



January 6, 2021

Dr. Alvin Thornton
Chair, Prince George's County Board of Education
14201 School Lane
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

Re: Support of Adoption of a Resolution Committing to Implementation of a Climate Change Action Plan Focus Workgroup

Dear Dr. Thornton,

Prince George's County Food Equity Council is writing in support of adoption by the Prince George's County School Board of a clear timeline to reduce the amount of food that enters the waste stream, increase the use of alternative food disposal means such as composting, and reduce food-related emissions by 25% by 2030 through reducing food waste and shifting to plant-rich menus. We are also writing in support of initiation of a Focus Workgroup to develop a School Climate Change Action Plan that will outline how to implement these goals in a timely, cost-effective, and equitable manner.

Since 2013, our council has been a voice for County residents at the policymaking table, tackling hunger, diet-related chronic disease, food deserts, and advocating for strides in urban farming and locally grown food.

Composting is a great way to convert a school's food scraps and yard waste into a valuable, natural fertilizer that can then be added to school gardens and lawns. It also can significantly reduce methane emissions. Composting at schools can also help students understand concepts such as decomposition and energy cycles while reducing the amount of organic material going to landfills.

The proposed provisions to shift toward climate-friendly menus will have significant benefits for student health. Nearly half of Prince George's County youth (48%) are overweight and at risk for obesity, with research showing that poor access to healthy foods and low levels of physical activity prevail as the main causes for obesity in Prince George's County.¹ Plant-based diets have been linked to a number of health benefits, including reducing the risk of heart disease, certain cancers, obesity, diabetes, and cognitive decline.² Plant-forward menus low in dairy are also culturally appropriate for our student population since most people of color cannot process lactose. Most children attend school for 6 hours a day and consume as much as half of their daily calories at school, so healthy school meals are a direct point of intervention

¹ Health Department Prince George's County. (2020, January). *2020 Youth Obesity Fact Sheet*.
<https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=141>

² Turner-McGrievy, G., Mandes, T., & Crimarco, A. (2017). A plant-based diet for overweight and obesity prevention and treatment. *Journal of geriatric cardiology : JGC*, *14*(5), 369–374.
<https://doi.org/10.11909/j.issn.1671-5411.2017.05.002>



to improve health outcomes.³ Further, a healthy school nutrition environment is important to establish a lifetime of healthy eating patterns.

From a climate standpoint, transitioning to plant-forward menus is also a crucial strategy for reducing greenhouse gases.⁴ For Prince George's County to be a leader on addressing climate change, shifting the food we serve from the biggest public food purchaser in the county - PGCPS - is critical.

In summary, we believe that the Prince George's County School Board should adopt a resolution committing to implementation of a climate change action plan focus workgroup to implement these and other climate mitigation goals. Thank you for considering our position.

Sincerely,

Julia Groenfeldt, Interim Director
Prince George's County Food Equity Council

CC: Edward Burroughs III, Vice Chair, District 8
David Murray, District 1
Joshua M. Thomas, District 2
Pamela Boozer-Strother, District 3
Bryan Swann, District 4
Shayla Adams-Stafford, District 4 Elect
Raaheela Ahmed, District 5
Belinda Queen, District 6
K. Alexander Wallace, District 7
Kenneth Harris II, District 7 Elect
Sonya Williams, District 9
Paul Monteiro, Appointed
Sandra D. Shephard, Appointed
Curtis Valentine, M.P.P., Appointed
Ninah Jackson, Student Member of the Board

³ *School Nutrition Environment | Healthy Schools | CDC.* (2019, May 29). CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/schoolnutrition.htm>

⁴ Sabaté, J., & Soret, S. (2014). Sustainability of plant-based diets: back to the future. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 100(suppl_1), 476S-482S. <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.113.071522>