free and reduced price meal eligibility information with Medicaid and FAMIS. These programs can only use the information to identify children who may be eligible for free or low-cost health insurance, and to enroll them into either Medicaid or FAMIS. These agencies are not allowed to use the information from your free or reduced price meal application for any other purpose. Medicaid officials or officials with FAMIS may contact you to get more information. You are not required to allow us to share this information with the Medicaid or FAMIS program. Your decision will not affect your children's eligibility for free and reduced price meals. If you do not want your information shared, please check the appropriate box in Section 5 of the application. You may qualify for other assistance. To find out how to apply for SNAP or other assistance programs, contact the local social service office in your area.

School officials use the information on the application to determine if your child is eligible to receive free or reduced priced meals and to verify eligibility. As authorized by the National School Lunch Act, the school division may inform officials connected with other child nutrition, health, and education programs of the information on your application to determine benefits for those programs or for the funding and/or evaluation purposes.

The Office of Food and Nutrition Services may check the information on the application at any time during the school year. You may be asked to send information to prove that your child(ren) should receive free or reduced price meals, the information you provide will be treated confidentially and will be used only to determine eligibility and to verify data.

You will be notified by letter of the approval or denial of this application. If you do not agree with the decision on your application or the result of the verification, you may contact the coordinator, administrative services, at telephone 703-813-4800. You also have the right to a fair hearing. This can be arranged by writing Ms. Penny McConnell, R.D., director, Office of Food and Nutrition Services, 6840 Industrial Road, Springfield, Virginia, 22151. If you need assistance with completing this application or have questions, contact the Office of Food and Nutrition Services at 703-813-4800.

Sincerely,



Jack D. Dale
Superintendent of Schools

JDD/fc

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