



2018-19 School Food Environment Grades

New Report Card Grades Maryland School Districts' Commitment to Improving Nutrition and Ensuring Access to Safe Water in Schools

June 25, 2019

On Healthy School Food Maryland's third release of our [School Food Environment Grades](#) for the 24 public school districts in Maryland, there was an 84-point overall increase in grades statewide. This translates to an 8% overall improvement since 2016. Since we began issuing the grades, there has been consistent incremental progress. In collaboration with Friends of the Earth, we added a category on the availability of healthy vegetarian and plant-based options this year, because students and their families are increasingly asking for healthy, plant-rich options. We found that school districts earned 45% of possible points for this category, on average. Top marks this year again went to Howard County Public Schools, the only district to receive an A+, followed again by Anne Arundel (A from A-) in 2nd place, improving half a letter grade over last year. Frederick, Kent and Saint Mary's Counties and Baltimore City tied for 3rd place. Frederick also impressed us with their commitment to Farm to School, by developing a comprehensive Action Plan to integrate locally grown fruits and vegetables into all FCPS meals. Congratulations also to Baltimore City, which raised its grade from B to B+, due to overall improvement and because it was the only school district to score 4 out of 4 for plant-based options. Montgomery County also climbed 2 spots in the rankings and improved its grade from a C+ to a B! The state's remaining largest school districts, Baltimore County (B-) and Prince George's County (D) raised their raw scores, but didn't improve as much as other counties did, which affected their ranking.



School Food Environment Grades 2018- 2019

The grades are based on a [rubric](#) of 13 items, with scores ranging from 0-4, which address parent and public health concerns related to school food and wellness, such as reducing sugar; access to potable water and water bottles; farm to school programs; salad bars and cut up fruit; use of artificial colors, flavors and other chemical additives; scratch cooking; availability of plant-based and vegetarian options; variety and repetition of meals; healthier vending options; transparency; wellness committees; policies on food and beverage marketing; and availability of vegetarian and plant-based options.

Rubric areas with notable score increases since last year include: À la Carte Transparency (up 9 points); General Transparency (up 4 points); Farm to School Programs (up 8 points); Food and Beverage Marketing Programs (up 7 points); and 43 points (45% of possible points) earned statewide in the new category, Vegetarian and Plant-based Options.

o **Vegetarian and Plant-based Options:** We added this rubric category in partnership with Friends of the Earth. Demand for healthy vegetarian and plant-based options has been rising, both from families who follow these diets for religious, ethical, or health reasons, but also from parents and kids who are omnivores but want more meatless options. According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, on average, kids are eating far fewer vegetables, fruits, legumes, and other plant-based foods than is recommended. Offering more healthy plant-focused meals can improve the well-being of students and is also better for the environment. Congratulations to Baltimore City for achieving the top score in this category by offering plant-based options like falafel on flatbread, veggie burgers, hummus plates, and salad bars every day. To learn more about strategies for scaling up plant-based school food offerings, visit <https://foe.org/projects/school-food-purchasing/>

Another concern is elevated lead levels in water in some district schools and the steps schools are taking to protect schoolchildren. Only two counties--Frederick and Kent Counties--obtained the highest score for expressly allowing personal water bottles and putting water bottles on their school supply lists. Other districts have either done nothing, or worse, forbidden students from bringing personal water bottles to school. Dr. Mia Sidhu, pediatrician and HSFM Board Member says, "Most schools have some lead in their plumbing or fixtures; and since we now know that even very low levels of lead in blood can cause cognitive, behavioral, and other health problems, students should be allowed and encouraged to access water at certified filtered filling stations."

While most of the items on the rubric are under the control of food services leadership, at least two rubric areas are decided at a higher level. This includes rubric items about wellness committees or school health councils, their composition, power and transparency; and policies on junk food marketing included in district-wide wellness policies, required under the Healthy, Hunger-free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA).

School Food Environment Grades Statewide Summary				
District	2017	2018	Curved Percentage	Grade
Howard	36	40	100%	A+
Anne Arundel	32	37	94%	A
Baltimore City	28	32	87%	B+
Kent	28	32	87%	B+
Saint Mary's	28	32	87%	B+
Frederick	29	32	87%	B+
Calvert	27	31	85%	B
Montgomery	25	31	85%	B
Charles	27	30	81%	B-
Harford	23	29.5	80%	B-
Baltimore	28	29	80%	B-
Cecil	15	28	79%	C+
Carroll	23	27	75%	C
Talbot	21	27	75%	C
Dorchester	21	25	71%	C-
Washington	24	24	69%	D+
Queen Anne's	22	23	67%	D+
Caroline	20	23	67%	D+
Somerset	17	23	67%	D+
Wicomico	22	23	67%	D+
Prince George's	18	22	65%	D
Allegany	20	21	63%	D
Garrett	15	21	62%	D
Worcester	15	18	58%	F

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