

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
School Meal Nutrition Standards Commission (SMNSC)

Wednesday, November 20, 2024

8:45 AM – Remote Meeting

Commission Members:

- Co-Chairs:
 - Rachel Colchamiro, Director, Nutrition Division and Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program, Department of Public Health
 - Robert Leshin, Director, Office for Food and Nutrition Programs, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Legislators:
 - Senator Jason Lewis
 - Representative Andy Vargas
- Governor Appointees:
 - Jessie Curran, Sustainability and Wellness Manager, Sodexo
 - Aminah Herzig, School Programs Manager, Healthy Chelsea
 - Wendy Ng, Director of Food Services, Gloucester Public Schools
 - Sasha Palmer, Director of Food Services, Public Schools of Brookline
 - Kumara Sidhartha, Chief Health Equity and Wellness Officer, Cape Cod Healthcare
- Advocates:
 - Beth-Ann Farrow, MA Healthy School Lunch Coalition
 - Sam Icklan, Director of Community Nutrition Services, Project Bread
 - Sarah Littmann, Representative of the School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts

Absent: None

Other Attendees: Sophia Apostola, Denise Courtney, Julia Fone, Nicole Good, Diana Hoek, Terri Mendoza, Karen Robitaille, Claire Santarelli, and several unnamed members of the public.

Call to order: Co-Chair Rachel Colchamiro called the meeting to order at 8:45 AM with a roll call attendance.

Swearing In: Julia Fone, Governor’s Office, conducted oath for governor’s appointees. Quorum met.

Open Meeting Law Training: Conducted by Sophia Apostola, Deputy General Counsel, Department of Public Health.

Introduction and Purpose of Commission: Rachel Colchamiro (Co-chair) reviewed [Section 77](#), School Meals Standards Commission. “(a) There shall be a commission for the purposes of studying nutrition standards and guidelines for school meals served in K-12 public schools in the commonwealth and developing recommendations for improvements to nutrition content. The commission shall review: (i) current federal nutrition standards and the updates proposed on February 7, 2023 to 7 CFR Parts 210, 215, 220, 225 and 226 by the United States Department of Agriculture; (ii) current nutrition standards or guidelines used by K-12 schools in the commonwealth; (iii) nutrition requirements or best practices of states with enhanced standards beyond federal requirements; and (iv) nutrition standards determined to prevent chronic disease and optimize the short-term and long-term health of children in the

Commonwealth. The commission shall make recommendations on the feasibility of implementing measures to increase the nutrition of school foods, including, but not limited to: (A) enhancing standards for food served at schools in the commonwealth, including, but not limited to, the sugar content, dietary fiber content, limits of saturated fat and cholesterol in and ultra-processing of products; (B) providing clearly-labeled daily vegetarian or vegan options; (C) accommodating religious, cultural, medical and non-medical dietary restrictions, including, but not limited to, food allergies and lactose intolerance; and (D) requiring food service providers to provide information to schools on the nutritional content of menu items and the location where the purchased produce is grown and processed.”

Summary of presentation by DESE’s Office of Food and Nutrition Programs reviewing sections (i), (ii), and (iv) of Section 77:

Organizational Structure and Administration of the National School Lunch Program: Presented by Robert Leshin, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

- Congress/President of the United States sets laws, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) implements these laws through regulations.
- USDA’s Food and Nutrition Services supports states implementing the regulations.
- DESE’s Office for Food and Nutrition Programs oversees compliance with school regulations.
- MA is only 1 of 8 states supporting universal free school meals with state funding. As a result, school breakfast and lunch participation is at an all-time high in the state.
 - 61,500 more students are eating lunch every school day.
 - 12 million more lunches and 9 million more breakfasts are being served annually compared to School Year 2018-2019.
- DESE’s Educational Vision aligns with school nutrition programs, which provide access to healthy, safe, and local foods that support the whole child.

School Meal Nutrition Standards and Meals Served in MA Schools: Presented by Denise Courtney, DESE.

Meal Patterns: The rules and requirements of meals in federal child nutrition programs.

- Meal patterns are driven by most current Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Meal Pattern includes specific age-appropriate requirements.
- Nutrition Standards are always evolving, and there are currently [updated federal standards](#) being phased in:
 - Reduced added sugars
 - Reduced sugars in milk
 - Reduced sodium
 - 80% whole grains
- Eating school meals associated with [healthier dietary intakes](#)
 - Children who ate school breakfast daily compared to children who ate 0–4 days/week reported consuming more fruits/vegetables, dietary fiber, whole grains, dairy, and calcium.
- In SY23-24, MA launched “Terrific Trays,” an initiative in which schools submit pictures of their meals along with recipes that highlight locally grown ingredients.

Opportunities for Growth

- Seat time: currently, no state minimum time for lunch. Students can have anywhere from 15-25 minutes for lunch. This includes travel time from classroom to lunchroom.
- Consumption: Balancing varied student needs/preferences with general nutrition recommendations /operational limitations.

Culinary Advancement

- Since the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010, schools have been steadily advancing their culinary capacity.
- Significance of School Meals for All
 - Increased investment in local foods and provided consistent funding.
- Schools are doing more “scratch cooking”; however, this requires additional workforce training and improved/newer kitchen equipment.

Opportunities for Growth

- Adequate Staffing: Recruitment and retention.
- Capital investments: Renovations to kitchens and serving lines to support scratch cooking.
- Training: Front-line staff culinary skills, local procurement processes.

Dietary Accommodations

- Modifications within the Meal Pattern: If a meal modification for a child's disability can be made within the meal pattern, a medical statement is not necessary, and the Program Operator is not required to obtain a medical statement.
- Modifications Outside of the Meal Pattern: Meal modifications outside the meal pattern are reimbursable, with an IEP, 504, or medical statement that includes only:
 - Information about the child's physical or mental impairment that is sufficient to allow the Program Operator/SFA to understand how it restricts the child's diet,
 - An explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability, and
 - The food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives in the case of a modified meal.
- Information available to students/parents on food allergies and gluten-free procedures, informed by a collaboration with DESE, Boston Children's Hospital, and the Celiac Disease Foundation.
- DESE has provided intense support for over 3 years to increase access to Kosher/Halal meals.

Opportunities for Growth

- Improved communication with parents/caregivers on the availability of dietary accommodations.
- Expand awareness of Kosher/Halal meals, including increasing training for school nutrition professionals.

Food Systems Integrating with School Meals

- School Meals are 100% American Grown.
- MA is a national best practice for local purchasing.
- MA is above the national average for local food in child nutrition programs.

Opportunities for Growth

- Lack of standardization in the supply chain of how sourcing information is communicated/recorded.

- Support procurement process for schools and farms.

Facilitated Discussion

Facilitated discussion with Commission members identified several key considerations when assessing the school nutrition environment, including:

- Individual school capacity
- Supporting schools for success
- Consideration of dietary fiber
- Consideration of milk and vegetarian options to meet dietary needs and cultural/religious preferences
- Importance of sufficient seat time
- Timing of recess
- Need to promote workforce development and retention
- Need to align recommendations with health equity efforts
- Consideration of how existing efforts and policies are meeting needs
- Consideration of any unintended consequences of recommendations

Next Steps

- Commission members can submit helpful resources, additional comments, suggestions to the agenda, etc., to co-chairs via email.
- The goal of this Commission is to prepare a report by the end of March. The Commission can't set standards but can make recommendations in the report.

Adjourned at 10:51 am, on motion of Kumara Sidharath, seconded by Juliana Cohen. Commission to meet again on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, at 9:00 am.

Documents Used During Discussion:

- SMNSC Slide Deck