



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Coolers full of 7-day meal kits, planned by registered dietitian nutritionists and prepared daily by trained food service professionals pack a Fairfax County Public School bus for its Bus Route Meal Service, Summer 2021.



Hutchinson Principal Sarah Aiello takes part of a meal kit from an FCPS employee to give to a parent with little children in her car during the first day of the Bus Route Meal Distribution.

School Buses and Sites Provide Free Grab and Go 7-day Meal Kits

No questions asked, no IDs needed — County children under 18 and all FXCO students eligible.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Ten Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) buses began rolling Monday, June 28, on a mission to deliver their precious cargo, coolers full of nutritious breakfast and lunch items packed in seven-day, bulk meal kits, grab-and-go style. It is a lifeline for some children living in the county's 406 square miles, who depend on USDA's child nutrition programs for the nourishment they need to grow and thrive.

According to FCPS, nearly one-third of its students qualified for free and reduced-price meals in the fall of 2019. Families who earn less than 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals, and those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of poverty level qualify for reduced-price meals. Fairfax County Summer Meal Program runs under the USDA Summer Food Service Program and enters its second week on July 5.

"The distribution of the meal kits fulfills an essential service to our community. The meals provide much-needed support to our most vulnerable students and families. Upon pickup, parents are not asked for any information other than the number of meals they require," said Dr. Ricardy Anderson, Fairfax County School Board Chair. "It is important to continue to spread the word that the distribution of meals is still available at FCPS schools and bus routes because the fami-

lies who have the greatest need may not be aware the service is continuing throughout the summer months."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that school districts could continue serving free meals to all children regardless of family income and allow the meals served in a drive-thru or walk-up setting, offered as "grab-and-go" meals through June 2022 under its Summer Food Service Program.

The program is vital, particularly for communities hardest hit by COVID. According to FCPS, all county children under eighteen years of age, and all FCPS students, regardless of age, are eligible to receive the no-cost, weekly Meal Kits, which can be provided to parents or caretakers without the presence of a child.

FCPS made the free meal kits available in two ways. Parents, guardians, and students can access the kits at the weekly Bus Route Meal Service distributing throughout the county through Thursday, Aug. 5. The second option is to visit one of the Meal Kit Sites (every Monday) through Aug. 2.

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS can let the FCPS employees know how many children need a meal kit. No other questions are asked, nor is identification required. Students may also pick up the meal kits.

On Tuesday, June 29, Delmay Sandoval of Herndon was first in line at Hutchinson Elementary school parking lot for that Bus Route Meal Service location. She sat in her

car with the windows rolled down with her two children and baby in the back seat. The temperature registered 95 degrees, and the sun was blazing. "I received this message last night from the school. It's in Spanish," Sandoval said. "I didn't know about the meals before that."

According to Sarah Aiello, Principal at Hutchinson, she texted the community multiple times the night before "to prep them because it's something new." She stood in the school parking lot as the bus arrived and called out to people, "Once a week, every Tuesday, 11:37."

Parents, caretakers, and students exited their cars to receive the meal kits off-loaded from the bus's rear. "I need it for three kids," one woman said. "Dos ninos," said a man.

Seeing small children in some vehicles, Aiello and other school staff hurried toward them with meal kits and loaded them into the trunks. Aiello later reported 80 meal kits distributed.

Registered dietitian nutritionists plan the meals and trained food service professionals prepare them daily using fresh high-quality ingredients. The grab-and-go meals "are tasty, well-balanced, and contain protein, whole grains, fruits and/or vegetables, and low-fat or fat-free milk," according to the Fairfax County Office of Food and Nutrition Services.

Ten FCPS buses run designated Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday routes to schools and other locations, once a week

Monday Meal Kit Sites

June 28 - August 2 - 8:30 - 10:30 a.m.
or until supplies are exhausted.

Dates of distribution

- June 28
- July 6 (Tuesday, July 6 due to the Monday, July 5 holiday)
- July 12
- July 19
- July 26
- August 2

Meal Kit sites

- Centreville HS- 6001 Union Mill Rd, Clifton
- Edison HS 5801 Franconia Rd, Alexandria
- Falls Church HS 7521 Jaguar Trail, Falls Church
- Hayfield SS 7630 Telegraph Rd, Alexandria, VA
- Marshall HS 7731 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church
- Mount Vernon HS 8515 Old Mt Vernon Rd, Alexandria begins 07/06
- South County HS 8700 Laurel Crest Drive, Lorton
- South Lakes HS 11400 South Lakes Dr, Reston
- West Springfield HS 6100 Rolling Rd, West Springfield
- Westfield HS 4700 Stonecroft Blvd, Chantilly
- Woodson HS 9525 Main St, Fairfax

A list of the Monday Meal Kit sites open for pick up.

with scheduled arrival and departure times for the Summer Meal Bus Routes. The routes stay the same for the 6-week program. The last day of the Summer Meal Bus Routes is Thursday, Aug. 5. Search Bus Route Meal Service- Summer 2021 | Fairfax County Public Schools for a list of the Monday through Thursday routes for the ten buses.

THE MONDAY MORNING FCPS Summer Meal Program Meal Kit Sites are open 8:30 - 10:30 a.m., for the remaining weeks in the season -July 12 through Aug. 2. Like the bus routes, meal kits containing seven days of breakfast and lunch items are packed in bulk. Adults may purchase kits for themselves and other adults for \$28 each at the Monday sites. Meal kits are not available off the buses for purchase by adults.

The Monday morning FCPS Summer Meal Program Meal Kit Sites are Centreville HS, Edison HS, Falls Church HS, Hayfield SS, Marshall HS, Mount Vernon HS, South County HS, South Lakes HS, West Springfield HS, Westfield HS, and Woodson HS.

Search Meal Kit Sites (Every Monday) June 28 through August 2 for more information.

FCPS Priority One: Get Eligible Students Vaccinated

Expansion of school COVID-19 vaccination clinics underway.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The level of community transmission of COVID-19 in Fairfax County is increasing again. It entered the “substantial” category, the second to the highest level on Tuesday, Aug. 2, following an upward trend reported by the CDC. The same week, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) continued vaccinating eligible students at school-based clinics under a public-private partnership.

During a media event on Wednesday, Aug. 3, while visiting one of the clinics, Superintendent Dr. Scott Brabrand announced that FCPS wants to be ready to roll to get eligible children vaccinated during the school day with parent permission. There are 83,000 students under the age of 12 entering school buildings for in-person learning on Aug. 23, according to Brabrand. Because of their ages, the students are not yet eligible for the vaccine.

Fairfax County Public Schools, in partnership with the County’s Health Department, hosted free school-based COVID-19 vaccination clinics for adolescents 12 years of age and older at three school clinic sites, Herndon Elementary on Wednesday, Aug. 4, Justice High School in Falls Church on Thursday, Aug. 5, and Liberty Middle School in Clifton on Friday, Aug. 6.

ON WEDNESDAY, Brabrand visited Herndon Elementary School to see firsthand the public health initiative underway. According to Brabrand, the division finished the last school year, getting almost 5,000 students their first COVID-19 vaccine dose. The division plans to have additional clinics up running this fall under a public-private partnership.

“[Currently], we are at 75 percent in Fairfax County Public Schools of 12 to 17-year-olds to have their first dose. Now, we want to get that number even higher, so we have school vaccination clinics this week at multiple schools, and we want to continue,” Brabrand said.

“The solution to this pandemic, to make sure all schools return in this county five days in person, is the vaccination of all of our eligible students. Right now, it’s all of our 12-years-olds and up. We are preparing and working very closely to have more school vaccination clinics this fall at, at least 40 locations,” Brabrand added.

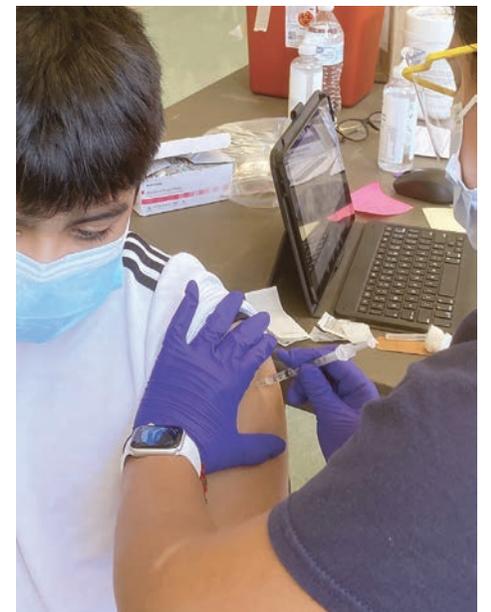
According to Brabrand, as the eligibility age for vaccination goes lower and lower, the division will be able to vaccinate thousands more children “to have a year that is as close to normal as possible.”

“Vaccination is part of the solution,” said Brabrand.

Students accompanied by their parents

(From left) Renee Gorman, Kimberlin Jimenez, 13, Scott Brabrand, Superintendent Fairfax County Public Schools, Hansel Molina, and Jeimmy Molina take a congratulatory photo after Kimberlin and Jeimmy receive their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

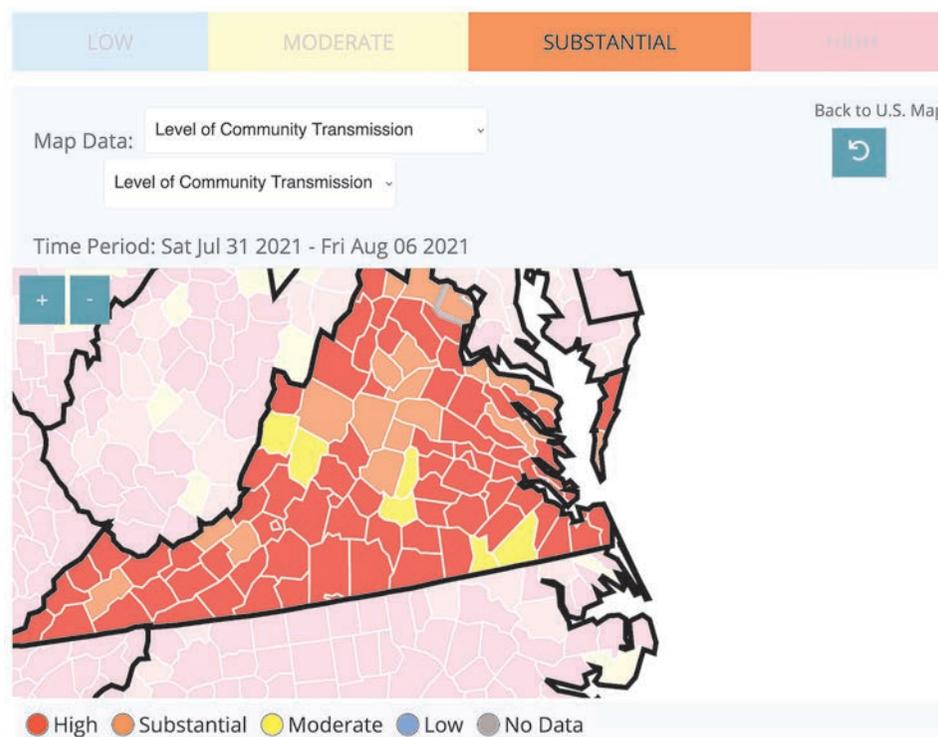
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Maycoll (last name withheld), 12, a Fairfax County student receives his COVID-19 vaccine at a school vaccination site.

Level of Community Transmission in Fairfax County, Virginia



The Level of Community Transmission in Fairfax County, Virginia escalates into ‘substantial.’

and guardians continued to enter the school to take advantage of the COVID-19 vaccine opportunity. Maycoll (last name withheld), 12, sat in the large room with others in the process of getting their vaccination. Maycoll said he would be attending Herndon Middle School in a couple of weeks. After receiving his immunization, Maycoll said, “It didn’t hurt, just a little pinch. I relaxed my arm.”

Rising freshman at Herndon High School, Kimberley Jimenez, 13, of Herndon, was about to exit the school clinic after receiving her vaccine. “I feel safe now because I got the vaccine [but], I will leave my mask on because others may not be vaccinated, and this is my first dose.”

According to Brabrand, like many other

schools in Northern Virginia, Fairfax County Public Schools is starting the school year 2021-22 with universal masking to counteract the Delta variant and reassure staff, students, parents, and the community that the division is committed to safe learning in school buildings.

BRABRAND said FCPS wanted to be very clear about social distancing. “Ninety-nine point five percent of our students are returning in person. Social distancing is not going to be possible in all of our schools and classrooms, and we’re not going to build a false expectation to our community.” He said where schools and classrooms could have additional capacity and additional distancing; social distancing would be possible.

Instead, schools are focused on layered mitigation strategies in line with the CDC—universal masking, upgrades to ventilation systems, and continued sanitation and hygiene efforts practiced well.

In addition, there would be professional monitoring sourced outside of FCPS. “We’ll continue to have safety teams coming in, an outside company similar to the one that Loudon County used, to continue to make sure that our staff is following all the safety procedures to keep schools safe,” said Brabrand.

He added that contact tracing would continue to be done because “the more contact tracing support we have, the quicker we can turn around having kids who may be paused at home, so they can get back in the classroom.”

Brabrand said to make immunization of their children easy for parents and guardians who give their permission; it will be provided within the confines of the school day, even for the youngest children. “So, we’re super excited about that. We really want to model for the rest of the country, vaccinate. We need to move away from the battles. Everybody needs to have kids back in school. Once they’re back in school, we’ve got to make it seamless and easy to get everyone vaccinated, including our students and including our youngest students in elementary school.”

According to Brabrand, FCPS is working on a protocol where parents can give permission and not physically be present with their children when the vaccine is given in school. However, FCPS knows some parents will want to be there, and they are working out the details.

Jeimmy Molina, 13, on her way to Herndon Middle School, received her vaccination. In an interview, Jeimmy answered what she would tell those with vaccine hesitancy. “To my friends and family, I’d say that I did it, and I encourage you to do it too.”

Call for School Board Member's Resignation Fosters Heated Conversation

Amid division, voices seek to be heard.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

With Ramadan's ending on May 13 and on May 14, Fairfax County School Board (FCPS) Member At Large Abrar Omeish posted what some considered controversial statements on her personal Twitter and Facebook accounts. The Twitter page qualified posts were her views. Omeish is a Libyan American Muslim. The timing of her posts coincided with airstrikes and rocket attacks. Civilian casualties mounted on the Gaza Strip, and Hamas launched barrages of rockets overwhelming Israel's Iron Dome of defense system.

On May 13, Omeish posted: "Eid Mubarak! Congrats on 30 days of worship! Hurts my heart to celebrate while Israel kills Palestinians & desecrates the Holy Land right now. Apartheid & colonization were wrong yesterday and will be today, here and there. May justice + truth prevail. #EidWith Palestine," - Twitter-Abrar Omeish@Abrar.

The following day, Omeish posted: "War is terrible for everyone. I hear those hurting. I continue to be here for each of you. People of all faiths deserve Holy Land peace. All forms of hate are unacceptable. Ensuring justice & honoring the humanity of everyone remains as urgent as ever. I look ahead to robust & empathetic engagement with Jewish leaders and all allies. Let's build together." - May 14, Abrar Omeish [Facebook].

What followed in the eight days after Omeish's posts were death threats to her, calls for her resignation, emails, and demonstrations. Events came full circle on May 20 during the FCPS School Board Hybrid Meeting held at Jackson Middle School. 3020 Gallows Road in Falls Church. It publicly convened shortly after 7:30 p.m.

SCHOOL BOARD CHAIR Dr. Ricardy Anderson (Mason District) opened by reading a statement, "...The School Board understands that the increased violence in the Middle East over the past weeks causes a range of emotions, including grief, anger, and fear... The Fairfax County School Board does not have a role in resolving geopolitical conflicts. However, we recognize that our students and families are hurting and are fearful of what is happening abroad and locally with increased acts of aggression against our Jewish and Muslim communities... In this, and every moment, it is important that we reject Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia."

Omeish is one of the 12 School Board members elected for the four-year term 2020-2024. Out of the 12 members, she is one of three elected county-wide who serve at large, representing all 1.2 million residents of the County rather than the popula-



Abrar Omeish Fairfax County School Board Member At Large speaks without notes during the FCPS School Board Meeting on May 20, 2021, saying, "I want to listen...because that is how we move forward, and that is how we grow."



Chairman Dr. Ricardy Anderson (Mason District) Fairfax County School Board says, "Our students and families are hurting and are fearful of what is happening abroad and locally with increased acts of aggression against our Jewish and Muslim communities."



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Demonstrators in support and those against Abrar Omeish, FCBS School Board Member At Large.



MERCIA HOBSON /THE CONNECTION

Omar Elbaba, 15, of Vienna said, "The Fairfax GOP is trying to remove her [Omeish] from office. That is affecting the entire community and not just her."



MERCIA HOBSON /THE CONNECTION

Leslie Sandler of Fairfax Station says that Fairfax County Public Schools is not the place to have political rhetoric.

tion of one of the nine magisterial districts. She is an FCPS 2013 graduate, Yale 2017 graduate, Georgetown Law Juris Doctorate/Master of Public Policy candidate, and Blume fellow.

Omeish's social media posts resulted in a barrage of daily reactionary posts, live media interviews, and press releases by individuals and organizations who called for her to apologize, resign from her position as a school board member, or be recalled. Re-posting these statements occurred, including speakers' interpretations and perspectives of Omeish's views, ultimately resulting in death threats against her.

May 14, fellow school board member Melanie Meren (D-Hunter Mill) @HunterMillFCPS, posted: "As a S.B. Member I'm aghast at the alienation @AbrarOmeish's sentiment has cast on many in our community, including myself, & am appalled at the setback this puts in @FCPSEquity work. Rebuilding of relationships will need to happen. JCRCgw @VOICEVirginia ADAMS (not on Twitter),"

May 15, "Blasting the 'hateful screeds' of Abrar Omeish — and calling for the school board member's resignation," stated Press Release, Fairfax GOP Blasts "Israel Hater" on County School Board - Fairfax County Republican Committee issued by Fairfax Republicans. "Fomenting hatred and division," said Fairfax GOP Chairman Steve Knotts in the Press Release.

May 17, "I don't necessarily support recall efforts unless there's something egregious, and I think in this case there is ...and I will share it publicly," said Fairfax County Board Supervisor Pat Herry (R- Springfield), in the interview on The Larry O'Connor Show.

May 18, "Anti-Semitism and religious intolerance," said Gary Aiken, 2019 Republican candidate for Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Mason District, in a WMAL interview.

May 19, "The JCRC [The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington] has cancelled its decision to honor at its annual meeting to be held tomorrow, May 20, ... She has not taken down her tweet, she has not taken affirmative steps to try to stem the vitriolic, hateful rhetoric on social media triggered by her remarks," said Ronald A. Paul, MD President, JCRC and Ron Halber Executive Director, JCRC, in their joint statement.

Underpinning a selection of the posts and statements against Omeish was the call for FCPS to focus on core education. "The focus seems to be on everything but...You know, anti-racism, equity agenda...We need to take them [Fairfax County Public Schools] back and get them going in the right direction," said Herry in his interview on The Larry O'Connor Show.

While posts and media attention resulted in calls for Omeish to resign, they also triggered support on multiple fronts and for various reasons, including the May 20 demon-

