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BUSINESS SERVICES DIVISION

Ed Burke, Director of Child Nutrition Services

CNS Board Update 4.9.2025
Additional Information

Al Puro Centavo

Al puro centavo is an idiom that means to rise to the occasion and do your best. The CNS team uses this idiom to describe our daily work and to grow so that we can better meet the needs of the children of Sonoma County.

Goals

1. Hire and retain excellent staff.
2. Prepare and serve from scratch food that meets students' needs and reflects the community we serve.
3. Invest in infrastructure to prepare and serve meals that meet students' needs.
4. Nutrition Education and taste testing
5. Local procurement
6. Sustainability and reducing the amount of plastic in schools.

But first, the numbers: Fiscal update

CNS has observed an approximately 4.4% increase in breakfast and lunch meals served compared to the 2023/24 school year. The number of breakfasts served this year is 11.25% more than the 2022/23 school year. The number of lunches served this year is 13.37% higher than the 2022/23 school year. CNS expanded the summer program with support from community partners and served 36.91% more meal equivalents, equal to lunches, than the summer before.

The CNS department has adopted a five-year multi-year projection (MYP) for the cafeteria fund to guide investment choices. The cafeteria fund holds reserves that reflect the reserves cap of the average expenditures of the past six months. These reserves and budget projections will help the CNS program invest in the program appropriately, weather changes in supplemental funding opportunities, and improve the food we serve each day. Each meal served by the CNS team is more than a meal. Each meal is an educational opportunity to support healthy lifelong eating habits.

Staffing update

Since our last board report, CNS has hired new staff members, transitioned three staff members into positions of greater responsibility within CNS, and successfully reclassified two staff members.

Our CNS team is crucial to the success of our goals in alleviating hunger in Sonoma County. We greatly appreciate and celebrate the daily work the CNS team engages in. Preparing and serving food is a profession, and serving students with love and care is a calling. CNS staff consistently make students feel welcome and supported and advocate for their needs. Ed Burke and the CNS leadership team are immensely proud of the commitment to a growth mindset, advocacy for peers and students, and the profound professional growth that the members of the CNS team have demonstrated this past year.

As we near the completion of staffing goals related to hiring excellent staff members, training has become a focus for our department. New staff members have been trained at elementary and secondary school sites and the central kitchen. We want every staff member to understand the nuanced needs of each age range we serve, the infrastructure of different facilities, and the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues. As we increase our offerings of scratch-cooked foods from the central kitchen, we want every staff member preparing and packing the foods to have a lived experience of the school sites receiving these foods. Of particular focus is safety, as safety is the first priority for all staff. Training related to worker and food safety is crucial for the CNS team. Everyone at CNS is responsible for food safety. As such, professional development has focused on food safety practices related to food preparation and service. In-person bilingual classes have been much more effective than purchased online self-paced training for food safety certifications. Almost all CNS staff are required to obtain a manager-level food safety certification.

SRCS wants classified staff to grow into their next position with the district. As such, CNS has shared an ambition to create a scaffolded learning experience for staff to grow into more technical and challenging positions. Ed Burke wants Food Worker III staff members to have a pathway into a food service director position. One of the most essential skills to acquire and master is culinary arts skills and culinary math. Culinary arts skills and culinary math skills are intertwined and require iterative learning experiences. When preparing four gallons of from-scratch ranch dressing, we can, and do, use sophisticated software to scale the recipes to the desired output. However, a deep understanding of culinary math is required to create new recipes and formulas successfully. For example, staff prepared a recipe for cerdo de puerco en salsa con chile negro y tomatillos. Culinary math and culinary skills are needed to scale that formula from four to six servings to four thousand servings. The skills required to accurately and consistently replicate the taste of a recipe at varying quantities directly relate to an understanding of volume and weight measures conversions. Cohorts of CNS staff prepared a new ranch dressing formula and then practiced the recipe's culinary math. Staff learned to convert ingredients from ounces to grams, fluid ounces to cups, and other volume measures. Math anxiety is a challenge for many people, and the CNS team explored best practices for

addressing the uncertainty and feelings of doubt related to math anxiety by focusing on explicit direct instruction. By grouping staff into cohorts, we have had consistent participation and a community of learners supporting each other. Future training sessions will include more hands-on applications of volume and weight conversions, recipe development best practices, and the development of shared vocabulary related to evaluating food. Training is ongoing.

SRCS CNS partnered with Sonoma Family Meals to provide hands-on training for food service staff at several school districts. Sonoma Family Meal provided two training sessions at the SRCS CNS Central Kitchen. CNS staff learned how to make a simplified cochinita pibil, meatball sub sandwiches from scratch, muffins, green Thai curry wontons, and much more. This was a wonderful learning experience and an opportunity to network and discuss best practices with friends at nearby school districts. The CNS team has developed a simplified cochinita pibil formula, and we are eagerly searching for partners that can provide banana leaves. As we prepare more scratch-cooked meals, partnerships aligned with training staff will be a focus for the CNS leadership team.

Staffing represents an opportunity to improve the level of service provided to students. For example, CNS was able to add staffing to meet the needs of the Cesar Chavez Language Academy (CCLA) much more comprehensively this school year. Historically, CNS has provided two staff members at middle schools. Two staff members were not adequate in providing the full scope of menu items at CCLA. As such, historically, all students were served a K-8 menu. Middle school students were not served the middle school menu offered at other secondary schools because of insufficient staffing. The MECHa group of CCLA requested chicken tikka masala, and several other menu choices for seventh and eighth graders. Early in the 2024/25 school year, CNS was able to offer the middle school menu to seventh and eighth grade students at CCLA. One of the entrees offered on the first day of service was chicken tikka masala rice bowls. Later in the current school year, salad bars were implemented at all grade levels at CCLA. None of this would be possible without the diligent support of CNS team members and the successful onboarding of new staff at CCLA.

CNS staff members will be assigned to support consolidated schools and separate age range groups during meal service. Additional staff will be assigned to Santa Rosa High School and Montgomery High School to support the longer meal service periods and food preparation for more students on campus.

Scratch Cooked Foods

New menu items and scratch-cooked foods:

- Al Pastor Tacos
- Black Bean and Carnitas Nachos
- Buffalo Chicken Wings
- Carne Asada Tacos
- Char siu chicken rice bowls
- Chicken Tikka Masala
- Chorizo breakfast burritos

- Homemade Shredded Beef Burrito
- Lemon Bowtie Pasta
- Nashville Hot Chicken Sandwich
- Re-formulated and introduced Beef Gyros
- Zucchini muffins
- Salad bar foods
 - Deli spice chickpea poppers
 - Esquites
 - Curtido (Reformulated)
 - Kale Chips
 - From scratch ranch dressing
- Baked Potato Bars at High Schools

Scratch-cooked foods are at the core of a great food program. Scratch-cooked foods represent a level of control that cannot be found in purchased products. For example, at community events where CNS offered taste tests, parents and students requested specific ingredients to be used instead of others. At back-to-school night at Monroe Elementary School, parents shared their appreciation for the use of olive oil in place of canola oil or vegetable oil in the kale chips they tasted. Further, we can adapt formulas to meet the needs of our students. Students in Teacher Natasha Thiele's class at Piner High School were overwhelmingly in favor of stronger flavor profiles in the samples of deli spice kale chips, roasted broccoli, and roasted red pepper hummus. Deli spice is an American BBQ rub featuring garlic powder, onion powder, and paprika, and it has consistently outperformed other spice blends. CNS has adapted the formula to reduce sodium while increasing the blend's flavor profile.

Scratch cooking removes the need for preservatives and additives to keep food on shelves longer. Sugar, for example, has hygroscopic properties that assist in preserving frozen foods. When schools adopt scratch cooking, there is no longer a need to freeze their foods, and therefore, there is no need for additional sugar or preservatives. For example, CNS developed a zucchini muffin with input from students, and Erica Lipanovich, a nutrition educator, and a family medicine physician assistant. The scratch-cooked zucchini muffin has 33% less sugar than the average sweet breakfast item. The zucchini muffin uses honey instead of brown or white sugar. The honey provides a floral bouquet that would be otherwise absent. We found that heating the honey before mixing makes manual mixing much easier, and the muffins were much better. Batches with the heated honey tasted much sweeter, demonstrated a more complete Maillard effect in the crust, had a stronger floral flavor, and were softer in texture. The sensory experience of the heated honey is by far and away the best of the other variables assessed during recipe development. Because the perceived sweetness was so much more present compared to other iterations, there is an opportunity to reduce the sugar content more, without adversely impacting the muffins. Further evaluation will be undertaken to reduce the amount of honey and maintain a pleasant sensory experience.

Scratch cooking is a collaborative process that fosters a growth mindset. The CNS team deeply appreciates our partnership with Chef Colleen Spiers, the Culinary Arts Instructor at Ridgway

High School, and the Ridgway High School Culinary Arts students. The keen observations and suggestions have transformed our recipe development process. The CNS team and Chef Spiers discuss what students want and test formulas. Slight changes have had a profound impact on the trajectory of a project. For example, Ridgway HS Culinary Arts students recommended lemon zest instead of orange zest in a blueberry muffin formula. It profoundly changed the formula for the better. Future collaborations will include taste tests, CTE-oriented activities in the central kitchen, and more formula development feedback.

Scratch cooking requires more hands and time to prepare and serve products. The transition to scratch cooking was historically challenging because the CNS team was understaffed. While the CNS department is increasing labor costs, scratch cooking will reduce food costs to offset some of these costs. Further, scratch-cooked foods that meet the needs of our school community have increased the number of meals served. The CNS leadership team believes that great scratch-cooked foods are a priority and has aligned the focus of our daily work to support this goal.

A notable success story of a student-led feedback loop is the baked potato bar offered to high school students each Wednesday. Students at Santa Rosa High School passed on a suggestion for a baked potato bar. Following discussions with students about their needs for more ovo-lacto vegetarian entrees, CNS implemented a pilot program at Montgomery High School and Santa Rosa High School. All high schools now have a baked potato bar each Wednesday. The baked potato bars have been a hit with students and reflect the best practices related to menu development and feedback loops with students.

Scratch cooking will be assessed through feedback loops with students and parents regarding menu item choices. Objective assessments will include menu production records and regular updates related to the multi-year projection.

Teachers, if you are interested in collaborating with CNS, we would love to partner with you to support the students of SRCS.

Infrastructure

Traditionally, the CNS program has found that federal and state funding, staffing, and infrastructure are the three barriers to scratch-cooked foods, local procurement, and a great dining experience. With the implementation of universal free meals in California, there have been a variety of one-time and ongoing funding opportunities to fund the CNS program transition to scratch cooking. School site kitchen infrastructure is largely unchanged from when the school was built, with equipment choices limited based on what infrastructure is in place. Older elementary schools were built with the standards of the time, and do not support the school's food preparation needs. For example, Albert Biella, Luther Burbank, Proctor Terrace, Steele Lane, Santa Rosa French American Charter School, and Santa Rosa Charter for the Arts have a small office kitchenette sink. We cannot wash and sanitize full sheet pans in these sinks. As such, we have historically needed to package food in plastic to avoid having to wash dishes

on site. The California Food Code does not allow food operations to not wash dishes on site without an approved exception from the local food safety authority. Making significant changes to the structure of the building needed to install the appropriate sinks is prohibitively expensive for the general fund, and CNS cannot use Cafeteria funds to make these changes. CNS is collaborating with the Facilities Department to design school kitchens for the bond-funded renovation projects. The CNS team does not wish to wait for renovations to provide a better meal experience. As such, CNS has collaborated with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services Environmental Health to address this challenge by creating and monitoring procedures for transporting clean and soiled dishes from school sites to the central kitchen and back as needed. The approved exception represents an excellent opportunity to safely meet the needs of students without significant and disruptive construction efforts at older schools. This exception is a crucial step in addressing the issue of plastic-wrapped hot foods at elementary schools.

Heating foods in plastic is not an acceptable practice, and the CNS team has been assessing short-term and longer-term solutions. The CNS team feels that an adequate solution now with an option to build upon the work is better than a perfect solution in a few years. Schools will be renovated as part of the bond-funded renovations. In the interim, the CNS team can replace the current aging serving line equipment with equipment that can be more easily repaired and better support meal service to students. CNS has evaluated several providers and is finalizing the purchase of serving line equipment for a pilot evaluation at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. The equipment being evaluated includes a “cooler” milk refrigerator, a refrigerated salad bar, and a food well-based hot serving unit. The current hot serving unit looks like a sarcophagus, and requires hot food individually wrapped in plastic. The infrastructure we use restricts how we can serve food. Lincoln Elementary will help us determine if changes in our specifications are necessary before purchasing units for elementary schools.

Secondary school sites represent a unique challenge requiring more consideration before piloting. Piner High School serves approximately six hundred students lunch in approximately eight to ten minutes each school day. Sixty to seventy-five students are served per minute. The amount of time students have to eat impacts the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed. Students must have as much time as possible to eat lunch to support healthy lifelong eating habits. The CNS leadership team has extensively searched for best practices, designs implemented at secondary school sites, and equipment intended to serve large numbers of people in a limited time. CNS is evaluating replacements for the current serving lines with high-capacity grab-and-go serving equipment. The CNS leadership team is assessing the flow of students, staffing needs, equipment, and design considerations with prospective vendors.

The SRCS Central Kitchen is aging, and equipment must be replaced to facilitate scratch-cooked foods. Work has begun replacing a non-operational blast chiller installed in 2000 with an amazing new multi-functional blast chiller. The installation of the blast chillers is expected to be completed in April 2025. Blast chillers are powerful refrigerators that cool oven-hot foods to refrigerator temperatures quickly. The California Food Code requires that all hot foods be chilled within six hours to 41 degrees Fahrenheit, with specific temperatures reached in that timeline. If these conditions are not met, the food must be discarded. Without a

blast chiller, staff must check the internal temperature of up to 30 pans of food every thirty minutes to ensure the food is chilling appropriately. The new blast chiller will cool oven-hot foods to 41 degrees Fahrenheit within 90 minutes. The automation and assurance of exceeding the regulatory requirements will free up staff to prepare other foods. The cost of the new blast chiller is \$382,846.99.

The CNS team is preparing to support school sites with welcoming new students and supporting more students at high school campuses. The CNS team will move equipment from closed schools as needed to welcoming schools. At secondary school sites with limited storage space, the CNS team will increase the number of deliveries to the school site as needed. The CNS leadership team is preparing the planning process for implementing dish washing machines at high schools. Washing dishes by hand takes time and effort from preparation and service activities. Washing machines are a substantial change to the kitchen layout and will require close collaboration with the facility plan review team at the Sonoma County Department of Public Health. The facility plan review may require additional investments and changes to the kitchens and dish washing machines to get approval. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that the installation of the dishwashing machine supports the safe preparation and service of food to the students of SRCS.

The CNS team has replaced aging trucks with five new refrigerated trucks that meet California clean air regulatory requirements. The five new trucks cost \$753,513.26 and have additional safety equipment, such as backup cameras and safer liftgates.

CNS has invested or encumbered approximately 1.38 million dollars into capital equipment since April 10, 2024. Infrastructure implementation progress will be assessed by evaluating the impact of purchased and installed equipment. For example, following the installation of the blast chiller, we will evaluate feedback loops of menu items, the amount of time reallocated to preparing other scratch-cooked foods, and the impact of secondary functions of the blast chiller on shortening the timeline to prepare scratch-cooked foods. Objective assessments will include the savings related to using equipment, the number of meals served, and other fiscal evaluations.

Nutrition Education and Taste Tests: Partners

- Albert Biella Elementary School Parents And Students At A Community Night Event
- Alliance For A Healthier Generation Collaboration
- Brook Hill lunch learning experiences
- Erica Lipanovich, Nutrition Educator And Family Medicine Physician Assistant
- Farm to Pantry
- Feedback from Santa Rosa High School students and parents, including Amanda Ford
- Hidden Valley Elementary School
- Hilliard Comstock Middle School parents and students at back-to-school night
- James Monroe Elementary parents and students at back-to-school night
- Kathryn Ridout and the California Dairy Council's Let's Eat Healthy Program

- Partnership with Ridgway High School Culinary Arts Program and Chef Colleen Spiers
- Partnership with Teacher Natasha Thiele at Piner High School
- Partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club of Sonoma-Marín
- Sonoma County Department of Public Health
- Many more partners and collaborators, and soon more students and parents.

Nutrition Education impacts and enhances each of the CNS department's goals. Students participating in nutrition education programs eat more fruits and vegetables, try new foods, and support lifelong healthy eating habits.

Every goal listed in this board report impacts the efficacy of the nutrition education program. Nutrition Education will be less successful without the ability to control the ingredients used, the equipment to prepare and serve meals with minimal packaging, and the staff to perform these tasks. As such, each barrier is not only a barrier to that particular goal but also to teaching and reinforcing lifelong healthy eating habits.

The CNS team is grateful for our partners' continued support in fulfilling the needs of Santa Rosa City Schools students. Each partnership represents a unique opportunity to engage with students, parents, and stakeholders where they interact with the school community. For example, the collaboration with Chef Colleen Spiers at Ridgway High School focuses on developing culinary arts skills to foster healthy lifelong eating habits. The partnership with Teacher Natasha Thiele at Piner High School is focused on feedback loops with students as a means to increase fruit and vegetable consumption by students at Piner High School. The partnership with Sonoma County Department of Public Health has been wonderful. Bilingual, bicultural health educators joined two back-to-school nights with CNS to support the unique needs of the age ranges served. It was great to chat with students during lunch at SRHS and discuss new menu items, the elimination of single-use plastic, and determining if protein powder is a viable option for school lunch. The SRHS Football Team students engaged with the hummus taste test with unique questions such as, "What are the macros for the hummus?" Ed Burke did not know off hand, but determined later that 9 grams of protein were present in one serving of hummus.

Taste tests and nutrition education can transform students' consumption of whole grains, lower-sodium foods, fresh fruits, and vegetables. For example, Ed Burke was assigned to Hidden Valley Elementary for a month, covering a staff absence. Ed Burke and Erica Lipanovich, a nutrition educator and family medicine physician assistant, partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Hidden Valley to conduct taste tests and nutrition education lessons. We served roasted broccoli and discussed the benefits of fiber. Namely, eating appropriate amounts of fiber and drinking enough water helps people poop. The following day, Ed Burke observed approximately 11 times the typical amount of broccoli consumed with great enthusiasm from students. At the time, CNS served 1.5 pounds of raw, uncooked broccoli per menu offering. Slightly less than 16 pounds of roasted broccoli was served and consumed. Students were initially distressed by the smell of the gas released from the broccoli's vacuoles. Ed Burke explained that no human could make that much of a smell—an important addition to nutrition

education lessons in the future. Ed Burke spent a month at Brook Hill Elementary covering staff absences almost immediately after concluding coverage at Hidden Valley Elementary last year. The students at Brook Hill were by far the best at taking and eating fruits and vegetables regularly. Site staff have done an excellent job of encouraging students to take, and eat, fruits and vegetables. CNS has paused preparing roasted broccoli and other roasted vegetables at elementary schools. These menu items required an approved exception to transport dishes to the central kitchen, and additional staffing at school sites to be sustainable.

Nutrition Education and taste tests are evaluated by the entrance and exit assessments, the amount and variety of fresh fruit and vegetables consumed at breakfast and lunch, and students' ability to articulate the benefits of healthy eating choices.

Local Procurement

- FEED Sonoma
- AgLink
- Direct purchases
 - EarthSeed Farms
 - Tri-L Ranch
- Support provided by
 - Conscious Kitchen & The Alice Waters Foundation
 - Shared Plates Strategies
 - Community Alliance of Family Farmers
 - California Wheat Commission
 - Center for Good Food Purchasing

SRCS CNS is committed to procuring the best locally grown and produced foods. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently reduced approximately one billion dollars of funding to food banks and school districts. Of that one billion, approximately 660 million dollars were to support schools procuring local foods through one-time grants. CNS has adequate reserves and a positive outlook for our five-year projection through the 2028/29 school year budget. As such, CNS will continue to purchase local food from our local aggregators, growers, producers, and processors.

CNS is interested in participating in procurement program certifications such as the Good Food Purchasing Program from The Center for Good Food Purchasing. This certification program will provide a structured evaluation system that CNS can use to improve our procurement practices. One of the challenges Ed Burke is concerned about is data collection for reporting purposes. To support these advanced procurement goals, the CNS team is scheduling discussions to learn more about the Good Food Purchasing program and how we can address data collection and reporting concerns.

Ed Burke connected with local organic growers and Conscious Kitchen, a non-profit that supports schools purchasing organic foods. Conscious Kitchen has developed several tools to help school districts purchase and serve organic foods with support from the Alice Waters

Institute. CNS leadership is exploring the expansion of organic foods offered by the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program using entitlement funds offered by the USDA. The USDA provides part of the reimbursement for lunch meals available to schools through commodity entitlements. Schools can allocate these commodity entitlement “dollars” to several programs or pathways. The DOD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is one of the ways SRCS CNS uses commodity entitlement “dollars” to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. The expanded offerings of organic fruits and vegetables via the DOD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable CNS leadership will evaluate the program. CNS is currently purchasing excellent local and organic produce directly from several growers and FEED Sonoma, a food hub in Petaluma. Compared to the 2023/24 school year, CNS has increased local purchases by 73.63%. The weighted average of these purchases traveled 109.55 miles. California tastes amazing, and Sonoma County tastes better.

Local and organic procurement will be evaluated objectively by the amount of produce purchased from local and organic producers, the impact of investments on the five-year multi-year projection, and assessments conducted with partners. Subjective assessments will include feedback from the SRCS community.

Sustainability and reducing the amount of plastic in schools.

Ed Burke and the CNS team feel strongly that great food is served with love and care for students and the environment in which our community lives. When great food is packaged and heated in plastic, the quality of that food objectively declines significantly. The CNS team has prepared some of the best food Ed Burke has eaten, and putting that food in plastic to be reheated at school sites feels like a betrayal of the love and care that went into the preparation. The CNS team has replaced individually wrapped spork kits with compostable utensils and napkins at all school sites. The CNS leadership team has been evaluating compostable containers to replace the plastic transparent “clamshell” containers at secondary school sites.

During a pilot program implemented at Hidden Valley Elementary and Brook Hill Elementary during the 2023/24 school year, notable increases in participation were observed when food was prepared and served without plastic. Within four days of starting the pilot at Hidden Valley Elementary, there was an approximately 78% increase in participation. Please note that this drastic change in a short period is terrifying, as there is a real possibility that there isn’t enough hot food available for students. Offering a cold sunbutter sandwich to a student excited about a hot entree feels like a betrayal and is deeply upsetting for students and staff. There was a slight increase in participation at Brook Hill Elementary, and an equal sense of excitement. The food we served was not prepared from scratch. However, it was dramatically better than the same food heated and served in plastic. There was enough time for one staff member to accomplish these tasks, but it was challenging to meet the needs of students during meal service periods. Portioning and handling students’ meals is more involved without plastic wrapping. When a student needs additional assurance or assistance, it is difficult to find the opportunity to do so when students are being served. As such, additional support for meal service and preparation is needed to ensure that CNS staff can sustainably meet the needs of elementary students.

Share Tables or “No Thank You” tables are a best practice for students to place unwanted foods that are fit for eating. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) underwent a significant change in 2012 for the better by requiring students to take a fruit or a vegetable with their breakfast and lunch meals. Ed Burke and the CNS team want every student to take a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. When students do not take a fruit or vegetable, we cannot get paid for that meal. The CNS team will not charge students for incomplete meals or a la carte foods, such as a bag of chips, because we want students to have a complete breakfast and lunch experience. Every day, we offer a variety of fruits and vegetables to meet the requirements of the NSLP and the needs of students. Staff will direct students to take a fruit or a vegetable to complete their meal as needed. Foods placed on the “No Thank You” or Share Tables are offered to all students and staff first. Any foods students and staff do not pick up are offered to Sonoma Food Runners, a food recovery and distribution non-profit 501(c)3. The Good Samaritan law limits liability exposure of organizations that donate edible food in good faith to a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.

We have observed the significant impact of nutrition education and the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Likewise, nutrition education includes explicit direct instruction on how to eat foods. We instruct students in the serving line to pair the pupusas with curtido in each bite for a great flavor. CNS staff also provide packets of low-sodium Tajin to promote fruit and vegetable consumption. Ed Burke would like to share his deep appreciation for the students and staff at Brook Hill for their explicit direct instruction on taking fruits and vegetables at breakfast and lunch. Seeing so many students consistently eating so many fruits and vegetables was a pleasure.

CNS took an opportunity to reduce waste and increase revenues during the summer months through strategic partnerships with the Sonoma County Library, Redwood Empire Food Bank, Adelante, Santa Rosa Recreation & Parks, and Burbank Housing. Historically, the Redwood Empire Food Bank (REFB) has sponsored and claimed meals for reimbursement from the state for meals served at community sites. Because the REFB is not a K12 School or school district, they were required to serve all meal items to each child to claim the meal for reimbursement. This led to a large amount of waste. SRCS stepped into the sponsor role for community sites hosted by our partners, named here in the summer of 2024. SRCS allowed sites to implement Offer vs. Serve, in which children can take at least three of the five meal components. For example, a student can decline the milk or a fruit, and the meal will be claimed for reimbursement. The changes reduced waste considerably at community sites. Further, the expansion of community sites, the opportunity to serve non-congregate multiple-day bundles of breakfast and lunch at rural sites, increased the number of meal equivalents served by 36.91% compared to the year prior. A meal equivalent is a way to compare different meals equally. A meal equivalent is equal to one lunch. We served an equivalent of 36.91% more lunches compared to the year prior. The growth we experienced partnering with community organizations and reducing waste during summer 2024 will be continued in Summer 2025.

The reduction of waste and single-use plastic will be assessed through several means: the impact on meals served, the amount of single-use plastic items purchased, the amount of food served but not eaten, and the feedback from students and parents.

Teachers, if you are interested in hosting nutrition education activities in your classroom, please check out the resource Abundant California from the Center for Eco-Literacy [HERE](#). To discuss other nutrition education opportunities, please contact Ed Burke at eburke@srcs.k12.ca.us.

Student Nutrition Advisory Committee (SNAC)

Santa Rosa City Schools wants to hear your suggestions and ideas. The CNS leadership team requests everyone interested in joining the Student Nutrition Advisory Committee (SNAC) to share their contact information via the link [HERE](#). The CNS leadership team will join community events at school sites and schedule town hall meetings to hear from the community we serve.

Thank you

Thank you for your continued support of the children of Sonoma County. Please contact Ed Burke at 707 890 3807 or eburke@srcs.k12.ca.us with questions, concerns, invitations to chat with students, and for CNS to participate in school events. Al Puro Centavo!