

Education Alert

Legislation of Vital Concern to Miami-Dade County's Students

DATE: May 14, 2020
TO: The Miami-Dade Congressional Delegation
FROM: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools
SUBJECT: **ADDRESS SCHOOL MEAL SERVICES AND COST DEFICITS IN STIMULUS BILL**

With campuses closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools provide food support to children despite major deficits in operational costs. We urge Congress to **provide emergency funding for school meals and relieve the growing deficits now impacting school meal operations.**

BACKGROUND: To date, Congress has addressed school meals flexibility under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act bill and provided initial funding to adapt educational services under the CARES Act. Yet Congressional action has not addressed the significant and ongoing cost impact of the crisis on school district food service budgets. Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) has completed a review of these impacts through March 31, 2020, and found:

- **Federal meal reimbursements were decreased by over \$25 million under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).** This is a 19 percent decrease in 2019-2020 projected revenues, reflecting the net effect of emergency closure on March 16.
- **Waivers that allow emergency food services have mitigated even larger losses.** Since March, program waivers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have allowed distribution of school breakfast and lunch meals to children 18 years and under at 50 designated school site distribution centers. A projected \$12 million for emergency meals mitigates what otherwise would have been a decrease of \$37 million under NSLP.
- **The net impact of crisis on District food services is a shortfall of over \$13 million, leaving Food Service with a dangerously low fund balance.** The net decrease reflects all federal, state, and local revenues and related expenditures, including any savings from decreased purchased in food and supplies.

The House bill introduced this week, The Heroes Act, proposes to extend waivers introduced under the Families First bill. Critically, the bill also mitigates local losses so that school districts can continue to operate and retain staff during this period of school closures.

- **A \$3 billion emergency fund for Child Nutrition Programs** provides relief to school meal providers and other USDA programs that operate on a per-meal reimbursement. The additional funding is necessary to cover fixed costs at a time when the number of meals served is drastically reduced due to the pandemic.
- **The calculation of meal reimbursements is adjusted to hold districts harmless** under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and Child Nutrition Act, ensuring that reimbursements for school year 2019-2020, such as commodity allocations and administrative funding amounts, are not less than the amounts provided in 2018-2019.

ACTION NEEDED: The pandemic has severely reduced meal reimbursements to schools, which must provide food security during closures and be ready to reopen when conditions allow. **We urge bipartisan support to create an emergency school meals fund and ensure that annual reimbursements are not reduced due to the crisis.** For further information, please contact Ms. Iraida Mendez-Cartaya, Associate Superintendent, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Grants Administration, and Community Engagement, at 305-606-6553.

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