

Carla Garcia- Community School Liaison for South Lake Elementary in Montgomery County, MD

I strongly support the Maryland Meals for Achievement bill which is an essential investment for the health and academic success of our South Lake scholars. South Lake Elementary, located in the heart of Gaithersburg, Maryland, is home to over 820 students and out of those students, 82% qualify for free or reduced lunch and breakfast. Our students rely on breakfast in the classroom because food insecurity is one of the top trending issues within our community. As a Community School Liaison, I receive calls and texts from parents inquiring about food distributions and resources on a daily basis. This access to universal breakfast in each classroom has been proven to positively impact the attention span, attendance, and scores of our students.

Many of our South Lake families are immigrants who are working 2 to 3 jobs and are barely getting by. A single mom, Maria, who immigrated from El Salvador last fall, currently has a first grader at South Lake. She works 7AM-7PM and relies on the school to nutritiously feed her child. This first grader starts his day at 6:00AM where he is dropped off at a local babysitter's apartment alongside 8 other children. Breakfast is not provided by the babysitter unless an additional fee is paid which is not financially feasible for Maria. Once this child arrives to school, he is eagerly greeted by Mrs. Ricketts at the door and a tray full of food, milk, and juice boxes. The funding to support Maryland Meals for Achievement is vital for our community and we need to continue this across our state.