Lessons from the D.C. Healthy Tots Act examines how Washington, D.C.’s Healthy Tots Act (HTA)—the first fiscally supported farm to early care and education (ECE) policy—and its local incentive procurement component, “Local5,” influence ECE site local food purchasing practices and impact local food intermediaries and local producers. Specifically, this report focuses on HTA impacts on low-income children and children of color as well as Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) producers. Based on the successes and challenges of HTA implementation identified through the evaluation (and summarized on page two), key recommendations for developing more impactful and equitable policies emerged.

Key Policy and Practice Recommendations for Local Incentive Policy in ECE Settings

- **Offer incentives sufficient to motivate behavior change among ECE providers and cover food and administrative costs.** Five cents is insufficient to change purchasing behavior substantively or to cover the cost of food or staff time for the administrative reporting process.

- **Prioritize reimbursement models that reduce administrative burden for ECE providers.** Models such as non-competitive reimbursement grants or lump-sum reimbursements minimize paperwork and reporting requirements.

- **Include language and funding in legislation for outreach and promotion to ECE providers that is specific to the interests and priorities of the ECE community.** For example, leading with language in the legislation around supporting the local economy may not be the most effective for ECE providers in urban areas. Identifying ECE provider priorities and customizing outreach will maximize participation and buy-in from providers.

- **Target funding for third party aggregators and implementation partners.** These partners are critical to providing the necessary capacity to facilitate purchasing and build more robust community food systems and relationships across ECEs and producers.

- **Include language and funding in legislation for monitoring and evaluation.** This may include new reporting systems and tracking mechanisms. A key component of understanding reach and participation is access to substantial tracking and evaluation that is built into the policy implementation. Though CACFP in D.C. reaches large proportions of BIPOC families and children eligible for free- and reduced-price meals, a lack of disaggregated data makes it difficult to verify equitable reach of the benefits of Local5.

- **Center racial equity in policy development and implementation.** This includes prioritizing purchasing from BIPOC producers through “set asides” or other ways to transfer wealth (e.g., infrastructure, staff, time, land lease support) and requiring disaggregation of participation and outcome data by race.

- **Build in support for family engagement opportunities.** Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs or family farm shares create pathways for family engagement and an opportunity to increase access to local fruits and vegetables in the home while creating additional market opportunities for producers. This approach increases the total volume of sales to each site and increases volume demand for local producers.
Strengths and Successes of HTA Policy Implementation

Aspects of HTA policy design and implementation yielded benefits in process and outcomes for children and food systems stakeholders, including:

- Increasing local food purchases at ECE sites
- Bringing together organizations and entities across the food sector (e.g., ECE sites, local food intermediaries, CACFP administering agency) around local food
- Involving families and community members in the HTA implementation process
- Investing in local food organizations to develop a successful distribution model for getting local food to ECE sites and families
- Leveraging the power of the farmers markets in proximity to the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area

Sample of Success: ECE Sites Procuring Produce from FRESHFARM through “LOCAL5” in 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING ECE SITES</th>
<th>CHILDREN SERVED</th>
<th>PRODUCE DELIVERIES</th>
<th>TOTAL SERVINGS OF PRODUCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>56k+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations and Barriers in HTA Policy Implementation

Certain aspects of the policy design limited reach and effectiveness of HTA policy. The policy would have been strengthened by including the following in policy language and implementation:

- Incentivizing behavior change and compensating ECE sites for the time involved with additional reporting and administration, especially when using outside organizations to help with Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) administration
- Collecting data on race, ethnicity, and free- and reduced-price meal eligibility of children as well as data on participating producer demographics
- Augmenting staff capacity, knowledge, and resources to participate in the local food purchasing process, including developing individual relationships with local producers
- Purchasing volumes of food needed by ECE sites that also are cost-effective for producers when selling directly to ECE sites
- Supporting an infrastructure to manage aggregation, storage, and transportation of delicate items that ECE sites like to serve (e.g., berries)
- Communicating to producers, when selling to ECE sites through a local food aggregator and distributor, about where their products are sold
- Funding outreach, promotion, tracking, and evaluation of the policy