



Education Advocate

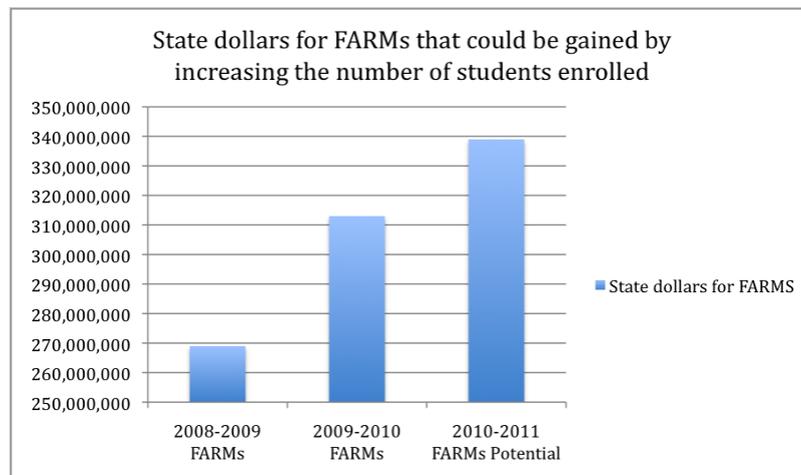
Meal Forms Critical to State Funding Nine Days Left to Get More Money for Your School!

The huge effort in 2009 that signed up an additional 10,000 children for Free & Reduced Meals (FARMS) saved the City Schools' budget this year, by generating an additional \$43 million. Can this year's effort match or exceed that amount? It must, or budget cuts are likely next year.

With less than 2 weeks to the October 31st deadline to submit and process FARMS forms, fewer forms have been submitted than from the same time last year. Is it FARMS-form burnout? Or are staff distracted by other priorities, like the teacher contract or Race to the Top submission?

Tens of millions in state aid are at stake. Schools must use the winning strategies from last year, and add more, to recapture the \$43 million increase from last year's campaign. And, according to an analysis by the ACLU-MD's Education Reform Project, an additional \$26 million is potentially available - IF new strategies are put into place.

City schools receive an additional \$4761 in state aid for each child qualifying for FARMS. Ninety percent of elementary children qualified last year. Although high schools notably increased their numbers from 58% FARMS in 2008 to 74% in 2009, the sign-up rate still lags far behind elementary and middle schools. If all schools matched the 90.1% rate of elementary schools, City Schools could gain an additional \$26 million in state funds.



Why Not Offer Pizza?



High school students don't like the school food. That's the primary reason they give when asked why they haven't turned in their FARMS form. High schools, like Title I schools, gain very directly for each FARMS student who qualifies. Dr. Alonso has given high school principals an incentive of \$750 direct additional funding for each student qualifying for FARMS.

Some high schools did a great job last year: Baltimore Freedom Academy got 98.8% of its students to turn in forms. Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy got over 95% of its forms in, and 91.6% of its students qualified - beating the elementary rate.

How did they do it? Baltimore Talent Development offered incentives unique to each grade and set up competitions between "teams" of students. Vivien T. Thomas explained the importance of the forms to the students and gave small incentives.

With 2 weeks to go, could it be as simple as pizza? If high school students were offered a week's free pizza at lunch, how many more FARMs forms would be turned in? Schools would get the forms, City Schools would get much more money than the cost of pizzas, and students would have a chance to talk to school leaders about the kind of food they want each day.

FARMS Count Lower In High Schools, K-8's

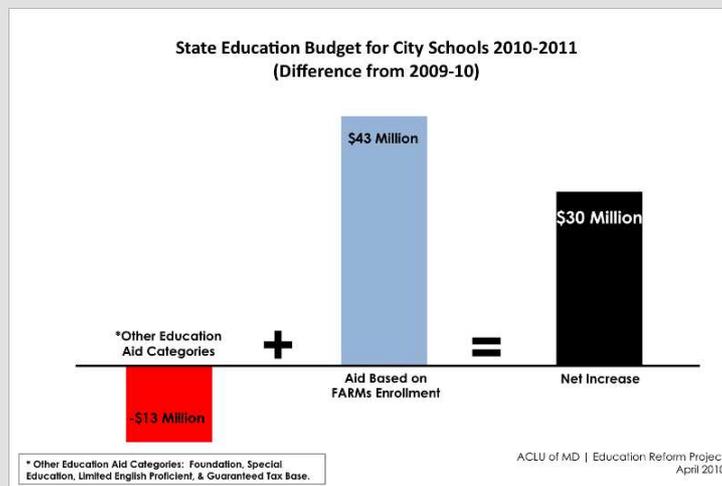
The percentages below for each type of school indicate the gap between the high FARMs qualifying rate at elementary and middle versus the other groupings.

Students qualifying for Free & Reduced Meals, 2009:

- Elementary: 90.1%
- K-8: 86.0%
- Middle: 90.6%
- High: 74.3%
- Special: 77.0%

2009 FARMS Campaign = Additional \$43 Million

The 10,000 additional students signed up for FARMs by October 31, 2009, generated an additional \$43 million in state funds for City Schools. State funding was projected to drop in other categories by \$13 million. The increased FARMs line drove an overall net increase in state funds of \$30 million.



Why Do School Systems Get More Money When High Numbers of Students Turn in Their FARMs Forms?

The state "Thornton" formula correctly recognizes that children from low-income households need additional services to succeed at the same rate as children with greater economic advantages. Summer school, after-school, Pre-Kindergarten, and other services help boost student achievement. The state adds funding for each child who has been documented, through the Free & Reduced Meals form, to be from a low-income family. Baltimore is receiving \$4761 additional funding for each student qualifying for FARMs. All schools, including charters, benefit from increased state aid due to the FARMs count.

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland Education Reform Project

Bebe Verdery, Director
Frank Patinella, Education Advocate
410.889.8555 | education@aclu-md.org | www.aclu-md.org

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)