



Montgomery County, MD Strategic Plan to End **Childhood Hunger**

FARM Policy Committee Meeting
October 13, 2023



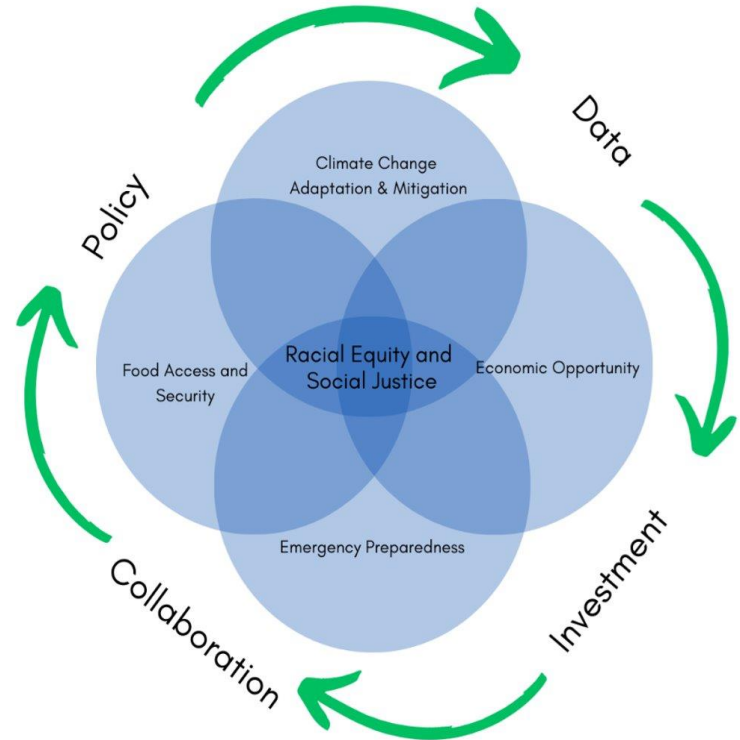
Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR)

Our Mission: To develop and implement interagency budgetary, regulatory, and operational strategies to build a more equitable, efficient, resilient, and sustainable food system in Montgomery County.

Resilience: *The capability of individuals, communities, and the County to withstand and rapidly recover from food system disruptions, stresses, and changes.*

OFSR BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

- Established by County Council under Bill 20-22 at the request of the County Executive
- **Purpose:** Streamline and coordinate cross-sector efforts to address food system challenges, with data-driven approaches rooted in equity and innovation.





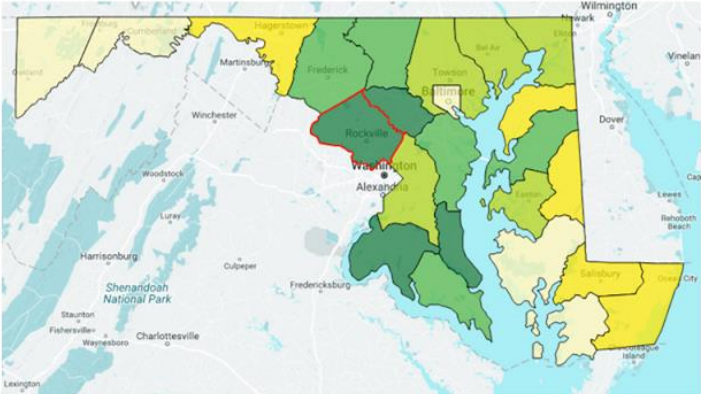
Mission & Vision

MCFC builds an equitable, resilient and sustainable local food system through collaboration, transformation, and cultivation.

MCFC envisions a vibrant and equitable food system that is healthy for our community, economy, and environment.



Our scope
County food policy, practices,
and programs within the context
of state, region, nation, and global



Our tools



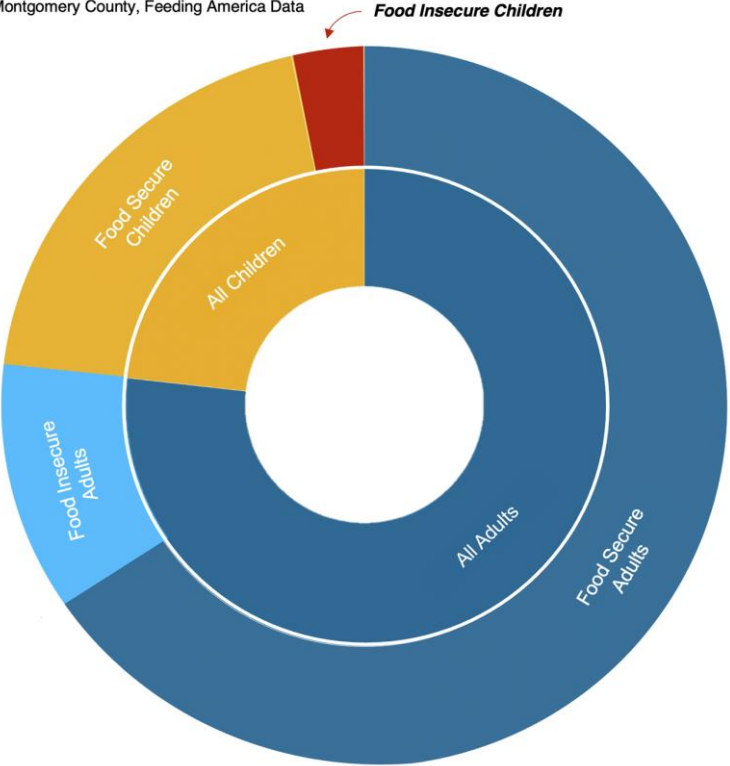
policy + education +
community engagement +
advocacy + partnerships +
evaluation



Background: Creating the Plan

Measuring Childhood Food Insecurity

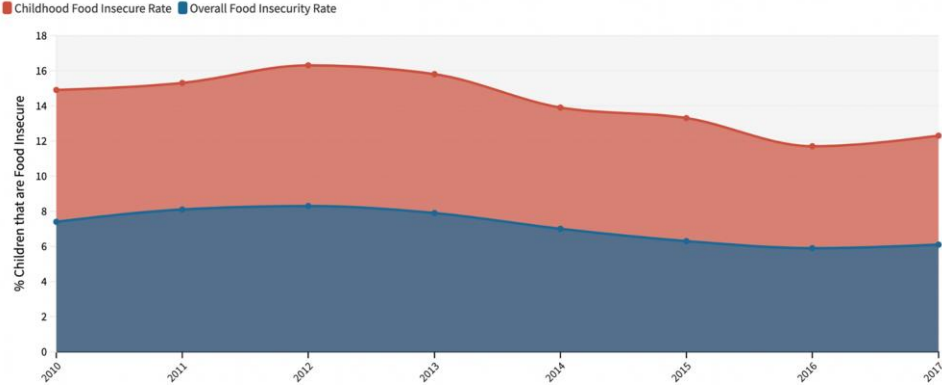
2020 Food Insecurity Breakdown
Montgomery County, Feeding America Data



Feeding America Data, 2020

14%
of all
Children
(33,840
kids)

Historic Food Insecurity Rate Among Children
Montgomery County, Feeding America Data



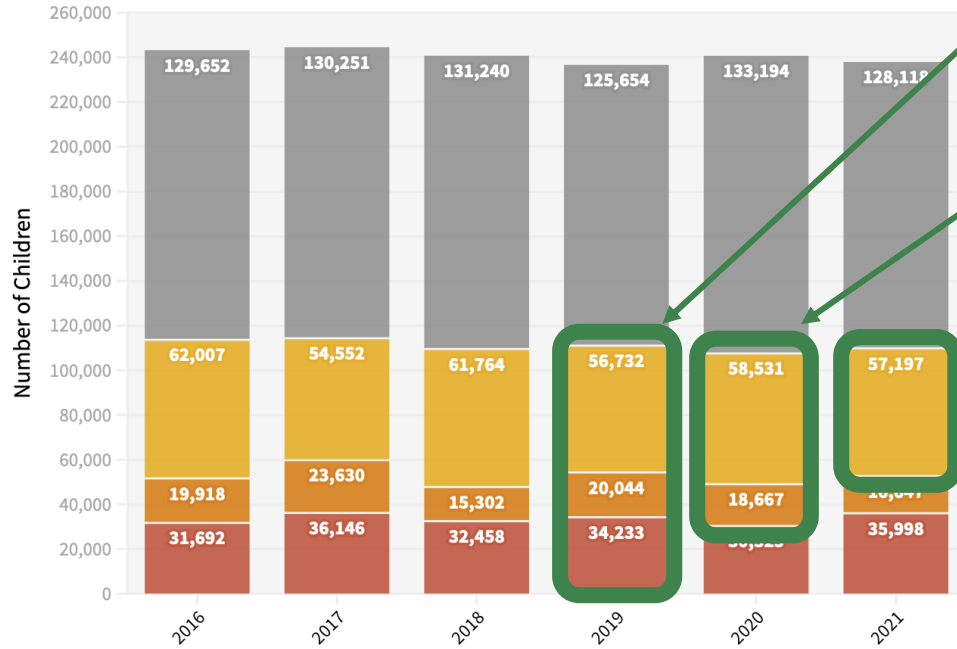
Source: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, M. Kato, A. Crumbaugh & M. Strayer. Map the Meal Gap 2019: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2017. Feeding America, 2019.

Gundersen, C., M. Hake, A. Dewey, E. Engelhard (2021). The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021, Update March 2021 [Data file and FAQ]. Available from Feeding America: research@feedingamerica.org.

Considering Household Income

Children by Ratio of Household Income to Poverty Level Over Time

■ Below 130% of Poverty* ■ Below 185% of Poverty Level ■ 185% - 400% of Poverty Level ■ Above 400%



In 2021, **110k** children living in HHs below Self Sufficiency Standard ...

... but, **73.8k** children in HHs with income too high to get SNAP ...

... and, **57k** children in HHs with income too high to get free school meals or WIC.

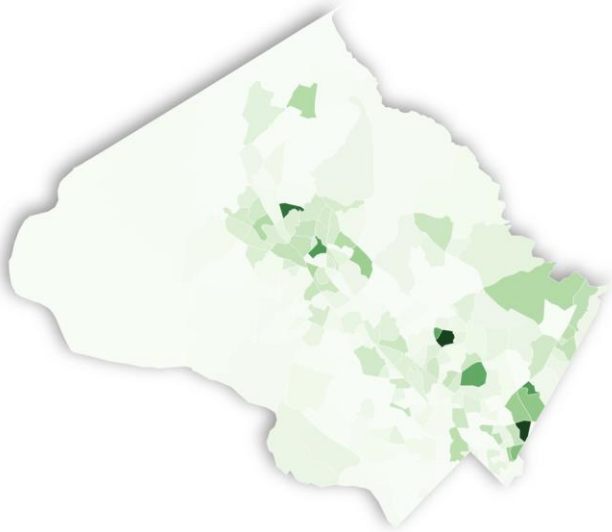
Source: US Census, American Community Survey, Table B17024. (2021) • *Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

Mapping Household Income

Too much income for SNAP, but less than self sufficient

Children in Households with income between 130% and 400% of Poverty Level

1 1129

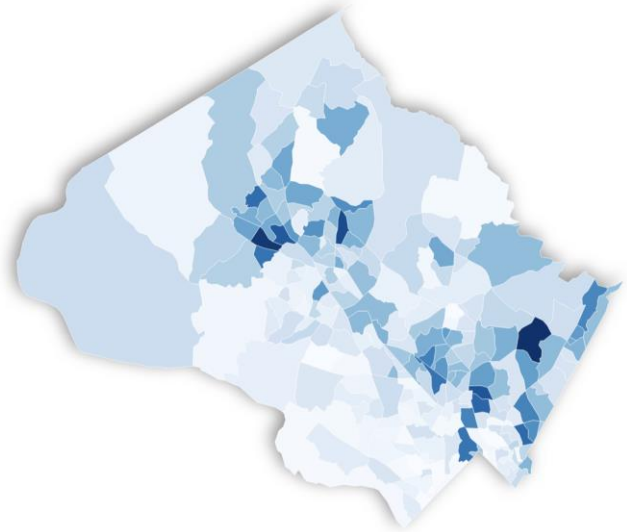


Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024. • Census does not report specifically on 130% of poverty level so this is calculated as those below 125% plus 20% of those below 150%.

Too much income for FARMS, but less than self sufficient

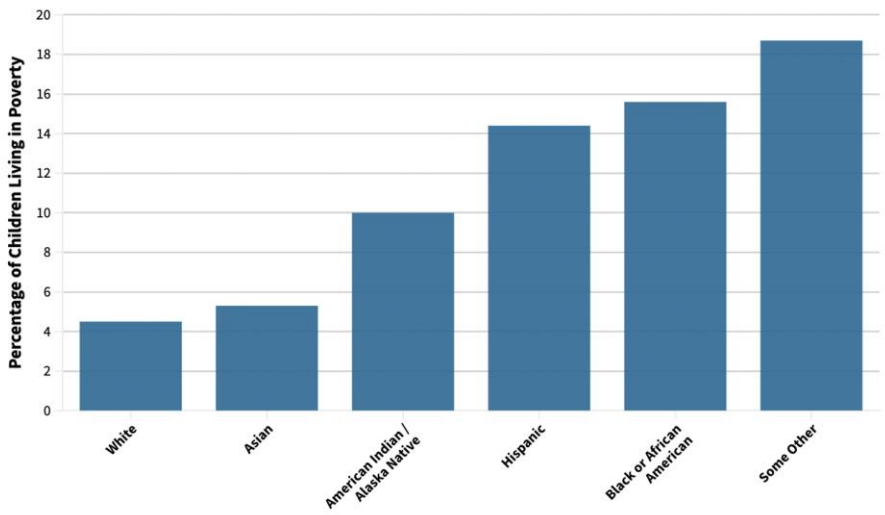
Children in Households with income between 185% and 400% of Poverty Level

7 980



Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B17024.

Considering Race, Language Spoken

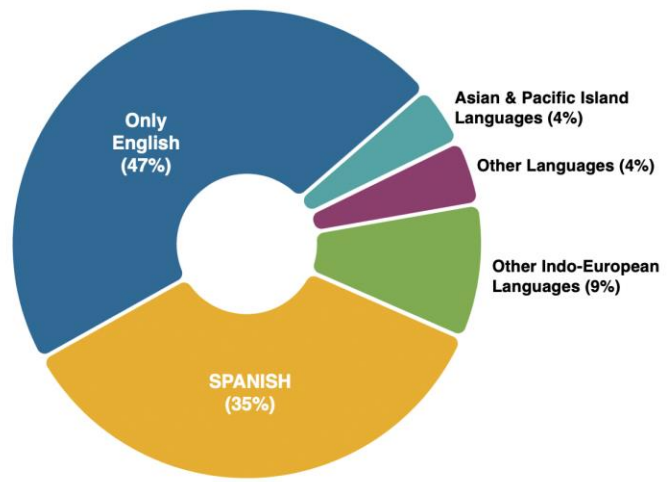


Percentage of Children Living in Poverty by Race

Note: all races include those reporting "alone or in combination"

Source: US Census Data, 2015: ACS 5-Year Estimates Selected Population Detailed Tables

Language Spoken at Home for Children 5-17 in Poverty



Source: US Census Data, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate Detailed Table B16009.

Plan Creation Process

- **Advisory Group Meetings**
 - 31 representatives from 23 public and private organizations
- **Stakeholder Meetings**
 - Benefits program centered approaches
 - Early Childhood
 - School-based Strategies
 - Out-of-School Strategies
 - Emergency Food Access
 - Healthcare-focused Strategies
 - Total of 142 participants, representing more than 70 organizations, across 33 meetings

Resident Feedback

- Montgomery County Childhood Hunger Survey
 - Conducted electronically in English and Spanish
 - 1,315 respondents
 - 84% English, 16% Spanish
- Resident Listening Sessions
 - 3 sessions held in Spanish, 1 session held in English
 - Total of 40 participants
 - Hosted by community partners

Key Takeaways

Major barriers for residents

- High cost of living in Montgomery County
- Difficulties navigating the benefit application process
- Not knowing where or how to ask for help
- Lack of access to transportation

Identified Strategies in the Plan

Key Priorities

- Invest in value-added strategies that build equity and food sovereignty, increase local food production and economic opportunity, embed education, and address climate change
- Center performance goals in program creation, and data collection and analysis in implementation and evaluation
- Maximize non-County public and private dollars through SNAP, state programs, and incoming grant-ready initiatives
- Strengthen community capacity and the nonprofit sector with sufficient operating support, technical assistance, and flexibility.
- Leverage market drivers for competitive pricing and align food security efforts with aggregation and procurement priorities for local farms
- Use grants to increase funding transparency and inclusivity, and engage expertise of community partners aligned with strengths and capacity

Identified Strategies

Direct Financial Benefits

Expansion of SNAP Enrollment Programs

Address Benefit Inadequacy, Especially During the Summer

Provide Direct Benefits to SNAP Ineligible Households

School & Childcare Adjacent Food Assistance

Expansion of Free School Meals

Expansion of Child and Adult Care Food Program

Expand Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K

Community School Distributions and Pantries

Expansion of Weekend Bags

Novel Approaches & New Pathways

Direct-to-Household Food Assistance

Improved Data-driven Decision Making

Food is Medicine

Caretaker Nutritional Training

Financial Literacy Training and Education

Gardening Grant Program

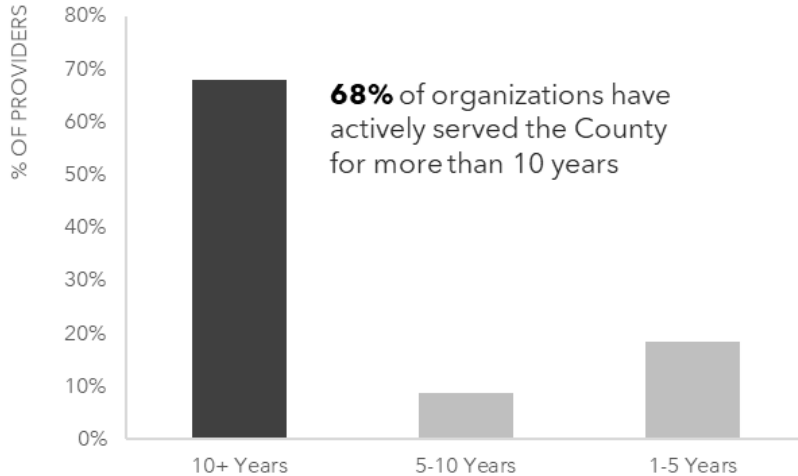
Updates Since Plan Launch

Updates Since Plan Launch

- **Creation of the Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR)**
 - Data collection, landscape analyses of current funding and impact
- **End of SNAP Emergency Allotments**
 - \$7 million reduction in SNAP benefits to Montgomery County residents per month
- **Community Schools Expansion**
 - 34 schools
- **MCPS School Meals Expansion**
 - Community Eligibility Provision
 - Maryland Meals for Achievement

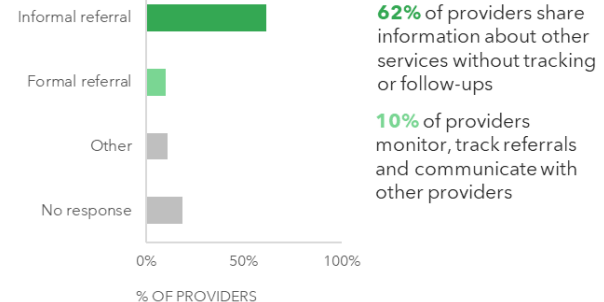
Food Assistance Provider Survey

Food providers: deep roots in the community



- 81 Food Assistance Providers responded
 - **14 organizations** supported over 10,000 children in the past year
 - **4 organizations** supported over 100,000 children in the past year
 - **16 organizations** provide food assistance on-site at MCPS school(s)

Food providers: low capacity connecting to other services



Food Assistance Provider Listening Sessions

50 Participants from Food Assistance/Community Organizations

Key points relating to children:

- Partnering with MCPS school sites helps identify families needing resources (FARMS, personal connection)
- Attending food distributions is particularly challenging for residents with small children, especially for those relying on public transportation

Highlighted Strategies

Highlighted Strategies: Maximizing Benefits Enrollment

SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger, but many eligible residents are not receiving benefits to which they are entitled.

Utilize Community Schools PCCs as Navigators: Fund DHHS Navigation Program (Community Action Agency/Office of Community Affairs) to train and support Parent/Community Coordinators to enroll families at MCPS schools in eligible benefit programs

- **Impact:** SNAP outreach and enrollment support for 8,000 households with school-aged children

Grant program to support SNAP outreach and enrollment by community based organizations: Target outreach to non-MCPS sites and 0-5 aged children

- Inform FY25 budget needs/strategy for matching DHS funds for CBOs/SNAP lead organization
- **Impact:** SNAP outreach and enrollment support for 4,000 households with children 0-5

Highlighted Strategies: Retail Food Access Pilot

Some Montgomery County households with children do not qualify for SNAP, but still struggle with food insecurity.

Proposed Strategy: Small-Scale Nutrition Benefit Program to Increase Retail Food Access

- Partnership with private sector food entity to create a nutrition benefit program with home delivery
- Multi-tiered approach to identify program participants
 1. Opportunity to expand food access for SNAP ineligible households
 - Leverage Care for Kids data to identify potential pilot program participants
 2. Address benefits inadequacy for families within self-sufficiency gap
 - Coordinate with DHHS to identify families at 130% FPL - 250% FPL

Impact:

- Families receive monthly nutrition benefits, over 5 month pilot period
- Address transportation and time barriers with home delivery model

Highlighted Strategies: Food As Medicine

Clinicians and pediatricians are in a unique position to screen children for food insecurity, and “prescribe” free food to children as treatment.

Proposed Strategy: Grant to Support Food Access at Health Care Sites

- Incentivize County healthcare providers to establish Food as Medicine programs supporting children and families with a County funding match
 - 40% - 60% match for program costs aligned with level of food sourcing from Montgomery County farms and/or local Minority, Female, Disable-Owned Businesses
 - 100% match for Montgomery Cares partner clinics
 - Program would include requirements around nutrition education and evaluation

Impact:

- Support 1,000 families per week with access to fresh produce
- Build demand for local, values-driven food procurement by institutions
- Reduce incidences of diet-related disease and increase impact of healthcare access

Highlighted Strategies: School-Based Support

Community Schools are a critical pathway to providing wraparound services to children in areas of concentrated poverty.

Proposed Strategy: School & Community Partnership Grant Program

- MCPS to identify food security support needs from schools, prioritizing Community Schools and considering unique assets and barriers at school sites
- OFSR will solicit proposals from providers that are experienced in or capable of providing food assistance at school sites
- Review panel will match applicants with schools based on location, capacity, program format, existing relationships

Impact:

- Increased access to fresh and culturally appropriate foods for more than 5,000 students and their families via family markets, pantries, and/or pre-packed food distributions at 30+ additional school sites

Highlighted Strategies: Gardening Grants

Gardening is a cost-effective way to supplement children's diets with nutritious fruits and vegetables.

Proposed Strategy: Increase Resident & Community Gardening Grant Program budget for FY24

- FY23 funding: \$100,000 total, \$50k from OFSR base budget + \$50k one-time funds from DEP supported 10 organizations
 - Organizations planned to reach over 2000 residents with access to gardening opportunities and food access

Impact:

- Increased access to gardening education opportunities and fresh, nutritious produce for an estimated 4,000 residents

Highlighted Strategies: Data-Informed Programming

Collecting data on food insecurity is notoriously difficult, but without reliable data, it can be challenging to make decisions on which interventions to fund and which to discontinue.

Anticipated Data Strategies through FY24:

- Partnership with HHS to identify residents to participate in Childhood Hunger grant programs
 - Pre- and post-intervention surveys to evaluate intervention impact
- Standardize data collection from food assistance providers and grantees
- Use WIC enrollment data from the state to identify priority areas
- Update and maintain FoodStat
- Annual community surveys and Longitudinal cohort study
- Coordination and data-sharing with MCPS and Food Staples partners

Impact: Develop a comprehensive understanding of food insecurity, poverty, demographic trends, and intervention effectiveness to inform future policy and investment decision making.

Advocacy Efforts

Maximize Federal and State Programs to Support Residents

1. Increase SNAP benefit adequacy, expand eligibility, improve process
 - Federal Summer EBT: Estimated benefit will be \$120/child; states need to opt into the program and cover 50% of the administrative costs
 - Maryland Summer SNAP: state funds that require a County match
1. Expand Free Meal Programs
 - Maximize CEP and Maryland Meals for Achievement
 - Explore Universal Meals and other means to reach students not supported by current programs
 - Additional support needed to build capacity for CACFP in pre-k, headstart, other early-childcare feeding programs

Next Steps

- FY24 Funding
- Investment Decisions for FY25 Budget
- Establish plan for MCPS-led strategies
- 2024 Maryland General Assembly & Federal advocacy
- Childhood Hunger Collaborative