

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Farm to School Initiative

1. **Background.** Metropolitan Nashville Public School District is Tennessee’s second largest school district, encompassing 158 schools and 84,863 students. It is a racially diverse and predominantly urban school district, with 75.5% of students classified economically disadvantaged and 50.8% receiving SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits. Nearly half of the students are African-American (44.9%); 29.4% are English Language Learners; and 11.9% have disabilities. MNPS’ Nutrition Services Department serves more than 8.4 million lunches and 4 million breakfasts during the school year. The program is an extension of the educational programs of the school system, funded under the National School Lunch Act and Child Nutrition Act. The United States Department of Agriculture administers federal laws regulating the food program through the regional office and by the Tennessee State Department of Education. In 2012, we received the SDA Best Practice Award from the United States Department of Agriculture for “Translating the Menu to Achieve Healthier Food Choices”. In 2013, we received 2nd Place in the Produce Culinary competition which was held by the Tennessee State Department of Nutrition at their state conference. In summer 2014 we received the 4 USDA Best Practice Award from the United States Department of Agriculture for Promoting a Healthy School Environment- Partnership with Alignment Nashville and Community to Bring about a Change in the School Café s Environment. Because of our urban, predominantly low-income demographic, students have relatively little access to agriculture or knowledge of the farming industry and there is a need for better understanding of nutritious food and education. This planning grant will allow integration of nutrition education and practice at targeted schools through a network of established and targeted community partners, creating a pilot to replicate throughout the district. For this project, we will focus on 7 high-needs schools as our prioritized pilot schools: Casa Azafran Early Learning Center, Fall Hamilton Elementary, Glengarry Elementary, Glenview Elementary, Park Avenue Elementary, Rosebank Elementary, and Wright Middle School. These schools are all over 85% economically disadvantaged (MNPS).

II. **Need & Readiness.** Nearly three-quarters of the students MNPS serves are low-income, and as a result, they lack access to many foundational assets that other students enjoy; extracurricular activities, transportation, and healthy food (due to lack of access and affordability). This can lead to barriers to learning as evidenced in poor health and lack of concentration. Researchers Margaret Lahey and Shari Rosen report that, “Malnourished children [...] are found to have delays in vision, fine motors skills, language skills and personal-social skills.” Researchers also discovered that 1/3 of surveyed adolescents actually reported poor food habits, chronic illnesses, and lower school achievements. While foods are often readily available for children, some foods are actually *inhibiting* their development. Not only are unhealthy foods proven to impact academia, but research also proves that a poor diet impacts a child’s attitude and behavior, both in and outside of school (Public School Review, 2015). Our goal as a school district is to provide an excellent education for all students, regardless of race, gender or socio-economic background -- *all means all*. Indeed, the MNPS Nutrition Services **mission** is to empower every student to excel in academic performance by ensuring they receive a choice of healthy meals at every school, every day. We achieve this mission through full integration of nutrition services, including but not limited to, offering education to parents, reaching out to low-income students to educate about SNAP availability, providing gluten free options, and offering gardening and

nutrition extracurricular activities. In fact, we currently have 47 school gardens in our system (1 for every 3 schools) that are using working gardens as an interactive education experience, teaching nutrition as well as core subjects such as Science, Reading, Math, Social Studies and the Arts. These initiatives, supported by students, teachers, parents, and partners, speak to our readiness for this project and our ability to increase our capacity through this project. The results will include highly trained and supported teachers and cafeteria workers; healthy choices modeled by the MNPS community; quality food preparation and presentation; increased use of local agriculture; and the dissemination of a common culture of wellness. By bringing these elements together in collaboration, we will increase each child's nutritional and educational assets. Key partners and their roles are as follows:

- Agricultural Partnerships (**The TN Department of Agriculture** will assist with facilitating relationships with farmers and food providers.)
- Community Awareness and Outreach (**Alignment Nashville** is an extensive network of partners that has developed principles of collaboration that align the resources of community organizations to the MNPS' strategic plan. Using an integrated design and implementation process, a structure of community collaboration and oversight, a set of guiding principles, and project management technology, Alignment Teams create and scale up tactics that make progress toward systemic change. The School Nutrition Alignment Team will assist with engaging farmers and educational partners through its ongoing efforts. **Community Food Advocates** is a hunger anti-poverty organization established with the mission of providing healthy, affordable food in a just and sustainable food system. They offer additional outreach to the farming community.)
- Local Healthy Food Providers (**Green Door Gourmet, Nashville Farmers Market, Nashville Grown, Josh Corlew/Nashville Urban Farmer** are local entities that will complement procurement efforts, broadening linkages to the Middle Tennessee farm community. Green Door Gourmet and Mr. Corlew will also host school field trips and provide onsite school education.
- Post-Secondary Support Partners (**University of Tennessee Extension, Vanderbilt University Medical Center Dietetic Internship** both offer healthy cooking demonstrations, nutrition education and healthy living activities for students and staff. Vanderbilt also assists with evaluation; for example, through their school lunch audit Vanderbilt Dietetic Interns analyze the selection and consumption of different food groups by students in high needs schools.

Health of the children in our schools and our city is imperative that must begin with targeted initiatives, such as this project, while garnering best practices for comprehensive education and implementation. Our challenge is also our strength in this project; bringing together district need, principal project leaders, and community partners, working for innovation in creative service delivery and education. The work of Alignment Nashville, as evidenced, has been ongoing, as has MNPS' priorities in addressing nutrition and healthy eating in all of our schools and in drawing on a pool of expertise for collective impact. The School Nutrition Alignment Team builds on this and includes members of the American Culinary Foundation, Community Food Advocates, Healthways, MNPS, Nashville Grown, Second Harvest, and Vanderbilt University, allowing for a positive mix of community voices and knowledge.

III. Objectives, Activities, Timeline. MNPS' Farm to School Program's overarching objective is to have our comprehensive Farm to School Action Plan in place by the end of our 18-month planning period. We will identify sources of locally grown food, procure it, and promote this initiative to both schools and communities. We will educate students and staff about the process that moves food from the farm to school, and add healthy food preparation classes, while working to address the nutrition disparity felt by low-income families.

Activities began before submitting this grant, through work of the School Nutrition Alignment Team. The committee meets once a month and all meetings are open to the public. We have already adopted Farm to School project goals for 2015-18 and are in the process of engaging stakeholders mentioned in this proposal. The School Nutrition Alignment Team also recently engaged Community Food Advocates to develop tools (survey and presentation) to reach out to farmers and engage them as Farm to School partners. Outreach has already touched over 100 regional farmers. We conducted a Strawberry Pilot in Spring 2015, as a way of learning more about how the Farm to School process works. Five elementary schools in the district received strawberries grown on a farm just north of Nashville to serve during lunch as a fresh fruit option. This allowed MNPS Nutrition Services to go through the entire process of local procurement, beginning with creating RFI materials and engaging with farmers. These materials will act as templates for future procurement efforts with other local items and will allow MNPS to move forward with larger efforts in more schools. Planned activities for our pilot are as follows:

Procurement: This begins with assessing our supply chain and identifying opportunities and gaps. This will help us identify and engage local farmers who can participate in Farm to School Activity. We will also identify additional supply chain partners (food hubs, distributors), for procurement. These activities will lead to our Procurement Pilot – seven schools (1 Early Learning Center, five elementary schools, and one middle school) will receive local items to serve during lunch. A variety of healthy food items will also be served multiple times per year, based on availability.

Education: This begins with assessing our educational opportunities and gaps. Again, we will draw on current partners (such as UT Extension, Coordinated School Health, and VUMC Dietetics) for additional educational opportunities, while identifying and engaging additional educational providers. Our Education Pilot will begin with conducting farmer visits to the seven targeted schools, while moving towards coordinating nutrition education activities in participating schools. Activities will be conducted during the school days, as part of physical education and health classes, cafeteria time, assemblies, and even STEM programs (i.e., drawing connections between math/science and cooking/agriculture).

Promotion: This aspect of our planning grant works on dissemination and publicity for all partners – meaning, students, parents, providers, and the community at large. We will research best practices for sharing Farm to School information with these stakeholders. We will develop logo and branding for this dedicated MNPS program material. We will present Farm to School information and activities at community events outside the school district, to broaden our reach.

Objectives and timeline are as follows:

Procurement Objective 1: By October 1, 2016, we will have identified assets, gaps, and providers and best practices, to assist with supporting our Farm to School Program.

Procurement Objective 2: By November 1, 2016, our School Nutrition Alignment Team (SNAT) will have visited at least two Farm to School programs, to assess practical applications and capacity issues of successful models.

Procurement Objective 3: By December 1, 2016, we will have a minimum of 15-20 farmers and five food chains/providers regularly assisting in supporting Farms to School programs by providing fresh, healthy food.

Procurement Objective 4: By January 1, 2017, a minimum of 7 pilot schools will receive local food items five times per year.

Procurement Objective 5: By May 1, 2017, a minimum of 10 pilot schools will receive local food items to be served a minimum of five times a year.

Education Objective 1: By November 1, 2016, we will have identified assets, gaps, and partners to support the educational aspect of our Farm to School Program.

Education Objective 2: By December 1, 2016, we will have added three health/nutrition/agriculture education partners to our Farms to Schools service delivery model.

Education Objective 3: By January 1, 2017, we will have developed Farms to Schools curriculum standard/activities to incorporate across the school district as the program increases

Education Objective 4: By May 1, 2017, we will have conducted 10 educational events and/or field trips for students at participating schools (i.e., farm visits, cooking classes, nutrition seminars). Ex: In the 2016-17 school year, partnering with CSH, the Vanderbilt Dietetic Internship will provide nutrition education programming in 3 of the pilot schools.

Promotion Objective 1: By December 1, 2016, we will have developed an inclusive school, partner, and community promotion plan to implement the following school year.

Promotion Objective 2: By February 1, 2017, we will have developed logo, branding, and promotional materials to distribute.

Promotion Objective 3: By May 1, 2017, we will have conducted a minimum of six awareness activities at local schools and community centers throughout Metropolitan Nashville Davidson County.

Promotion Objective 4: By May 1, 2017 we will have distributed promotional materials to students and staff at 10 participating schools.

IV. Evaluation. MNPS already assesses height and weight data for students in K, 2, 4, 6, 8 and lifetime wellness at each school, through our Coordinated School Health (CSH) program. We also utilize the School Health Index Assessment designed by the CDC, updating information regularly and evaluating quarterly. CSH staff will assist with evaluation on this grant; impact on our Farm To School initiative will be determined by pre- and post- assessments of teachers and students (re: farm to school and nutrition knowledge), number of speakers and educational offerings, community participation, and access to partners and providers. Awareness surveys will also be given to parents during this process and at the end of the grant cycle. Anecdotal records will be collected from teachers and facilitators at the mid-year and end-of-year intervals.

We will also conduct BMI (body mass index) measurements in all children at the pilot schools.

V. Project Management and Quality Assurance. Our School Nutrition Alignment Team (and Farm to School project) is led by Spencer Taylor, Executive Director of Nutrition Services at MNPS and Jackie Contreras, Food to Table Manager at Community Food Advocates. **Mr.**

Taylor earned his B.S. Education – B.S. Home Economics Berea College 1990, M.S. Community Nutrition Eastern Kentucky University 1998; and has been a Registered Dietitian since 1998. He has been in his current position at MNPS since October 2012, overseeing operations of 138 production sites that serve approximately 12 million meals annually.

Ms. Contreras currently serves as Farm to Table Coordinator and manages the Growing Healthy Kids program at Community Food Advocates (CFA), a Nashville-based non-profit committed to ending hunger and creating a healthy, just, and sustainable food system. She also serves as chair of Alignment Nashville's School Nutrition Committee, working closely with MNPS School Nutrition Services and other community partners to develop Farm to School opportunities in MNPS cafeterias. Under her leadership, the committee facilitated MNPS's first procurement of local, farm fresh foods to be served to students during the National School Lunch Program. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Contreras will meet monthly (at minimum) with the School Nutrition Alignment Team to discuss progress towards goals. Our Evaluation Team will craft and distribute quarterly reports to all participants (Team, staff at schools, partners). MNPS' Director of Grants Management, Dr. Merrie Clark, will monitor and approve project expenses and prepare financial reports for internal and external review. Organizationally, MNPS has the capacity to provide support to successfully aid the School Nutrition Alignment Team in managing this project. The Grants Management Team in the Office of Federal Programs works to support all district grant initiatives, in terms of monitoring, evaluation, outcomes, finance, and quality assurance.

VI. Staffing. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Contreras (as mentioned in the previous question) will lead the project. They will be supported by the aforementioned School Nutrition Alignment Team, a committee of 24 individuals from the American Culinary Foundation, Community Food Advocates, Healthways, MNPS, Nashville Grown, Second Harvest, and Vanderbilt University. These individuals will support project leadership in planning and execution of the project, interfacing with partners (TN Department of Agriculture, Community Food Advocates, Green Door Gourmet, Nashville Farmers Market, Nashville Grown, Nashville Urban Farmer, University of Tennessee Extension, and Vanderbilt University). The Dietetic Internship Program at Vanderbilt will also provide 16 interns, each providing 16 hours of nutrition education. Each of the interns will also spend 8 hours in preparation for classroom time spent with students at pilot schools. Interns would be trained in classroom management, MNPS policies, nutrition education and evaluation processes. Evaluation will be conducted by Vanderbilt staff, Coordinated School Health team, teachers at each school, and overseen by MNPS' Director of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation, Dr. Christine Stenson.

VII. Dissemination of Findings. We will measure short and long-term performance goals, collect feedback from participants, and meet monthly to share findings and disseminate learning among partners, making necessary adjustments in planning and implementation. Together we will craft our Farm to School Action Plan, a document that partners will also disseminate among their respective stakeholders. We will also disseminate findings to parents in our Community Achieves communications, monthly school newsletters, and in Farm to School Fact Sheets (posted on the website and sent out in email blasts to parents and partners). Finally, as one of our objectives, we are designing curriculum and activities, which can be shared with stakeholders, as well as other school districts. All findings will also be made available to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as part of our reporting for this grant.

VIII. Sustainability. MNPS Farm to School proposal builds on existing partnerships, while leveraging new opportunities, ensuring sustainability. The Farm to School objectives align with MNPS nutrition and education goals, and we will continue to build upon and utilize relationships developed in this shared planning process to extend teacher learning and professional development. The Farm to School Action Plan that results from this planning grant will be implemented throughout Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.