

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Catherine E. Pugh
Mayor, City of Baltimore

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*Chair, Baltimore City Board of
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Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

May 16, 2017

The Honorable Bernard C. "Jack" Young
President, Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**Re: Letter of Information
City Council Resolution 17-0022R – Moving Baltimore to Zero Waste**

Dear Council President Young:

As drafted, Council Resolution 17-0022R seeks to encourage the development of an effective, long-term plan to move Baltimore toward Zero Waste to support the continued health, well-being, and prosperity of the City's residents.

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) is committed to reducing our waste footprint and has embarked on a variety of efforts to do so. In June 2016, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners passed a Sustainability Policy which lays out broad goals for the district. Among other things, each school is now required to designate a Sustainability Ambassador to be the point person for greening-related issues at his/her school.

Green projects and sustainability programs take place daily across City Schools. Thirty-two schools have earned the Green School award from the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education.¹ Many more are conducting green programs and activities in their classrooms, and over 100 schools have received grants from the Baltimore Office of Sustainability for student-led greening projects.

City Schools works to ensure that all of our schools have access to necessary resources for effective recycling programs. Baltimore City's Department of Public Works visits each of our schools once per week to pick up recycling. For SY2017 year-to-date, 50 of our schools have earned an "A" rating, which means they had recycling items outside and ready for pick up between 90-100% of the time.

City Schools also recognizes the importance of food waste reduction. Our Food and Nutrition Department serves more than 100,000 meals each day at over 180 school locations throughout the city. We offer breakfast, lunch, after school meals and a fresh fruit and vegetable program at all eligible sites. Our department represents the largest food operation in the city of Baltimore and is a significant generator of waste for the school district.

City Schools uses the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchyⁱⁱ to prioritize waste reduction. Source reduction, or reducing the volume of surplus food generated, is the most preferred method of food recovery. The department has prioritized source reduction by investing in improved point of sale systems, including electronic ordering, inventory and menu planning modules that allow cafeteria managers to better project food orders based on past consumption, reducing excess inventory at the source.

Additionally, the department implements USDA's Offer Vs Serve model, which allows students to select three out of five offered meal components (fruit, vegetable, protein, whole grain, and milk) instead of requiring them to take all items. This reduces waste by allowing students to reject foods they do not prefer. While this is required in all high schools by USDA, City Schools has implemented it districtwide to further reduce food waste.

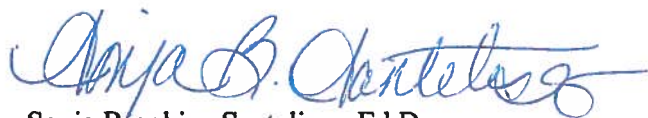
The department recognizes that its environmental impact is bigger than food waste. We have prioritized the purchase of locally grown produce, increasing from 750,000 pounds purchased in SY2014 to more than two million pounds in SY2016. For SY2018, the addition of a five day/week vegetarian menu and the removal of styrofoam trays represent other important steps to mitigate our environmental impact.

Despite our ongoing efforts to increase sustainability and reduce waste, several challenges remain. For example, the Baltimore region currently does not have a composting facility large enough to handle the volume of waste generated by our cafeterias. We are hopeful that by 2025, all schools will be reusing plastic trays or composting biodegradable trays. In the meantime, while composting is a worthy goal for our cafeterias, there is much we can do before that point to reduce the volume of waste generated.

From a practical standpoint, the lack of infrastructure in City Schools' kitchens is problematic. Switching to reusable trays, for example, would require dishwashers, which we no longer have, as well as space to dry and store the trays. Implementing cafeteria composting would require the purchasing of cafeteria bins, educating and monitoring students and staff, and hiring a food-waste hauler – all of which would require significant resources.

In closing, despite potential resource challenges, City Schools appreciates the Council's attention to this important issue and supports the spirit of a Zero Waste plan to advance sustainability, public health, and job creation for our students and for the communities in which they and their families live.

Sincerely,



Sonja Brookins Santelises, Ed.D.
Chief Executive Officer

ⁱ <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/25788>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-recovery-hierarchy>