

**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