

Scheduled School Closing Meals Pilot
Proposal for Philadelphia
April 2017

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Vice-Chair of the Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development and the
Homeless**

I. Executive Summary

Thousands of children in the city of Philadelphia are food insecure and depend on daily school lunches to provide them with nutritional meals. When schools are closed, these children and their families are left struggling to find a way to replace the meals that children would otherwise be getting in school. Our sister cities, Washington D.C. and Baltimore, were able to execute successful meals programs where they fed children when their schools were closed due to *Snow Storm Jonas*. These programs inspired the creation of a program in Philadelphia where we could feed our children when schools were closed. In January of 2016, we introduced a resolution calling for hearings to investigate this topic, and in March of 2016 a public hearing was held in Philadelphia City Council. From that hearing, a working group was formed from various partners in the city. This working group met consistently over the summer of 2016. From that working group, a proposal to feed children during scheduled days off of school was made.

This proposal consists of using the Parks and Recreation After School Meals Program and expanding it to include days where schools are closed but the city is open. On the 2016-2017 Philadelphia School District Calendar this is a total of 16 days. This Scheduled School Closing Meals Program would begin with a pilot in the 3rd Councilmanic District Recreation Centers during the week of Spring Break 2017, to expand city-wide by the beginning of the next school year in the Fall of 2017

II. Background

a. Need for the program

Providing children with good nutrition is crucial in ensuring they grow and develop into healthy adults. Unfortunately, in Philadelphia and many other cities across America, many families struggle to put food on the table. For many youth growing up in extreme economic

inequality, a day without classes means a day without breakfast, lunch, or both. To mitigate the impact of days off of school on families who rely on school meals for a core portion of their children's food, a school closing meals program is needed in Philadelphia. This meals program will allow children to have lunch during scheduled days off of school starting with a pilot program in the 3rd Councilmanic District Recreation Centers.

Not all, but many of the youth that this pilot is intended to serve live in households that are already struggling because of the poverty that ravages their communities and the various challenges, from gun violence to addiction, that accompany it. Many in Philadelphia face deep poverty and families often struggle to make ends meet. In the United States, 1 in 7 (13%) people are considered food insecure, but in Philadelphia, that number is more than 1 in 5 (22%). Food insecurity is defined as not having enough food for an active and healthy life. In Philadelphia, over 470,000 individuals rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in order to put food on their tables, and 45% of those households include children. Currently, 36% of children live in poverty, with 12.2% of Philadelphia families living in deep poverty (income at half or less of the poverty line). We know from research from Children's Health Watch that young children in food insecure households are more likely to be in fair or poor health, to be hospitalized, and to be at risk of developmental delays. Hungry kids are distracted kids. There is a wealth of research illustrating not just the short-term learning benefits of providing free meals to all students, but vast long-term savings to society from raising graduation rates, and reducing health and behavioral problems.

b. Legislative Process and Working Group

1. Inspiration for Legislation

In January of 2016, taking the lead from our sister cities Washington D.C. and Baltimore, we introduced legislation to help create a pilot in Philadelphia where we too would be able to feed our children on days when schools are closed.

i. Washington D.C.

The Washington D.C. public school system ran a pilot program during *Winter Storm Jonas* in January, 2016. The Washington, D.C. School District opened up the kitchens of 10 schools around the city and invited students who could make it in safely to go and receive food. Altogether, the pilot program served approximately 1,500 students, and was funded through federal emergency relief funding after the mayor declared the storm an emergency.

Washington D.C.'s public school population is far poorer than either the city at large or the nation as a whole. A full 76 % of students in the system in 2013–14 were enrolled in either free or reduced-price school meals programs. The proportion of students who qualified for the meal programs rose by a tenth from 2011 to 2013. The median income in the Washington, D.C. area is over \$100,000, but about three-quarters of the city's public school students come from homes that survive on far less than half of the median income.

ii. Baltimore

The City of Baltimore also ran an emergency feeding program during *Winter Storm Jonas*. The storm shut down Baltimore schools for an entire week, creating a nine day period where children could potentially lack food. Thankfully, Baltimore was prepared and had assembled over 20 city offices and non-profits to think of ways to help at-risk groups such as youth, the elderly, and the homeless. The Family League was one of the non-profits involved and helped

plan how to get food to children who needed it. Multiple recreation centers opened their doors from 12:00 PM-6:00 PM and workers provided food for the first two hours each day.

In Baltimore, one third of children live in poverty, and one fourth are considered food insecure. Thus, while Philadelphia has a higher poverty rate, both cities have similar problems when it comes to feeding their youth. In order to ensure its citizens do not go hungry, Baltimore has taken part in several programs to feed children in poverty. These include the Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The CACFP is a program dedicated to providing after school meals to needy children. Nationally, the CACFP provides about 1,000,000 meals and snacks each year to children who might go hungry otherwise, and it brings 4,000,000 dollars worth of federal nutritional funding. This program feeds nearly 10,000 children a day at over 225 locations throughout Baltimore. The SFSP provides food to children during the summer when they cannot get meals from schools. There are 565 sites throughout Baltimore and they can provide kids with up to two meals a day. The expenses of this program can be reimbursed by the federal government.

Philadelphia has made strides to combat hunger and reduce food deserts over the years. Sadly, the city is still struggling despite improvements. High poverty and the existence of food deserts mean many families struggle to prepare healthy meals or any meals at all. By following some of the examples set by Washington D.C. and Baltimore, Philadelphia can help children get the nutrition they so desperately need.

2. Public Hearing and Working Group

On March 14, 2016, the Joint City Council Committees on Education and Housing, Neighborhood Development and the Homeless held a public hearing to explore the possibility of creating a pilot program in Philadelphia. The hearing was well attended and hunger experts

throughout the city came and gave their testimony. From the same experts who testified at the hearing, a working group was created in order to solidify a feasible plan that would work for Philadelphia. This working group, comprised of representatives from City Council, The Parks and Recreation Department, The Free Library of Philadelphia, The Mayor's Office of Policy, The Mayor's Office of Education, The Office of Homeless Services, The School District of Philadelphia, The Archdiocese of Philadelphia, The Coalition Against Hunger, Philabundance, Share Food Program, The Food and Research Action Center and Chosen 300, met consistently during the summer months and discussed in depth the feasibility of having a feeding program to provide lunches to feed children when schools are closed due to bad weather. Early on, the intent of the working group was to provide meals during weather emergencies, but this idea eventually evolved into planning meals on scheduled days off. Due to the logistical challenges associated with delivering and serving food during bad weather, the working group decided to focus first on creating a pilot program to feed needy children during scheduled school closures before implementing a pilot for closings due to inclement weather. The following is the proposal for a pilot to feed children during scheduled days off.

III. Proposed Plan

a. Summary of Plan

Philadelphia already has a framework for feeding children after school but currently do not provide meals during days when schools are scheduled to be off, due to holidays, in service etc.. The Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department operates an extensive after school meals program that serves thousands of children in recreation centers all around the city. These meals provided by the Parks and Recreation Department are funded by reimbursement from the federal

government through the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CAFCP) for meals that are served on site.

This pilot would begin the week of spring break April 10-13, 2017 and would serve meals at recreation centers located in the 3rd Councilmanic District. The pilot would use the existing framework that is in place for the Parks and Recreation After Schools Meals Program and be reimbursed through the same source of funding, the CAFCP.

b. Breakdown of components

1. Timing

In the 2016-2017 Philadelphia School District Calendar there are approximately 24 scheduled days off and 16 scheduled days off when the City of Philadelphia Government is still open. The scheduled days off when the City is open but the schools are closed will be the days that Parks and Recreation Department will open up this pilot program at their West Philadelphia Recreation Centers to feed children around 3:00 in the afternoon. Specifically, this pilot program will begin during spring break, April 10-13, 2017, and with a successful outcome the goal is to expand the program city-wide by the beginning of the next school year in the Fall of 2017.

2. Funding

The funding for this pilot will come from the same source of funding that is used for the Parks and Recreation After School Meals Program. The State reimburses the City and the Federal Government reimburses the State for each meal that is served on site and that is served when school is closed. On school days, the food may only be given out once school has ended, and on days schools are scheduled to be closed meals may be served at the time the CAFCP site chooses.

For the pilot, meals would be kept on site at the designated recreation centers, and the Parks and Recreation Department will file for reimbursement based on the meals that were eaten at the sites. Since the CACFP is a viable source of funding even on days where school is not in session, the meal reimbursement should function the same way as it does when meals are served after school. At first, a conservative amount of meals is necessary so that demand can be measured, however, numbers from the after school feeding program will be used to determine how many meals should be kept on site.

3. Locations

This pilot program will take place in the Recreation Centers located in the 3rd Councilmanic District where the After School Meals Program is already taking place. Christy Recreation Center, James Wright Recreation Center, Kingsessing Recreation Center, Lee Cultural Center, Miles Mack Playground, Mill Creek Playground, West Mill Creek Playground, and 48th & Woodland Playground. Currently, the listed recreation centers have the After School Meals Program and thus, they already have children in the area that know about the program and utilize the service. Therefore, this pilot program would simply be an expansion of what these centers are doing currently.

4. Food Sources

Food from the program will come from vendors that the Parks and Recreation After School Meals Program is already working with. Meals would be delivered onsite on the same day.

5. Staffing and Workforce

Staffing will come primarily from employees working at the locations serving the food. The serving hours would accommodate the staff at the recreations centers so that they would be able to serve the meals and still get off of work on time.

6. Informing the public

When schools are closed, the parents of school children will need to be notified about the additional feeding on scheduled days off and where they can go for their child to get a free meal during the school closure. The recreation centers already have after school meals on days when school is in session, therefore, parents can be informed about the additional feeding days on scheduled days off through the same recreation center that they go to get their meals on school days. Additionally, The School District has said that they are willing send information home with student in their newsletters.

However, information about where the sites are located will need to be accessible online. Currently, the After School Meals Program has a website containing information about feeding sites and where to locate them. It would be possible to include information about this pilot on the same website. Additionally, the Coalition Against Hunger's website provides information about the feeding programs as well and would therefore be willing to provide information about this program on their site.

IV. Additional Discussion

These are other topics of discussion and solutions that were discussed by the working group. For the purposes of this pilot these options will not be utilized. However, they are included in this report so that they may be considered for the expansion, in the event this pilot is successful and we would like to expand our feeding programs in Philadelphia even further.

a. Share Emergency Food Package

Share Food Program generously offered to pack shelf-stable food to supplement the meals being served to children. The assumption here is that many children are accompanied to the sites by caregivers, and that the box or tote of Share items can be carried home where this food will help feed household members. Share would rely upon its regular food donation sources for an appropriate selection of nutritious shelf-stable items, and would use volunteers for food packing. The only costs associated with Share's participation would be delivery by its own trucks (at \$50 per location) and tote bags or boxes, for which Share would need to be reimbursed. The packaged food could be assembled at Share, and stored in its warehouse at 29th Street and Hunting Park Avenue. Share's routine food packing and distribution operations are especially busy from the weeks leading up to the Thanksgiving holiday through the end of the calendar year. Depending on the number of households to be served, it might be possible to pack additional food packages during this period.

b. Promise neighborhood grant

The Promise Neighborhood Zone Grant is an effort lead by Drexel University, with key participating partners such as The City of Philadelphia, Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity, School District of Philadelphia, Wordsworth of Philadelphia, Mount Vernon Manor, People's Emergency Center, Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and many other local governmental, community non-profit groups, and grassroots organizations. It would provide maximum \$30 million grant over five years, given by the federal government that would work with seven different schools in the Promise Neighborhood. The Scheduled School Closing Meals Pilot fits into the parameters of the Promise Neighborhood Grant included in the grant application.

c. Possibility of private funding for back packs

Another option that was discussed by this working group and was suggested during the hearing was the possibility of having a backpack program. While a backpack programs that distributes food in anticipation of a school closing are desirable because it eliminates the need for children to make their way to a feeding site, federal funding (via the school/summer meals programs) cannot be used for such a purpose. However, a backpack program can always be an option in the future if the city is able to access private dollars to fund such an initiative.

Sources Used

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