



School Lunch Initiative 2006-2007 Program Highlights

In 2004, the Chez Panisse Foundation, the Center for Ecoliteracy and the Berkeley Unified School District launched the School Lunch Initiative. The goal of the School Lunch Initiative is to change what all of the students in Berkeley public schools eat for lunch every day and transform the way children are educated about food, health, and the environment. The following highlights the Foundation's main achievements, challenges, and lessons learned in the past year.

Achievements

- The Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) is now 100 percent transfat and high fructose corn syrup free.
- The central kitchen uses all fresh whole produce, as opposed to frozen, pre-cut vegetables.
- All 16 schools have a salad bar featuring seasonal fruits and vegetables.
- All 16 schools have Universal Breakfast, offered at no-cost to all students regardless of household income.
- 12 out of 16 schools use a buffet service for meals, rather than serving lunch in prepackaged, plastic-wrapped disposable trays.
- Organic milk from Humboldt County is being served at lunch in all schools as of September 2007.
- BUSD began purchasing produce directly from local farms, including Full Belly and River Dog organic farms.
- All kitchens are composting and recycling.
- BUSD opened a healthy snack shop at Berkeley High School that serves freshly cooked soup or chili in a bread bowl; bagels and cream cheese; yogurt smoothies and parfaits; Clif, Luna and ZBars; soy milk, Smart Water and Knudsen Spritzers.
- Year one of the School Lunch Initiative evaluation was completed. The Center for Weight and Health at UC Berkeley collected baseline data and surpassed the initial target of 75% participant consent by receiving 80% consent from all 4th and 5th graders in the schools surveyed.

Challenges

The following is a description of our biggest challenges this past year:

- **Infrastructure.** While all of Berkeley's school meals are cooked from scratch, the food is still reheated and cooked in batches the day before. We lack the facilities and human resources to prepare it daily. The central kitchen is a small facility and lacks even a stove. It has been extremely challenging to cook better food with such infrastructure constraints. A local bond measure will allow BUSD to renovate the central kitchen this year. In addition, the opening of a state-of-the-art kitchen at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in 2008 will relieve infrastructure constraints.
- **Human resources.** With all the new changes in how school food is procured, prepared and served in schools, it has been a challenge to train food service staff, as many of them did not know how to properly prepare and handle fresh food. In response, the Foundation and BUSD are providing professional development opportunities for food service personnel. Training topics range from personal wellness to food tastings and knife skills.
- **Lunch participation rates.** Lunch participation rates fluctuated in the beginning of the School Lunch Initiative but year-to-year comparisons show that participation is up across all schools. The Foundation and BUSD are working hard to significantly increase the rates at Berkeley High School particularly. The high school suffers from long lines (there are not enough staff to serve students) and a small cafeteria. Additionally, Berkeley High is an open campus which lures many of the young people away for lunch. The Foundation and BUSD have tried to meet the challenge of participation rates in creative ways. One example is the creation of a healthy snack bar at the high school. The Foundation also supported an effort that allows student athletes in uniform to eat for free on game days.
- **Funding.** When the Foundation began this work, we estimated that BUSD would need to double what the federal and state governments spend to make a healthy lunch. The federal government reimbursement rate is \$2.49 per eligible student; the state allocation is 21 cents; the commodity foods program brings in another 18 cents for a total of \$2.88. When payroll and overhead are factored in, there is only about 80 cents left for food costs. BUSD now spends about \$4.85 on each lunch, pulling resources from its general fund and California state Meals for Needy funding to fill the gaps. Maintaining this level of funding each year is difficult given strapped resources at the local level. The Foundation believes that increased reimbursement rates are needed from the state and federal governments if BUSD is to maintain the system in place and provide young people with the kind of healthy, local, seasonal and organic lunch that the Foundation envisions.

Lessons Learned

In the past year, the Chez Panisse Foundation has learned important lessons about what it takes to implement an ambitious agenda like the School Lunch Initiative and replicate it at other sites. The following are some of our lessons learned:

- **Hire a Cook.** The Foundation's goal in Berkeley is to create freshly prepared meals made of local, seasonal and organic ingredients. Before Ann Cooper started as BUSD's Nutrition Services Director, only a handful of staff had professional cooking skills.

Without knowledge of food preparation and purchasing, it is virtually impossible to reorganize the system to make from-scratch meals.

- **Changing school meals requires a public/private partnership.** A public/ private partnership has helped jump-start rapid changes in Berkeley. The Foundation has provided much needed “gap funding” for everything from milk dispensers to consultants. In many cases the Foundation also served as a fiscal agent when BUSD could not accept money directly. Until the federal and state governments significantly increase funding for school lunch, public/private partnerships remain a critical source of “gap” funding for innovative districts.
- **Districts must be committed to allocating more resources and providing leadership.** All of the changes to the food have been made within BUSD’s budget. In Berkeley, BUSD allocates less than one half a percent of its general fund to the Nutrition Services division. This small amount of funding is critical to maintaining the quality of the food. Over the past two years, BUSD also created several new permanent positions such as an executive chef, a purchasing agent and a sous chef, to ensure the sustainability of the changes we’ve made.
- **All the food doesn’t need to be cooked “in house” to be good.** Given the lack of kitchen equipment and limited cooking facilities, we have found that it is critical to create partnerships with other local vendors to cook meals or menu items that BUSD cannot. We rely on vendors like Acme Bakery, the Bread Workshop, Allstar Tamales and Full Bloom Bakery to make freshly prepared rolls, muffins, Mexican food items and pizza crust each week.
- **Support at the school level is critical.** Support at the school level has been instrumental to our success. The implementation of Universal Breakfast is a good example. Last year at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, 200 out of 900 students ate breakfast. The Foundation encouraged teachers and administrators to find a way to get more students involved. The school agreed to have each teacher bring their students to get their breakfast and enjoy it together as a class during advisory period. Now more than 600 students at King are eating breakfast with their teachers.
- **Curriculum remains the hardest part of the system to shift.** While the Foundation has helped to take the “bad” food out of the cafeterias, we understand that it is only part of the solution. In order to create long-term changes, it is important to re-educate children to perceive food in a different way. In our experience, children learn to see food in new ways at the Edible Schoolyard where the kitchen/garden classrooms are integrated with the academic curriculum and learning is a hands-on experience. In order to create district-wide change, there needs to be widespread support for this kind of integration in all schools, as it requires additional funding for professional development and time for teachers to work together.

Next Steps

The Chez Panisse Foundation receives countless national and international requests for information on how to start an Edible Schoolyard or how to change school lunch locally. In the next few years, the Foundation plans to 1) continue to support model programs like the Edible Schoolyard and the School Lunch Initiative 2) develop tools and training to assist the development of models across the country and 3) continue to feed people our ideas through meetings with funders, policy makers, school administrators, teachers and others.