Salad Bars in Schools

MCPS has salad bars in about 20 of its 202 schools, many of the elementary schools. Why is a salad bar a good idea, and is it appropriate for an elementary school? The latest data from the CDC shows that only 24% of high school students in Montgomery County eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Healthy eating habits develop early, so what better time to start encouraging children to try new items with the freedom to select what appeals to them than in elementary school? It’s also great for the district, as it increases student participation in school lunch. In the Riverside Unified School District in California, Director of Nutrition Services Rodney Taylor (who now works for the Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia) put salad bars into every elementary school. The result – seven straight years of increasing revenue by $1 million dollars per year. Once a salad bar skeptic, where Taylor used to see obstacles, he now sees possibilities, writing off administrators’ concerns by stating that those obstacles exist only in the minds of adults.

One way Taylor encourages children to eat more fruits and vegetables is by sending them through the salad bar first. Adults help children choose “colorful foods” and when they get to the end of the line and they have a colorful plate, they get a sticker that says, “I have a rainbow in my tummy”. The entrée is the last thing they receive. Closer to home, at DC Bilingual, a public charter school in DC, they offer a salad bar for preschoolers and up. Food & Nutrition Director Bea Zuluaga explained that once the children are taught salad bar etiquette, they have no problem using it properly. Multiple studies have shown that introducing a salad bar increases the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables that children consume. Another great reason for a salad bar is because it draws school staff and teachers into the lunch room, setting a good example for the children. If you’re interested in this issue, go to [www.realfoodforkidsmontgomery.org/school\_reps](http://www.realfoodforkidsmontgomery.org/school_reps) and look for your child’s school. If there’s an RFKM representative at your school, then contact them. If not, and you are interested in serving as a representative for RFKM at your child’s school, contact us at realfoodmcps@gmail.com. We could use your help to advocate for salad bars in MCPS schools!