



PGCPS Board of Education Climate Change Action Plan Focus Work Group

October 6, 2021 3:30pm-5:00pm

Topic: Materials and Waste Cycles / Food and Food Waste

Draft Narrative Summary

Board Member Boozer-Strother called the meeting to order. She then called for adoption of the September 15, 2021 meeting minutes. Ms. Waterman made a motion and Delegate Lehman seconded it. The minutes were approved without objections. She then called for adoption of the meeting agenda. Delegate Lehman made a motion and Mr. Jakuta seconded it. The agenda was approved without objections.

Board Member Boozer-Strother reminded the public of the availability of our founding. Mr. Jakuta discussed the upcoming meeting on Buildings that is scheduled for October 20, 2021. He also discussed how PGCPS staff has been diligent in fulfilling what is available for data and buildings and transportation data is now available for review. Ms. Culzoni then discussed the need for everyone to sign up for their sub workgroups and that in particular we want to get moving with the legislative workgroup. Ms. Culzoni discussed that the survey was distributed Tuesday October 5. We must share it widely and responses are due by October 31, 2021. Boardmember Boozer-Strother stated she wanted to work with the student members to increase outreach of the students on the effort.

Board Member Boozer-Strother introduced Chloe Waterman, a member of the workgroup who will be the moderator and present information on food. She then introduced the PGCPCL leadership on the call -- Director of Food and Nutrition Service Joan Shorter, Sara Gillespie Maintenance Technician for Recycling, Antoine Taylor, PGCPS Building Services Operations Supervisor. Mr. Sam Stefanelli, Director of Building Services, and Mr. Shawn Matlock, Director of Capital Programs, were also in attendance.

Ms. Waterman presented slides. She discussed the work of the Prince George's Food Equity Council. Next was a presentation of the connection between healthy foods and climate, particularly the use of vegetarian and organic foods. Additionally, curbing emissions from the

food sector is vital for meeting the Paris climate goals, in particular from the livestock sector. She then went to discuss food waste, both from production of excess food and decay in landfills. Ideas such as reducing waste by having an offer versus serve model and to reduce waste that is landfilled through composting.

An example was provided that even switching out one meal from meat to vegetable can reduce large amounts of carbon emissions, in addition to being cheaper for the school system despite an increase in labor costs. Another example involved the cost savings from switching out of a meat tomato sauce for the vegetarian option. Sourcing was also discussed if we are procuring from Prince George's County and/or Maryland and impact unions positively. Also mentioned was the District of Columbia's Green Food Purchasing Act. She finished by displaying a menu available for a week in PGCPs.

Director Shorter began the discussion. PGCPs offers grain, meat/meat alternative, vegetable, fruit, milk. Offer (student has choice to take or reject) versus serve (add to plate even if student will not eat it) is already available, but USDA does require that the fruit or vegetable be taken to meet standards. She mentioned that due to the larger farms closing, we don't have Prince George's County farmers that can meet the needs of the program, so local farms are considered to be anywhere in the mid-Atlantic. All vegetables are either frozen or fresh. PGCPs does not have scratch cooking due to food safety concerns. Sodium, fat content and sugar content are low. There are vegetarian options, hummus, veggie burgers, soy burgers, etc, but they often get thrown out because the children don't want it. There are also time constraints that make cooking of things such as chicken challenging.

Antoine Taylor then discussed the impact of building services including cleaning, equipment repair, etc. There are over 1,110 employees involved in this effort.

Sara Gillespie then discussed recycling, which she oversees. There is work ongoing to get better data on recycling. She is also working on composting pilots at Largo High School and Laurel Elementary.

Ms. Waterman asked about the pilot composting programs. Ms. Gillespie mentioned that the state bill on composting and energy from a variety of staff has led to the implementation of the pilot. The pre pilot started during the end of the 2020-2021 school session when fewer students were in the building and allowed for planning for a larger comp. The compostable trays and more students were added to the program this year. The cost for the supplies, trays and bags, as well as hauling are going to be a limiting factor for expansion. Michelle Smith then added there is an issue with getting volunteers to help sort the food waste and and take out the compost.

Delegate Lehman asked about the process of introducing a new food item. Ms. Shorter discussed that products often begin with blind taste tests with student panels. Everything goes through product testing. Ms. Shorter also discussed that there has not been a waste audit.

Questions were raised to the student members about the discussion, Nithin Gudderra brings his own lunch, Breanna Malcolm says that visual quality of the food is an important factor in deciding what to eat, and Ja'bari Woodberry also discussed outreach and look. There are multiple menu choices available on Menu Viewer for high school students.

Mr. Matlock asked about the land use requirements for school composting. Ms. Gillespie discussed that the composting is done offsite at the county facility at 6500 Old Crain Hwy, Upper Marlboro, MD, though some schools have been done onsite for yard waste, particularly at schools with gardens.

Marita Roos asked about the possibility of returning composted materials and Ms. Gillespie said they are examining that possibility as part of a learning.

Donald Belle asked that the composted materials could benefit from inclusion of more compostable materials. He cited the compostable trays as being a boon for reducing sorting and wanted to know if other materials, like the fruit cups, could be made compostable.

Ms. Waterman mentioned some of the challenges, scratch cooking, no central cooking, aggregation with farmers, etc. but what asked what would be your wish for a program? Ms. Shorter discussed that even a central commissary would still have the same issue of cooking, flash freezing, and then delivering that PGCPs currently has. They make 55,000 breakfasts and 85,000 lunches a day. Ms. Shorter did say a large central warehouse and cooking facility would be quite nice.

Mr. Jakuta asked about recycling. The recycling program is managed by a principal, teacher, and the building supervisor. So everyone in the schools is taking care of it. Data used to be available as an aggregate of the route, so you could only get 20-40 schools in the aggregate. Now there are sensors in the dumpster that can determine the recycling levels at each school and they are piloting it with the general waste dumpsters.

Board Member Boozer-Strother asked about milk distribution and Ms. Gillespie said that currently the milk and juice cartons are recyclable and that the straw ban has helped with contamination.

Diana E. Conway, President, Safe Healthy Playing Fields Inc. and Kathleen Michaels, PhD, Advocate, Safe Healthy Playing Fields Inc. then discussed the issue of synthetic turf. Ms. Conway stated that its high temperature, toxic, injury, and you can't get rid of it. It increases the heat of the field, the waste materials are toxic and cannot be taken to the dump, peer reviewed studies find increased injury rate for leg injuries and MRSA infections, the chemicals also aerosolize resulting in breathable pollution.

Delegate Lehman next discussed her proposed legislation for synthetic turf chain of custody.

Dr. Michaels then presented on what is synthetic turf, the health concerns with synthetic turf, and other synthetic turf impacts.

Mr. Stefannelli asked about the process to make sure that grass fields are sufficient for sports play. The issue that Ms. Conway cited is that sod is put in and not allowed to root and that there isn't a set of industry standards to install. There are resources available for improved sod procurement and Delegate Lehman cited that the University of Maryland had agronomists. Mr. Stefannelli said that a big difference between schools and other sports fields is the larger number of teams that rely regularly on fields and this results in grass not being able to recover. Another issue is that PGCPs used to have a groundsman at each school and that no longer exists. Ms. Conway provided multiple organizational names to Mr. Matlock and Mr. Stefanilli for access to the latest data on natural turf fields that withstand the use of PGCPs school communities.

Ms. Alston asked the question of watering the grasses of natural fields. Ms. Conway cited that synthetic turf does require an amount of watering too to cool it down during heat situations and there are grasses that are more resilient that are becoming available to handle more use and require less water.

Mr. Matlock did mention his familiarity with some of the financial and injury related issues. He mentioned especially the need for PGCPs to address all of the stakeholders including coaches and the public at large. Ms. Conway specifically talked about the issues of public awareness.

Meeting Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EihFU2RZS1Q&t=3s>

Action Items:

- The next meeting is October 20 at 3:30 with a focus on Buildings.