



NEWS RELEASE

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BCPS unveils new food trailer designed to offer more real-world experiences to Career and Technical Education students

Towson, MD – Forbes magazine describes food trucks as “mavericks, bringing restaurant cuisine to where no chef has cooked before.”

Baltimore County Public Schools is vying for its own “maverick” status by unveiling a new food trailer that will engage Career and Technical Education students in preparing and serving food, but also in managing the finances and marketing of the nonprofit operation, assisting with its maintenance, and maybe even growing some of the produce used.

While BCPS administrators are aware of similar food truck projects in other states, school system planners are not aware of any similar projects in Maryland.

“This is a passion project of mine,” said MiVida Parham, CTE technical programs supervisor, who first envisioned a food truck project five years ago.

“Every day, I would see food trucks across from our offices, and I would think, ‘Why can’t we do that with our students?’,” Parham said. “I envisioned a CTE food truck as a showcase for everything that we do – an opportunity to get more students involved, more students demonstrating and practicing what they can do.”

To evolve the idea into a reality, Dr. Michael Grubbs, CTE coordinator, identified funding, and CTE staff worked closely with BCPS transportation staff, Gabriel da Graca, senior purchasing agent, and Jeffrey Smith, culinary arts instructor at Sollers Point Technical High School. Along the way, the original idea for a food truck shifted into a food trailer that could be easily relocated using BCPS trucks.

“The development of this project was a real partnership with the transportation office,” Parham said. “We had to work out how we would move it, store it, maintain it, develop all the specs, go through inspections, get tags, title, and insurance.... It has been a real learning experience, especially during COVID.”

“I am so impressed with the creativity of BCPS staff, continually seeking ways to provide our students with relevant, real-world learning opportunities,” said BCPS Superintendent Dr. Darryl L. Williams. “This project will benefit our students and allow the community to experience their talents.”

The 18-foot trailer is a customized cooking/serving space; which features a refrigerator, freezer, cooktops, fryers, air conditioning, and service bay. The trailer was delivered in October 2020, and it has been sitting since then – relatively unnoticed – at a BCPS bus lot due to the pandemic.

The food trailer was intentionally designed to match the BCPS Mobile Innovation Lab. “I can just see the fleet of BCPS vehicles attending a community event to show students, parents, the community all the opportunities available in BCPS,” Parham said.

This week, as a “soft opening”, the trailer was used to serve its first meals. As a thank you, lunch was served to about 40 transportation and CTE staff members involved in developing and maintaining the trailer. The meal was prepared by Smith and Lisa Tomecek, culinary arts instructor at Western School of Technology.

Parham looks forward to the trailer being fully operational beginning with the 2021-2022 school year. The food trailer will be initially housed at Sollers Point Technical High School, with a focus on providing internship opportunities for seniors and participating in school and community events countywide.

“We chose Sollers,” Parham said, “because we already have cafes at Eastern Technical High School and George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology, and Western Tech already does a lot of catering. In addition, Chef Smith at Sollers has experience running his own restaurant and was especially enthusiastic about this project.”

Grubbs added that, although it is a CTE Office Food Trailer, and Sollers is leading its initial use, all BCPS culinary programs will have the opportunity over time to leverage and use the food trailer to ensure access around Baltimore County.

(Editor's note: Photos of the new food trailer at its soft open event accompany this release.)

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