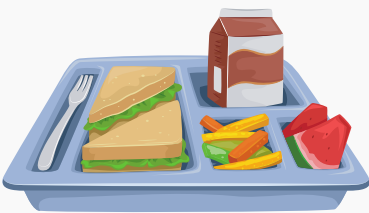


Making School Menu Changes - The Reality Today



When was the last time you had 250 people over for dinner? And you only had 30 minutes to serve and feed them—and get them out of your house?



School cafeterias serve as the largest restaurants in the state. An average sized school might serve 250 lunches daily. The level of detail involved in ordering, storing, preparing and serving can be mind boggling. Yet schools do this day after day. Modifying menus comes with challenges. Here is how those challenges play out in school cafeterias today.



Ingredients & Supply Chain



Training & Labor



Kitchen Facilities & Equipment



Time to Prepare & Time to Consume





Ingredients & Supply Chain



What would you do if a product you need is delayed?

What school kitchens and nutrition service directors are managing:

- Access to distributors, delivery timing, delivery sites
- Product shortages or substitutions
- Relationships with small suppliers (eg. individual farms)

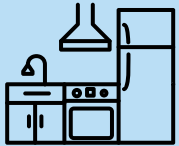


Training & Labor

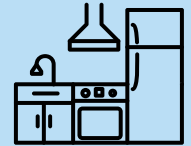


- The nutrition services team may wish to improve their menu and offerings but often staff need training to do so.
- Once teams are trained to handle fresh produce and other raw products, new possibilities can open up for menu improvements.
- Labor shortages may limit the ability to dedicate time toward training. This is further complicated by these jobs often being part-time and without benefits.
- Check out [Chef Ann Foundation's Lunch Box](#) for training resources and support!

Scratch cooking can lead to changing schedules, arrival times, and out times



Kitchen Facilities & Equipment



How would you scratch cook a meal with only an oven?

- For decades, school meal programs have relied on a 'heat and serve' model.
- This has led to kitchens being built with limited equipment.
- Shifting to a scratch-made meal item may require costly equipment and facility upgrades.
- And sometimes, brand new kitchens are poorly designed with very little thought put into flow, storage, and efficiencies needed for scratch-cooked models.



Time to Prepare & Time to Consume



- When considering how to change a school menu, any adjustment to the menu can have a cascading effect, amongst them 'time' is a major consideration.
- When making menu decisions, school meal operators will weigh the time savings of using a processed item over a freshly prepared item because they may lack the labor/staff to prepare and serve the item.
- School meal operators also factor in how much time the students have to get through the serving line AND then consume the meals.

How does this manifest in a specific meal?

Let's take a look at something like chicken fajitas versus chicken nuggets.



Scratch-cooked chicken fajitas

Speed-scratch chicken fajitas

Chicken nuggets

Ingredients

Fresh cooked chicken

Chopped & sautéed onions/peppers

Cheese

Green onions

Homemade salsa

Pre-cooked chicken

Onions/peppers - frozen mix

Shredded cheese

Pre-chopped green onions

Pre-made salsa

Chicken nuggets

Buttered corn

Training and Labor

Staff to prepare and serve each component

Staff to heat and serve each component

Staff to heat and serve

Kitchen facilities & equipment

Cutting boards/knives

Pots/pans/ovens/etc.

Pans or containers for serving each component

Decent amount of kitchen space to prep

Oven, steamer, or similar

Pans for serving each component

Kitchen space to prep

Oven, steamer, or similar

Pans for serving each component

Limited kitchen space to prep

Time to prepare and consume

Do I have enough staff time to cook each item? Do I have enough staff to help students make individual topping choices? Do students have enough time to choose and eat?

Do I have enough staff to help students make individual topping choices? Do students have enough time to choose and eat?

How can I prepare meals with limited staff? How can I move students through the line as quickly as possible so they have time to eat? How can I provide meals that are easy to eat and are quick?

How can these two options be mixed and matched to get delicious chicken fajitas with current staff/facility limitations?

"Pancake-on-a-Stick helps get kids through quick."

Other Considerations



Kid Preferences



After school facilities have been upgraded, staff has been trained, and more local foods and scratch-made items are being served – will students choose them? For a meal program to be successful, it needs to have buy-in. Making changes to the menu can be risky if students aren't on board. Will you go 'out of business'?

If the kids want pizza and chicken nuggets... they are going to serve them...

Utilize food education and nutrition education to create student buy-in! SNAP-Ed, FRESHFARM FoodPrints, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (CSU).



Community Members

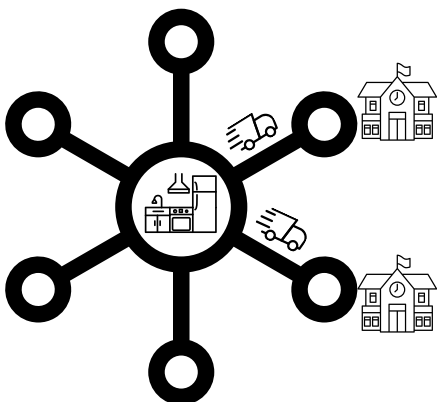
Parents and community members can also support the process of teaching our children to enjoy scratch-made meals at home, while also recognizing this may not be feasible at home for all families; they may be busy, working multiple jobs, lack access to healthy foods, etc.

Other challenges for the nutrition team might include the cost of ingredients and/or access to food items; they also need connections to partners, local food producers, and sellers. Schools are eager to serve the best food they can, but they often have limitations.

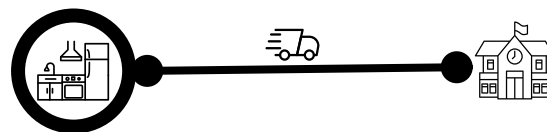
Remember we're all in this together!

Food Production Systems

Centralized kitchens



Satellite kitchens

























































Prepared on-site



Food quality and level of choice varies based on the types of kitchens and the distance food travels to the serving site. It also matters if food is reheated in a kitchen, delivered hot, or prepared on site. All of these nuances play into meal choice and perceptions of meal quality.

Example 5 Week Menu Cycle

A selection of fresh fruits and vegetables are offered daily on our salad bar!

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| Salisbury Steak Mashed Potatoes Dinner Roll    | Chipotle BBQ Chicken Garlic Bread   | Hamburger or Cheeseburger BBQ Kale Chips   | Chicken Enchiladas Rice Rainbow Bean Salad    | Pizza - Cheese or Pepperoni Breadsticks with Marinara Sauce   |
| Meatball Sub with Local Beef Roasted Broccoli    | Spice Rubbed Chicken Dinner Roll  | Chipotle BBQ Pulled Pork Baked Beans   | Fajitas with Peppers and Onions Rice    | Mac n Cheese Buttered Corn   |
| Chicken Fried Steak Mashed Potatoes    | Chicken Noodle Soup Dinner Roll   | Chicken Sandwich Rainbow Bean Salad   | Sloppy Joe Italian Pasta Salad    | Spaghetti with Meat Sauce   |
| Ham Sandwich Steak Fries   | Chicken Nuggets Roasted Broccoli  | Peanut Butter and Jelly Baked Sun Chips | Tacos Spicy Bean Salad    | Pizza - Cheese or Pepperoni Breadsticks with Marinara Sauce   |
| Lasagna Garlic Bread    | Chicken Teriyaki Veggie Fried Rice   | Parmesan Chicken Sandwich Lemony Garlic Steamed Broccoli   | Beef Burrito with Green Chili Refried Beans Homemade Salsa    | Cheesy Nachos with Ground Beef Spicy Bean Salad   |



Scratch-cooked items



Speed scratch-cooked items



Includes local ingredients - see the [Colorado Agricultural Calendar](#)

Most schools follow a cycle menu - between 4 to 6 weeks is common. This means menu items will be served only 5 to 8 times throughout the school year.

A cycle menu helps manage food-buying costs, improves staff efficiency and allows menu flexibility for creative meals students will enjoy.