

## **Food for Thought Baltimore County Summary:**

In Baltimore County alone, there are over 2,500 students in the public school system who fall into the category of “homeless and in desperate need.” During the school week, these students have access to at least one meal each day; however, on weekends and extended breaks from school, these students are not guaranteed access to food. They are “food insecure,” that is, their access to nutritious food is chronically unstable.

According to Share Our Strength's No Kids Hungry Campaign, 77% of teachers say that addressing childhood hunger should be a national priority. Children who do not get enough food are distracted, display behavioral problems, and complain of headaches and stomachaches in school. Hunger at a young age is a major obstacle to success throughout life. And few children are as hungry as children who are homeless and in desperate need.

**Food for Thought Baltimore County (FFT)** is an affiliation of organizations whose goal is to address student food insecurity in Baltimore County Public Schools through direct service (weekend backpacks of nutritious, shelf-stable food) and advocacy, thereby creating more stable communities today and brighter futures for students. Food for Thought seeks to act on three items over the next year:

1. Expand the understanding of and conversation about food insecurity for Baltimore County school children who are homeless and food insecure.
2. Train and coordinate the efforts of other churches and organizations that wish to partner with schools in serving food insecure children.
3. Expand existing Food for Thought programs to serve more students.

## **Food for Thought Program Fast Facts:**

- Baltimore County Public Schools identifies schools / students who would benefit from weekend support.
- Food for Thought is a Baltimore County Public Schools-approved program.
- Our nutritionist has developed appropriate food guidelines.
- Volunteers provide approved food items and pack the backpacks.
- Supplies for each back pack cost approximately \$10-15, depending on the age of the student.
- Examples of food items: granola bars, shelf-stable milk, cereal, juice, tuna fish.
- Food for Thought delivers backpacks of shelf-stable food to schools each Friday. Students pick up the bags on their way out of school.
- Sponsoring organizations may tailor food items after talking with the school.
- Seed funding and training are available for organizations wishing to start a Food for Thought program and become paired with a school.
- Organizations may also support Food for Thought with monetary donations.

## **Additional Information on Implementing Food for Thought in public schools in Baltimore County**

**Food for Thought Baltimore County** is a program active in several County public schools. Homeless students and others in dire need are identified by school staff as needing supplemental food on the weekends. This food is packed by volunteers in backpacks or bags, delivered to the school during the week; the students take the bag for the weekend, and return it on Monday.

The program is currently only active during the school year and not during school breaks, although some funding groups have food delivered to the school for distribution during school breaks.

**Food for Thought is essentially a partnership between a community group funding and implementing the program and the staff identifying students in need at a particular school.** So far, the community groups funding Food for Thought have been churches, although members have raised funding from non-faith based groups (Rotary Club for example). There is no cost to the school other than the time needed to identify the students and set up a discreet time and place for the students to pick up the food before the weekend.

The largest group funding Food for Thought in Baltimore County schools is currently the Assistance Center for Towson Churches (ACTC). ACTC can only provide assistance in the central area of Baltimore County – basically from Towson to the MD state line.

### **Steps for implementing Food for Thought in a Baltimore County School:**

- A local community group identifies a school where students need assistance, through word of mouth, information on poverty levels, etc.
- Contact is made with Christie Carr, the Pupil Personnel Worker (PPW) at Cockeysville Middle School, who coordinates connecting BCPS staff at that school with the group that wishes to fund Food for Thought. Christie asks the school staff to identify students in need of Food for Thought.
- Once the number of students is established, the funding partner decides how many students they can support at the school. If they choose to participate using the Food for Thought guidelines and logistical support for the program, they sign an agreement with Food for Thought stating that they will follow the nutritional guidelines established by FFT, and that they will fund the number of students they commit to for a minimum of one year. After they have committed to a certain number, the families are contacted and the program is explained to them.
- If ACTC is not the funding/organizing group, the church or group organizes volunteers to purchase the food and the bags or packs, pack the food each week, deliver the bags to school and pick them up on Monday of the following week to repeat the process. The food is not visible in the bags or backpacks used in the program.

- The costs of feeding one child on the weekends during the school year in elementary and middle school is about \$350 – for high school students it is about \$400 per year.

As school staff become more familiar with the students and families, some groups are adjusting their foods to include various ethnic groups. In addition, the Church of the Holy Comforter also distributes food baskets for the Christmas holidays to students and families they support through Food for Thought. Not all groups can afford to make additional donations. The basic goal is to nourish the child on the weekend to avoid the child coming to school hungry and unable to focus on Mondays.

- Organizations may also support Food for Thought with monetary donations if they do not have the resources to start and maintain a program in a given school.

The Church of the Holy Comforter in Lutherville has received a grant to help train other churches or faith-based organizations who wish to start a Food for Thought Program in a school near them. **Contact:** Monica Butta, [mbutta2@jhu.edu](mailto:mbutta2@jhu.edu)

**FFT currently feeds over 100 students in 6 Baltimore County schools**

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| Hampton ES   | 9 students  |
| Ridgely Middle                                       | 10 students; ACTC delivers two weeks; Timonium United Methodist Church, two weeks   |
| Warren Elementary                                    | 21 students   |
| Pleasant Plains ES                                   | 17 students   |
| Padonia ES   | 20 students; Church of Holy Comforter   |
| Loch Raven HS  | 5 students; Valley Baptist Church has taken over the shopping, packing and delivery of these bags; church contributes \$200 a month towards food. |
| Towson HS  | 13 students, beginning fall 2016; Towson Presbyterian Church  |
| Red House Run ES and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church | new program   |

- Plans are underway to expand to additional schools in Essex and Dundalk

There are other backpack programs in Baltimore County public schools, but there is no comprehensive listing of them all, which is needed.

**What You Can Do:**

- Ask your church or community organization if they would be willing to sponsor a school or volunteer with an existing Food for Thought program. For information about starting your own program, please email Monica Butta at [monicabutta@gmail.com](mailto:monicabutta@gmail.com).

- Contact your County Council representative or state legislator to express your concern about food insecurity in Baltimore County Public Schools. Urge them to allocate funding to help create solutions to this challenging issue. For information about who your representatives are and sample language, please email Laurie Taylor Mitchell at [ltmitchell4@comcast.net](mailto:ltmitchell4@comcast.net).
- Make a donation to or volunteer with an existing program such as Food for Thought of ACTC. Email Luann Blackman at [theblackmanfamily@comcast.net](mailto:theblackmanfamily@comcast.net).