

Food and Nutrition Program Survey Report 2017

Key Findings

1. Far fewer parents reported that their children eat school breakfast one or more times per week, 38%, compared to those whose children eat school lunch one or more times per week, 64%.
2. The top five things that would motivate parents to use the breakfast or lunch programs more included: *More fresh food options; Having more time to eat; More nutritious meals, More variety in the menu and Better tasting food.*
3. The most common reason parents cited for not having their children participate in the breakfast or lunch programs was personal preference.
4. Despite their request for *more fresh food options* in the meal programs, only 56% of middle school parents were aware that all middle schools have a Garden Bar with fresh local fruits and vegetables available daily.
5. The top four themes among the open-ended question: *How can we improve MMSD's meal program?* in order, were: *Healthful or Nutritious Foods; More Time to Eat; Fresh Foods; and Variety.*

Background

MMSD's Food and Nutrition Program last conducted a parent satisfaction survey approximately six years ago. Since that time, the program has implemented a number of changes, including expanding the school breakfast program, starting a farm-to-school program featuring locally grown produce and adding garden bars at middle school. Food and Nutrition Program leaders wanted to learn more about parents' opinions of the school meal program, what factors might encourage them to use the meal program more and the reasons why some parents don't use the program. RPEO staff reviewed existing surveys on school meal programs and worked with Food and Nutrition Program leadership to collaboratively craft a survey for elementary and middle school parents.

Data and Methods

MMSD administered the survey electronically from October 16 to November 3, 2017. RPEO staff emailed survey links in English, Hmong or Spanish to elementary and middle school parents. We received a total of 5,262 responses to the survey, for a 39% response rate among elementary and middle school households.

Table 1. Students' Demographics	(n)	% Among Parent Respondents	Enrollment K to Gr 8
African American	396	8%	17%
American Indian	13	<1%	<1%
Asian	427	8%	9%
Hispanic	687	13%	22%
Multiracial	467	9%	9%
White	3268	62%	42%
Low Income	1213	23%	52%
English Language Learners	997	19%	29%
Students with Disabilities	507	10%	13%
Elementary	3675	70%	71%
Middle	1587	30%	29%

Parent responses are tied to the demographics of their oldest child attending 4K to Grade 8. Table 1 at left shows the demographics of students associated with the parent responses.

By race/ethnicity, survey participation was lower among parents whose children are African American or Hispanic and higher among parents of white children than the overall composition of enrollment in Kindergarten through Grade 8. There were also lower numbers of participants whose children were ELL, students with disabilities or low income.

To analyze the findings, we calculated response distributions for each closed-ended question and summarized themes among responses to the open-ended

responses. The body of the report focuses on results overall and notable results by demographic group. Tables with results by demographic group are found in the Appendix.

Questions

The survey asked parents to respond to questions about the breakfast and lunch programs in reference to their oldest child enrolled in elementary or middle school. Survey questions focused on four aspects of the Food and Nutrition program: 1) Frequency of use; 2) Factors influencing participation; 3) Communication about the program; and 4) Perceptions about the program. Parents were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback on how to improve the Food and Nutrition program.

Results

Frequency of Meal Program Use and Factors Influencing Participation

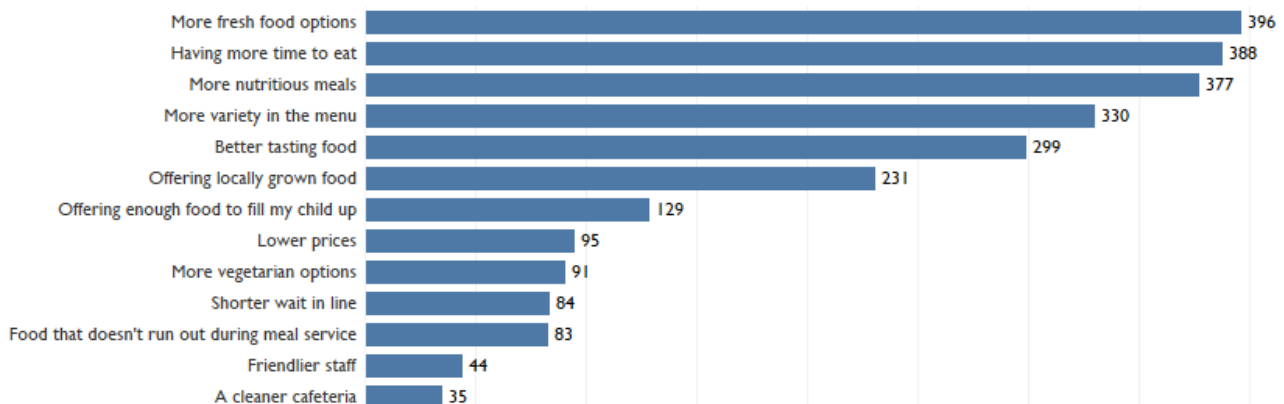
Parents were asked how many times per week their children eat school breakfast and school lunch. **Far fewer parents reported that their children eat school breakfast one or more times per week, 1,973 or 38%, compared to those whose children eat school lunch one or more times per week, 3,127 or 64%.** Among demographic groups, African American students and low income students, participate in the school breakfast program at much higher rates, 72%, compared to 38% of students overall. English language learners, 57%, and students in special education, 51%, also participate at higher rates, than students overall, 38%. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1

	1 - 2 times	3 - 4 times	5 times per week	My child does not eat school breakfast.	My child brings a lunch to school
Q1 How many times a week does your child eat school breakfast?	636	496	841	3,268	
Q4 How many times a week does your child eat school lunch?	1,036	675	1,416		1,864

Parents who indicated their children use the school breakfast program 1-2 times per week or 3-4 times per week were asked what would make their families use the breakfast program more. Parents could choose up to 5 responses. Among the 946 parents who responded, **the top 5 things that would encourage them to use the program more, in order, were: More fresh food options; Having more time to eat; More nutritious meals, More variety in the menu and Better tasting food.** Across all demographic groups, responses were very similar to parents overall, with nearly all demographic groups choosing the same top 5 reasons, though in varying orders of frequency. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 2 below:

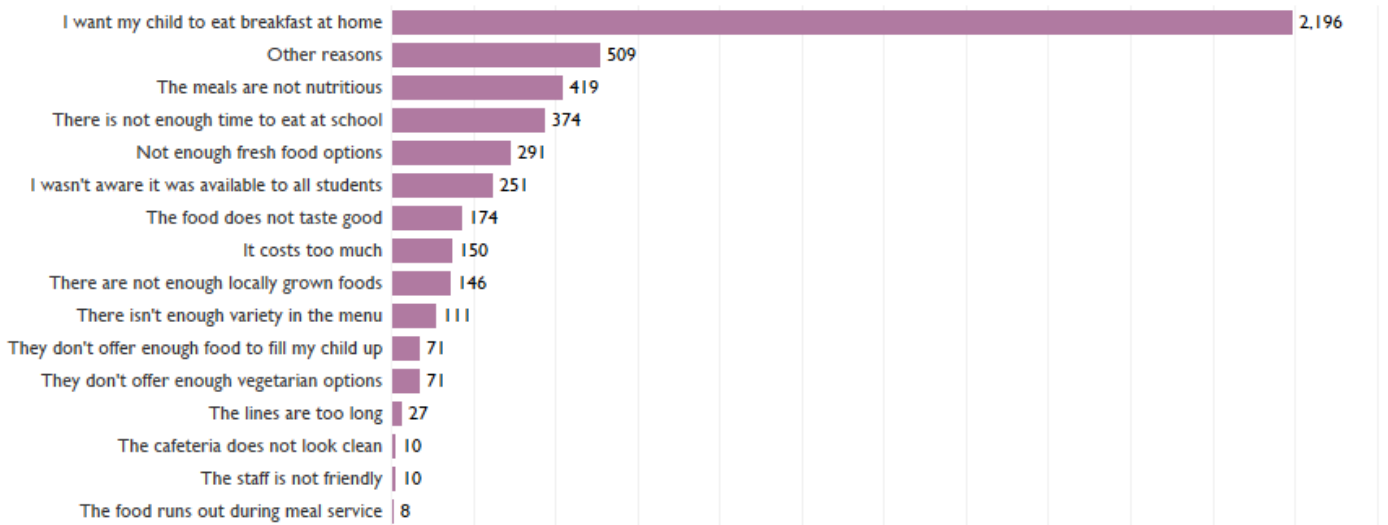
Figure 2: Q2 What would make your family use the breakfast program more? (Choose up to 5)





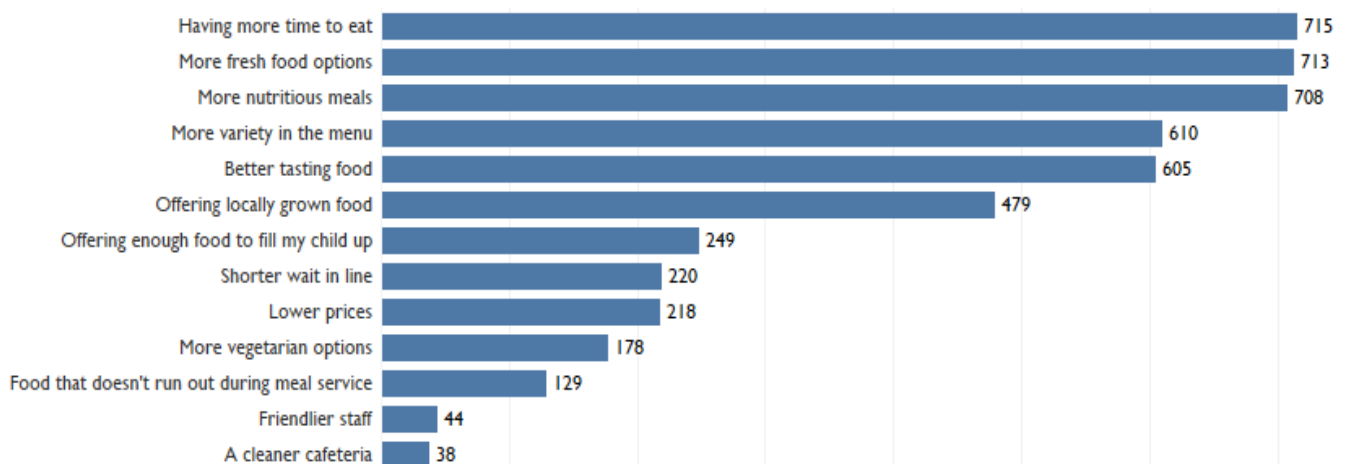
Parents who indicated their children do not eat school breakfast were asked to select the reasons why. Parents could choose up to 5 responses. Among the 3,148 parents who provided reasons why their children don't eat school breakfast, **overwhelmingly, the most common reason was: I want my child to eat breakfast at home. The remaining reasons, in order, were: Other reasons; The meals are not nutritious; There is not enough time to eat at school; and Not enough fresh food options.** Parents who chose *Other reasons* were able to write an open-ended response. Within those responses, the most common theme was *It's my child's preference*. Across all demographic groups, responses were very similar to parents overall, with all groups choosing the same top 2 reasons, while the remaining reasons varied somewhat in order of frequency. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Q3 What are the reasons your child doesn't eat school breakfast? (Choose up to 5)



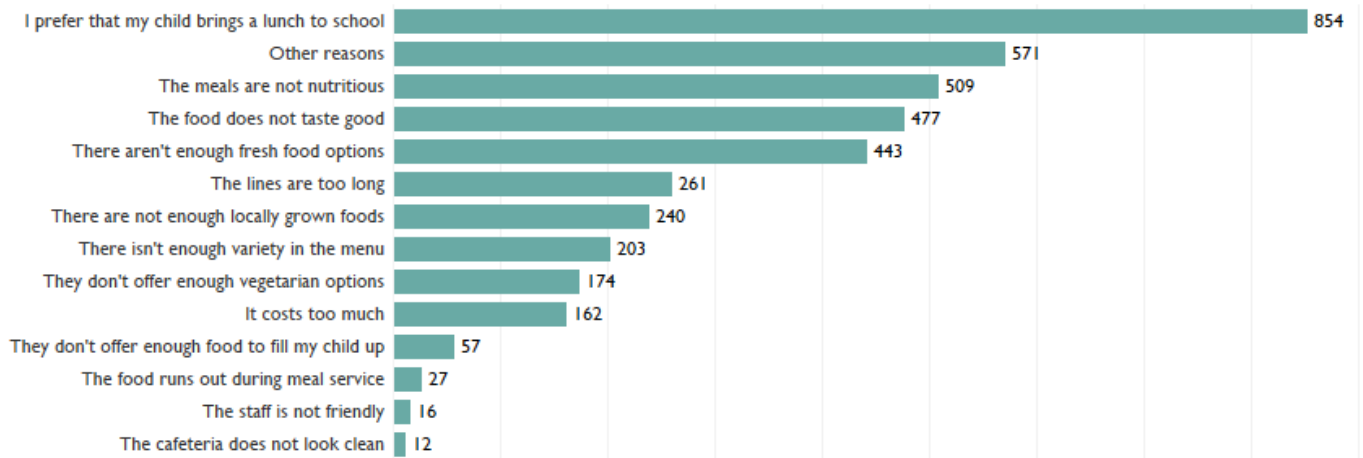
Parents were asked a corresponding set of questions about the school lunch program. Parents who indicated their children eat school lunch 1-2 times per week or 3-4 times per week were asked what would make their families use the lunch program more? Among the 1,583 parents who responded, **the top 5 things that would encourage them to use the program more, in order, were: Having more time to eat; More fresh food options; More nutritious meals; More variety in the menu; and Better tasting food.** Across all demographic groups, responses were very similar to parents overall. The full distribution of responses is shown below in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Q5 What would make your family use the lunch program more? (Choose up to 5)



Parents who indicated their children do not eat school lunch were asked to select the reasons why. Parents could choose up to 5 responses. Among the 1,836 parents who indicated their children do not eat school lunch, **the top 5 reasons why their children do not eat school lunch, in order, were: I prefer that my child brings a lunch to school; Other reasons, The meals are not nutritious; The food does not taste good; and There aren't enough fresh food options.** Parents who selected *Other reasons* were allowed to write an open-ended response. The three most common themes among the *Other reasons*, in order, were: *It's my child's preference; There's too little time to eat; and My child's a picky eater.* Among demographic groups, there were two notable differences in reasons why children don't eat school lunch. Parents of African American children cited *it costs too much* while parents of Asian children cited *not enough vegetarian options* among the top 5 reasons their children don't eat school lunch. The full distribution of responses is shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Q6 What are the reasons your child doesn't eat school lunch? (Choose up to 5)



Communication about the program

Parents were asked Q7 *What would be the best way for your family to receive the breakfast or lunch menus?* **Most parents, 61%, would prefer to receive the program menus by Email, followed by the MMSD website, 13%, or Other means, 13%.** Of the 391 parents who specified *Other*, 91% of them preferred a paper copy sent home, with many noting that this service is already provided by their children's schools.

Figure 6

Q7 What would be the best way for your family to receive the breakfast or lunch menus?

Email	61%
Facebook	1%
MMSD Website	13%
Phone App	11%
Other	13%

Q8 If you had a question about school meals, how would you find an answer?

Call the school	42%
Go to the MMSD Website	49%
Talk with the Kitchen Manager	6%
Other	4%

Among demographic groups, the *Email* option for menus was more popular with parents of African American, 74%; Asian, 73%, and English language learner students, 70%, compared to 61% of parents overall. Using the *MMSD website* to find menus was somewhat less popular with parents of African American, 6% or Hispanic, 7%, students compared to 13% overall.

When asked Q8 *If you had a question about school meals, how would you find an answer?*, **49% of parents indicated they would go to the MMSD website while 42% prefer to call the school.** Parents of African American or Hispanic students were much more likely to *call the school*, 57%, compared to 42% of parents overall. Similarly, parents of African American, 29%, or Hispanic students 33%, were less likely to go to the MMSD website, while parents of white students were more likely to go

to website, 57%, compared to 49% of parents overall. Figure 6, at left, shows the response distributions for questions 7 and 8.

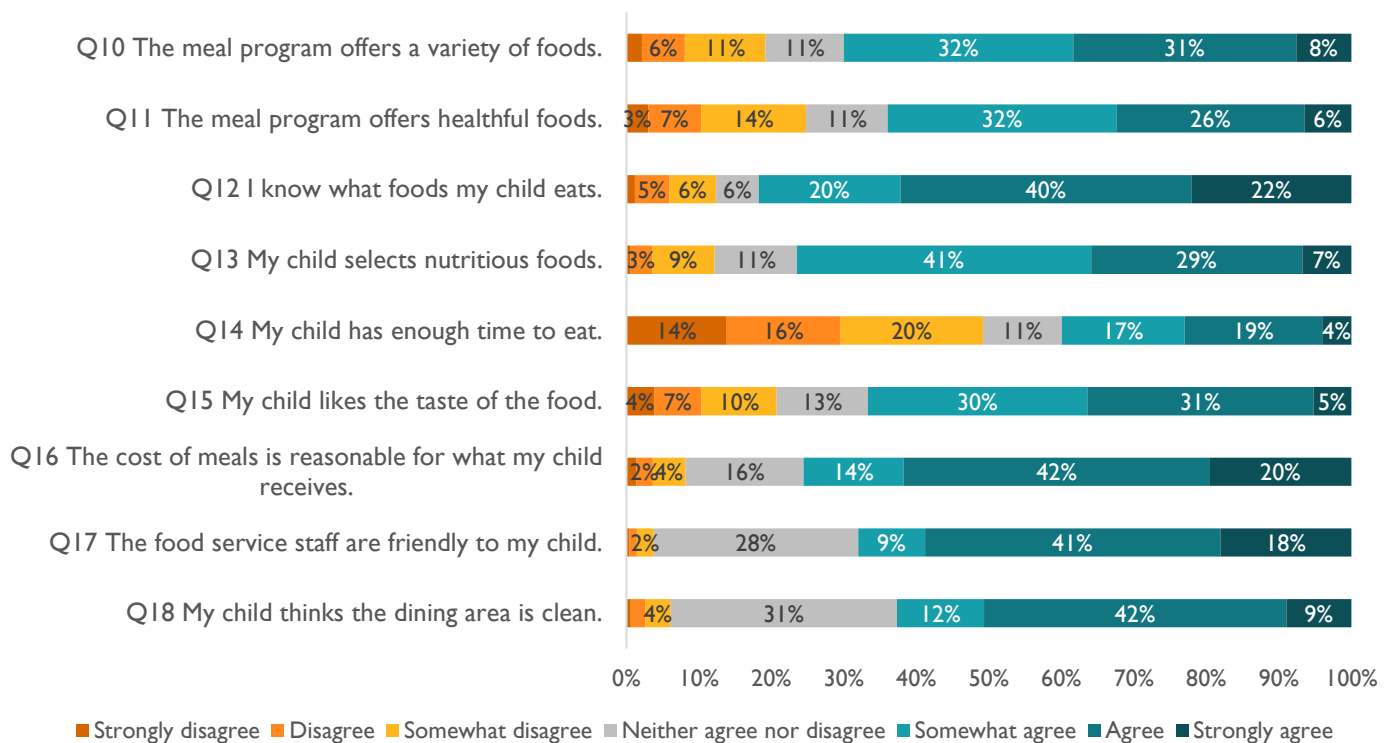
Middle school parents were asked: *Q9 Are you aware that every middle school has a Garden Bar with fresh local fruits and vegetables available each day?* **Fifty-six percent (56%) of middle school parents were aware of the Garden Bar program, while 35% of parents were unaware and 9% were unsure if they knew about it.** Among demographic groups, a much smaller percentage of parents of Asian, 36%, and English language learner students, 43%, were aware of the Garden Bar program, compared to 56% of parents overall.

Perceptions of the program

All parents were presented with a set of statements related to the Food and Nutrition program or their children’s experiences with it and asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each. In the analysis, responses ranging from *Somewhat agree* to *Strongly agree* were characterized as positive (shown in teal below) while responses ranging from *Somewhat disagree* to *Strongly disagree* were characterized as negative (shown in orange below). **The most positive responses from parents related to Q12 I know what foods my child eats, 82% positive, followed by Q13 My child selects nutritious foods and Q16 The cost of meals is reasonable for what my child receives, 76% positive each.** All demographic groups rated questions 12, 13 and 16 the most positively.

The most negative responses from parents related to Q14 My child has enough time to eat, 49% negative, followed by Q11 The meal program offers healthful foods, 25% negative and Q15 My child likes the taste of the food, 21% negative. There was no notable variation in negative responses by demographic group. Two items had high percentages of neutral responses, relative to the other items: *Q18 My child thinks the dining area is clean, 31% neutral*, and *Q17 The food service staff are friendly to my child, 28% neutral*, suggesting that parents may not have direct knowledge of their children’s experiences in those areas. The full distribution of responses by question is shown in Figure 7 below:

Figure 7





Parents were also asked: *Q19 On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend MMSD's meal programs to a friend or colleague?* This type of question is called a Net Promoter® Score or NPS. NPS is a customer loyalty metric that divides respondents into three categories based on the scale point they selected:

- *Promoters* (scale points 9 and 10): Promoters are loyal and enthusiastic about your program and will continue buying and referring others.
- *Passives* (scale points 7 and 8): Passives are generally satisfied customers, but lack the enthusiasm of Promoters.
- *Detractors* (scale points 0 through 6): Detractors are often unhappy and can diminish your brand through negative word of mouth.

Overall, 12% of parents would recommend MMSD's meal programs to friends or colleagues (Promoters), 28% gave Passive ratings, and 60%, would be considered Detractors. Among demographic groups, a higher percentage of parents of Hispanic, 16%, low income, 16%, and African American students, 14%, tended to be *Promoters* of the meal programs, while a higher percentage of parents of American Indian, 70%, and Asian students, 64%, tended to be *Detractors* of the programs, compared to parents overall. The distribution of NPS ratings are shown in Figure 8 below:

Figure 8: Q19 On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend MMSD's meal programs to a friend or colleague?



Open-Ended Comments

All parents were asked *Q20 How can we improve MMSD's meal program?* There were a total of 1,472 responses to the open-ended question. The top five themes and the corresponding number of comments related to each are listed below, along with representative quotes. **The top four themes to improve the MMSD meal program, in order, are: *Healthful or Nutritious Foods; More Time to Eat; Fresh Foods; and Variety.*** It is notable that the top four themes identified among parents' comments closely mirror the top factors influencing families' participation in the school breakfast and lunch programs found in the closed-ended questions. This alignment of themes in the qualitative data with the findings in the quantitative data suggests strong reliability among parent responses.

Healthful or Nutritious Foods (430) - Within this category, comments included variations of the words health or nutrition or contained specific references to specific nutrients such as protein, fat, or carbohydrate. Comments included: "Offer only nutritious options. Limit added sugar, refined carbs." "More nutritious offerings - less sugary things, less salt, less refined carbs." "Eliminating some of the less healthy lunch options (ie pizza/fried style foods)" "Healthier options with fruits and veggies and lean proteins. Less fried food/pizza/chicken fingers, etc." "Get rid of the high saturated fat/trans fat, high sugary, processed foods." "Remove gatorade, chips and other high-calorie, non-nutritious items."

More Time to Eat (334) – Comments were very consistent in this category and included: "Allow kids to have more time to eat." "Children need more time to eat." "Give kids more time to eat!!!!" "Have lunch time be a little bit longer." "My 7 year old son complains all the time that he does not have enough time to eat at school." "My 5th grader claims to never have enough time to finish her meal" "Provide more time to eat. Do recess before lunch instead of after. That way kids don't rush through eating to get outside."



Fresh Foods (268) – Comments in this category focused on variations of the word: fresh or referenced preparation methods and included: *“Prepare food fresh at the school.” “Fresh foods, less processed options would be nice.” “More fresh options.” “More good quality fresh fruit.” “More fresh foods, less processed meals.” “Made fresh not reheated.” “I would like to see more fresh fruits and vegetables.”*

Variety (229) – Comments within this category included general requests for variation in the menu itself or specific suggestions. Comments included: *“I would have to say a better variety throughout the month” “Add more choices to the menu” “better salad bar with more variety,” “More ethnic foods (Hmong, Mexican, Tibetan, Vietnamese, etc...)” “More variety of fruits and vegetables,” “Have more green veggies and super foods.”*



Appendix

Q1 How many times a week does your child eat school breakfast?	(n)	1 - 2 times	3 - 4 times	5 times per week	My child does not eat school breakfast.
African American	396	17%	16%	39%	28%
American Indian	13	31%	15%	8%	46%
Asian	418	15%	12%	20%	52%
Hispanic	685	16%	14%	28%	41%
Multiracial	466	13%	11%	20%	56%
White	3259	10%	7%	10%	73%
Low Income	1209	16%	17%	38%	28%
English Language Learners	986	16%	13%	28%	43%
Students with Disabilities	506	13%	12%	26%	49%
Overall	5241	12%	9%	16%	62%

Q2 What would make your family use the school breakfast program more often? (Choose up to 5)	African American n=116	Asian n=92	Hispanic n=190	Multiracial n=95	White n=445	English Language Learners n=245	Students with Disabilities n=110	Low Income n=353	Overall n=946
A cleaner cafeteria	8	7	8	1	11	19	6	18	35
Better tasting food	54	34	76	33	98	99	44	156	299
Food that doesn't run out during meal service	15	8	20	11	27	22	15	47	83
Friendlier staff	11	10	14	2	7	23	9	27	44
Having more time to eat	49	36	68	47	184	96	49	152	388
Lower prices	13	21	13	11	36	39	11	25	95
More fresh food options	41	30	78	34	210	83	42	117	396
More nutritious meals	27	29	76	28	214	85	38	99	377
More variety in the menu	51	33	82	33	126	109	55	152	330
More vegetarian options	8	13	18	8	44	29	9	31	91
Offering enough food to fill my child up	31	12	30	11	41	34	29	65	129
Offering locally grown food	19	8	39	15	148	32	26	48	231
Shorter wait in line	9	9	27	5	33	39	9	41	84

Q3 What are the reasons your child doesn't eat school breakfast? (Choose up to 5)	African American n=102	Asian n=204	Hispanic n=271	Multiracial n=252	White n=2312	English Language Learners n=406	Students with Disabilities n=243	Low Income n=323	Overall n=3148
I want my child to eat breakfast at home	58	130	165	172	1668	269	145	170	2196
I wasn't aware it was available to all students	4	17	22	25	183	36	20	24	251
It costs too much	7	16	21	15	91	22	6	8	150
Not enough fresh food options	12	15	31	23	210	41	14	24	291
Other reasons	23	33	45	51	355	43	48	69	509
The cafeteria does not look clean	1	1	3	0	5	2	0	2	10
The food does not taste good	10	10	25	15	113	31	21	30	174
The food runs out during meal service	0	1	3	0	4	3	1	2	8
The lines are too long	1	0	6	0	20	3	5	4	27
The meals are not nutritious	12	17	44	33	313	57	21	26	419
The staff is not friendly		0	2	1	6	2	0	2	10
There are not enough locally grown foods	8	5	10	14	109	15	4	12	146
There is not enough time to eat at school	8	28	29	35	273	54	35	44	374
There isn't enough variety in the menu	4	14	18	11	64	24	13	26	111
They don't offer enough food to fill my child up	2	3	11	7	48	10	6	15	71
They don't offer enough vegetarian options	2	13	4	2	49	19	4	10	71

Results for parents of American Indian students were suppressed for Q2 and 3, due to 6 or fewer respondents.



Q4 How many times a week does your child eat school lunch?	(n)	1 - 2 times	3 - 4 times	5 times per week	My child brings a lunch to school
African American	371	17%	17%	51%	15%
American Indian	12	17%	17%	42%	25%
Asian	386	19%	16%	37%	28%
Hispanic	641	19%	16%	41%	24%
Multiracial	443	19%	14%	31%	36%
White	3134	22%	12%	21%	44%
Low Income	1125	15%	18%	55%	11%
English Language Learners	920	19%	16%	42%	23%
Students with Disabilities	478	18%	16%	38%	27%
Overall	4991	21%	14%	28%	37%

Q5 What would make your family use the school lunch program more often? (Choose up to 5)	African American n=113	Asian n=123	Hispanic n=197	Multiracial n=135	White n=1007	English Language Learners n=293	Students with Disabilities n=155	Low Income n=342	Overall n=1583
A cleaner cafeteria	4	10	11	1	12	21	7	18	38
Better tasting food	54	55	76	60	357	124	66	161	605
Food that doesn't run out during meal service	13	10	15	14	76	20	22	45	129
Friendlier staff	8	8	11	2	14	18	9	27	44
Having more time to eat	37	52	85	55	483	120	69	139	715
Lower prices	18	33	21	21	124	44	21	24	218
More fresh food options	38	40	88	53	491	114	55	129	713
More nutritious meals	34	48	92	54	478	124	47	114	708
More variety in the menu	56	54	76	46	377	130	80	163	610
More vegetarian options	11	26	16	13	112	41	14	31	178
Offering enough food to fill my child up	39	22	34	23	129	52	44	97	249
Offering locally grown food	18	19	54	38	348	59	31	58	479
Shorter wait in line	10	20	29	20	139	48	31	57	220

Q6 What are the reasons your child doesn't eat school lunch? (Choose up to 5)	African American n=56	Asian n=101	Hispanic n=153	Multiracial n=157	White n=1346	English Language Learners n=211	Students with Disabilities n=129	Low Income n=124	Overall n=1836
I prefer that my child brings a lunch to school	23	53	57	73	645	106	51	30	854
It costs too much	8	8	33	19	94	25	11	11	162
Other reasons	17	25	36	49	443	41	49	48	571
The cafeteria does not look clean	1	0	3	1	7	1	0	1	12
The food does not taste good	23	18	53	35	347	57	36	53	477
The food runs out during meal service	0	1	5	2	19	3	1	1	27
The lines are too long	6	12	27	20	196	27	14	13	261
The meals are not nutritious	7	17	49	44	392	64	23	20	509
The staff is not friendly	0	1	1	0	14	0	2	2	16
There are not enough locally grown foods	6	6	24	20	184	31	9	9	240
There aren't enough fresh food options	8	9	35	45	346	49	19	15	443
There isn't enough variety in the menu	5	9	33	29	127	44	15	16	203
They don't offer enough food to fill my child up	6	1	8	7	35	5	4	4	57
They don't offer enough vegetarian options	3	16	10	10	134	21	8	6	174

Results for parents of American Indian students were suppressed for Q5 and 6, due to 6 or fewer respondents.



Q7 What would be the best way for your family to receive the breakfast or lunch menus?	(n)	Email	Other	MMSD		
				website	Phone app	Facebook
African American	312	74%	9%	6%	11%	1%
American Indian	9	67%	0%	11%	22%	0%
Asian	277	73%	8%	13%	6%	0%
Hispanic	502	68%	12%	7%	12%	1%
Multiracial	290	60%	13%	12%	13%	1%
White	1818	55%	15%	16%	12%	1%
English Language Learners	707	70%	10%	9%	10%	0%
Students with Disabilities	348	62%	14%	11%	13%	0%
Low Income	1006	69%	12%	8%	10%	1%
Overall	3210	61%	13%	13%	11%	1%

Q8 If you had a question about school meals, how would you find an answer?	(n)	Go to the	Call the	Talk with the	Other
		MMSD website	school	kitchen manager	
African American	314	29%	57%	11%	3%
American Indian	9	44%	44%	11%	0%
Asian	272	47%	43%	6%	4%
Hispanic	500	33%	57%	7%	3%
Multiracial	286	42%	48%	6%	4%
White	1802	57%	34%	5%	4%
English Language Learners	693	35%	54%	7%	4%
Students with Disabilities	347	40%	48%	10%	3%
Low Income	996	31%	57%	8%	3%
Overall	3183	49%	42%	6%	4%

Q9 Are you aware that every middle school has a Garden Bar with fresh local fruits and vegetables available each day?	(n)	No	Maybe	Yes
African American	93	38%	6%	56%
Asian	76	50%	14%	36%
Hispanic	146	31%	21%	49%
Multiracial	74	45%	7%	49%
White	436	31%	6%	63%
English Language Learners	197	40%	18%	43%
Students with Disabilities	36	34%	9%	57%
Low Income	111	35%	12%	53%
Overall	830	35%	9%	56%

Results for parents of American Indian students were suppressed for Q9, due to 6 or fewer respondents.



Q10 to Q18 Percent Positive by Group	African American	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Multiracial	White	English Language Learners	Students with Disabilities	Low Income	Overall
	n=262	n=10	n=257	n=462	n=290	n=1905	n=671	n=322	n=844	n=3186
Q10 The meal program offers a variety of foods.	70%	70%	72%	68%	70%	70%	69%	67%	69%	70%
Q11 The meal program offers healthful foods.	70%	70%	71%	63%	65%	62%	65%	62%	65%	64%
Q12 I know what foods my child eats.	85%	60%	84%	80%	80%	82%	83%	82%	83%	82%
Q13 My child selects nutritious foods.	81%	67%	77%	78%	80%	75%	79%	77%	79%	76%
Q14 My child has enough time to eat.	48%	30%	42%	49%	41%	36%	49%	43%	49%	40%
Q15 My child likes the taste of the food.	61%	70%	67%	69%	68%	67%	65%	61%	65%	67%
Q16 The cost of meals is reasonable for what my child receives.	75%	70%	75%	76%	76%	76%	74%	67%	74%	76%
Q17 The food service staff are friendly to my child.	74%	70%	68%	74%	65%	66%	73%	66%	73%	68%
Q18 My child thinks the dining area is clean.	66%	60%	64%	65%	60%	62%	65%	58%	65%	63%

Q19 On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend MMSD's meal programs to a friend or colleague?				
	(n)	Detractor	Passive	Promoter
African American	247	55%	32%	14%
American Indian	10	70%	20%	10%
Asian	247	64%	26%	10%
Hispanic	443	55%	30%	16%
Multiracial	282	57%	31%	12%
White	1838	62%	27%	11%
Low Income	806	56%	29%	16%
English Language Learners	646	58%	28%	14%
Students with Disabilities	308	61%	28%	12%
Overall	3069	60%	28%	12%