



# ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

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## REDUCTION OF WASTED FOOD

AP No. 0111  
Effective Date:  
April 21, 2025

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- I. **PURPOSE:** To provide guidelines for implementing best practices for utilizing food resources and decreasing wasted food in Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS).
- II. **POLICY:** The Prince George's County Board of Education (Board) is committed to generating renewable onsite energy sources at buildings, monitoring and reporting electricity used from renewable energy sources, replacing infrastructure and vehicles with zero emissions alternatives, reducing wasted food and food-related greenhouse gas emissions, and reducing landfill waste among other solutions. The Board recognizes the need to reduce the school system's environmental impact by building and operating its facilities in an environmentally responsible manner to create healthy places to learn and work and to preserve the environment for future generations. (Board Policy 0111)
- III. **BACKGROUND:**
  - A. In 2021, the PGCPS Board of Education issued a Board Action Summary with the goals of 100% Zero Food Waste by 2030 and 100% Zero Landfill Waste by 2040. PGCPS is committed to implementing best practices for utilizing food resources and decreasing solid waste by prioritizing composting and the reuse and recycling of materials (Board Policy 0111).
  - B. Recommendations and strategies for reducing the district's carbon footprint are outlined in the 2022 Climate Change Action Plan. PGCPS is committed to and working toward implementing school cafeteria Share Tables, composting programs, and other food waste reduction strategies throughout the district. Strategies that reduce waste generated (Offer vs Serve) and redistribute food for consumption (Share Tables) are prioritized over disposal (composting). These strategies are integral to achieving the zero waste and zero wasted food goals set forth by the Board, demonstrating the district's dedication to environmental

sustainability and responsible resource management.

- C. PGCPS is working towards certifying all schools as Maryland Green Schools. By reducing waste in the cafeteria, schools will satisfy some of the requirements of the Maryland Green School program. By adhering to this administrative procedure, the district aims to establish consistent practices across all schools, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship among students, staff and the broader community.

#### IV. **DEFINITIONS:**

- A. *Composting* – The process of recycling materials such as food scraps, plant trimmings, and/or other natural materials via biological decomposition into an amendment (compost) that can be used to enrich soil. Composting is a waste reduction strategy to divert materials from the landfill. Composting is a form of recycling. In the PGCPS composting program, food scraps and acceptable items are collected and processed into compost at a specialized facility.
- B. *Food “Backpack Program”* – A program that provides students with food to take home for weekends and holidays.
- C. *Food donation* (or “*food recovery*”) – The reduction of wasted food through the donation of leftover or excess food to a local food bank or any other nonprofit organization.
- D. *Food pantry* – An organization that distributes food and grocery products directly to those in need.
- E. *Maryland Green School Program* – Provides educational opportunities that empower Pre-K to 12th-grade students to take action to reduce environmental impact, practice and encourage environmental stewardship and sustainability, fosters environmental literacy, and increases awareness of the impact of the environment on public health. The program aligns with the goals of the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and supports Maryland State Department of Education graduation requirements and standards. The Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education administers the program and Maryland Green School awards.
- F. *Offer Versus Serve (OVS)* – A provision in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program that allows students to decline some of the food offered. The goals of *OVS* are to reduce wasted food in school meal programs while permitting students to decline foods they do not intend to eat.
- G. *Share Tables* – *Share Tables* are designated stations where students may return whole or unopened food or beverage items they choose not to eat and/or take

food items that they would like to eat.

- H. *Waste Reduction* – The net reduction in solid waste material, or garbage, sent to a landfill (or other disposal facility) via actions taken to reduce, reuse, compost, recycle, or completely prevent the generation of solid waste materials.

## V. **PROCEDURES:**

### A. Food Preparation and Service

#### 1. Offer Versus Serve (OVS)

- a. OVS reduces wasted food by allowing students to choose the foods they want to eat. Students must select at least three of the five meal components – protein, milk, fruit, vegetable and grain – to ensure they get the nutritional benefits of a meal. OVS will be practiced in all PGCPS schools using the following guidelines:
  - 1) Students are not required to take all items offered for the meal;
  - 2) A reimbursable meal includes at least three of the five meal components.
  - 3) Students must select a serving of fruit or vegetable; and
  - 4) Students are **not** required to take milk.

#### 2. Share Tables

##### a. Benefits of Share Tables

- 1) Share Tables are designated stations where students may return whole or unopened food or beverage items they choose not to eat and may take food items that they would like to eat. All schools are encouraged to utilize Share Tables as part of their food service and waste management practices. The benefits of Share Tables include:
  - a) Making food available to those who may want or need another serving;
  - b) Increasing consumption of nutritious food while decreasing wasted food;
  - c) Redistribution of food to other programs such as school food pantries and food Backpack programs;

- d) Surplus food can be shared with the community or taken to a nearby food pantry;
  - e) Creating an opportunity for students to support one another and be part of a waste reduction solution; and
  - f) Supporting the school's Maryland Green School application.
- b. Share Table Protocols
- 1) Share Tables must be regularly monitored by an adult, teacher or volunteer designated by the principal who has been informed by Food and Nutrition Services of the types of items that can be shared, how to prevent contamination of foods, and protection for students with allergies.
  - 2) Accept only foods from the school nutrition program; no foods from home may be placed on the Share Table. Post signage with the acceptable items on the Share Table.
  - 3) Accept only foods in their unopened and original containers.
  - 4) Inspect foods to ensure packaging is intact. If packaging is damaged and no longer protects the integrity of the food, then it should not be accepted or provided to students.
  - 5) Supervise student involvement.
  - 6) During the school day, allow only students to take items from the Share Table.
  - 7) Share Tables can be utilized during breakfast and lunch.
  - 8) Temperature controlled foods must be discarded at the end of the last lunch period unless they are stored at a temperature of 41 degrees Fahrenheit or colder. See section VA2c3 below for a list of acceptable items.
  - 9) Place Share Tables away from sites for potential cross-contamination. In the cafeteria, schools may place the Share Table near the serving line exit (and can be paired with the utensil, sauce and napkin area) so students can visit the Share Table before taking their seat or as part of the cafeteria waste sorting station (recycling bin, trash can, tray stacking area and Share Table).

- 10) After lunch, food items may be moved to an alternate Share Table location in order to make the food items available to the school community after the school day (ex: alternate location in the cafeteria or near the school main entrance).
- 11) The items not consumed by the end of the day can be redistributed via school pantries and food Backpack programs, made available for the school community to take (ex: parents picking up students), or donated to a local food pantry. Share Table items cannot be redistributed to afterschool programs.
- 12) At the end of the day and after all options to redistribute the food for consumption have been utilized, custodial staff will dispose of any remaining items on the Share Table. When possible, schools should separate food and acceptable materials for composting and recycling to reduce waste sent to the landfill.

c. Acceptable items for the Share Table include:

- 1) Whole, fresh fruit - Rewash whole fruit before making it available for students to select for consumption if it has an edible peel (*i.e.*, apples or pears) or if the fruit is not served in a protected form (such as wrapped in plastic or in a plastic bag).
- 2) Unopened pre-packaged items, such as cereal, crackers, fruit cups and chips.
- 3) Temperature controlled foods, only if stored in a cooler or similar device to maintain temperature of 41 degrees Fahrenheit or colder, including:
  - a) Milk, juice, yogurt and cheese; and
  - b) Prepared packaged foods such as sliced apples, carrots and vegetables.

3. Food Donation

- a. Eligible donation items include unopened food or beverage items and whole fresh fruit with the peel intact.
- b. Items not consumed during mealtime may be redistributed to other school programs such as school pantries and backpack programs, made available

for the school community to take (ex: parents picking up students), or donated to a local food pantry.

- c. If perishable food items are to be donated to a local food pantry, they must be stored under refrigeration at the school. Schools will be responsible for coordinating with the food pantry regarding items the food pantry accepts, storage/handling procedures, and transport to the food pantry.
- d. Schools will collect and maintain a signed Food Donation Program Partnership Agreement (Attachment 1), signed by the food pantry, and submit a copy to Food and Nutrition Services.
- e. School Principals will designate staff to collect and maintain weekly logs (Attachment 2) of food taken to the local food pantry and submit copies to the Department of Sustainability and Resiliency.

## B. Roles and Responsibilities

### 1. Principal

- a. Follow best practices in scheduling lunch periods. After the meal has been served, there should be a minimum of 10 minutes for students to consume their breakfast and 15 minutes for students to consume their lunch.
- b. Review Offer Versus Serve and Share Table procedures with all staff, including how to select items required for a reimbursable meal. (See Section VII)
- c. Designate staff to set up and oversee Share Tables in dining areas.
- d. Communicate with parents about Offer Versus Serve and Share Table procedures and how to reduce wasted food.

### 2. Food Service Staff

- a. Encourage students to select a variety of foods in compliance with school meal program regulations. Emphasize the importance of healthy eating and trying new foods.
- b. In the serving line, encourage students to take only food items they plan to eat and are required for a reimbursable meal.
- c. Inform and assist students and staff with implementing Offer Versus Serve guidelines and how to select items required for a reimbursable meal. (See Section VII)

- d. Post educational information in the serving line about Offer Versus Serve guidelines.
- e. Incorporate reduction strategies, including separating materials for composting and recycling, into school waste management practices to reduce wasted food.
- f. Separate expired food and food unfit for consumption for disposal by composting.

### 3. Education Staff and Lunch Duty Staff

- a. Encourage students to select a variety of foods in compliance with program regulations. Emphasize the importance of healthy eating and trying new foods.
- b. Encourage students to take only food items they plan to eat and are required for a reimbursable meal.
- c. Encourage students to reduce food waste and eat all of their food and beverages.
- d. Encourage and assist students to correctly sort their waste materials into recycling bins, compost bins and trash cans.
- e. Inform and educate staff and students about Offer Versus Serve and how to select items required for a reimbursable meal. (See Section VII)
- f. Inform and educate students about the Share Table in a way that does not pressure students to donate foods from their meal.
- g. Ensure students do not pressure or bully other students to donate their food.
- h. Educate students about how to reduce wasted food via Offer Versus Serve and the Share Table.
- i. Incorporate reduction strategies into school waste management practices to reduce wasted food.

### 4. Custodial Staff

- a. Incorporate reduction strategies into school waste management practices to reduce wasted food.

- b. In coordination with the staff designated by the Principal to oversee the Share Table, work together to establish the placement and setup of the Share Table in the cafeteria.
- c. At the end of the day and after all options to redistribute the food for consumption have been utilized, custodial staff will dispose of any remaining items on the Share Table.

**VI. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE:**

- A. Food and Nutrition Services, Department of Sustainability and Resiliency, and the William S Schmidt Center will provide educational training materials to schools.
- B. School Principals are responsible for providing training to school staff during pre-service week.
- C. Prior to each school year the Director of Food and Nutrition Services will review roles and responsibilities and reduction of wasted food procedures with Food and Nutrition department staff.

**VII. RELATED BOARD POLICIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES:**

Board Policy 0111 – Sustainability Plan  
 Board Policy 0116 – Wellness, Nutrition, and Physical Activity  
 Board Policy 5210 – Prohibition of Systemic Meal Shaming Practices and Board Regulation on a Universal Meals Program for Early Childhood, Primary, and Intermediate Grade Levels  
 Administrative Procedure 2810 – Recycling Program

Board Action Summary <https://www.pgcps.org/globalassets/offices/board-of-education/docs---board-of-education/ccap/board-of-education-climate-change-action-plan-focus-work-group-resolution.pdf>

**VIII. LEGAL REFERENCE:**

[Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996](#), 42 U.S. Code § 1791  
 Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 4-132  
 Md. Code Ann., Env. § 9-1724.1  
[\(COMAR\) 26.04.13 Food Residuals - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion](#)

**IX. MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THIS ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE:**

This administrative procedure will be updated as needed by the Departments of Food and Nutrition Services and Sustainability and Resiliency.



**X. CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES:** None. This is a new administrative procedure.

**XI. EFFECTIVE DATE:** April 21, 2025

**Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Food Donation Program Partnership Agreement

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XSXtUpX27ePUiXfANZ0AtrXf2iwU58KGKjkFpwqz\\_e4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XSXtUpX27ePUiXfANZ0AtrXf2iwU58KGKjkFpwqz_e4/edit?usp=sharing)

Attachment 2: Weekly School Food Donation Record

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XSXtUpX27ePUiXfANZ0AtrXf2iwU58KGKjkFpwqz\\_e4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XSXtUpX27ePUiXfANZ0AtrXf2iwU58KGKjkFpwqz_e4/edit?usp=sharing)

**Resources**

[Offer Versus Serve \(OVS\) Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers - National School Lunch Program](#)

[Offer Versus Serve \(OVS\) Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers - School Breakfast Program](#)

Offer Versus Serve Materials <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-Versus-serve-national-school-lunch-program-posters>

Offer Versus Serve Guidance <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>

Help Prevent Wasted Food

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/15EsfqZiXemTNj9cv90cu8sfmQ7\\_TmXg3/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15EsfqZiXemTNj9cv90cu8sfmQ7_TmXg3/view?usp=drive_link)

Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1v-qRBKJnmMRCHBY7qTY\\_C-iiE4WSNT9H/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1v-qRBKJnmMRCHBY7qTY_C-iiE4WSNT9H/view?usp=drive_link)

PGCPS Recycling Program [www.pgcps.org/recycling](http://www.pgcps.org/recycling)

PGCPS Climate Change Action Plan <https://www.pgcps.org/about-pgcps/climate-change-action-plan>

PGCPS Composting Program <https://www.pgcps.org/offices/building-services/recycling/composting>

Maryland Green Schools [www.maeoe.org](http://www.maeoe.org)