

CNS Board Update 4/10/2024

Ed Burke and the CNS leadership team are so grateful for the continued efforts of community-based organizations, parents, staff, and partners.

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

Staffing

SRCS CNS has hired and onboarded outstanding staff members in the past year. In addition to recruitment efforts via Edjoin.org, SRCS CNS has collaborated with a staffing agency with a “temp to hire” model. SRCS CNS hires temporary workers to fill vacant Food Worker III positions posted on Edjoin.org. Almost all temporary workers have applied and been selected for permanent positions. Several have since transitioned from Food Worker III to leadership positions at school sites.

SRCS CNS continues to fill vacant positions to increase the capacity of scratch-cooked meals at school sites with a minimum amount of plastic. The CNS leadership team is actively recruiting members of the central kitchen’s Cook Chill team. The Cook Chill Team will expand on the scratch-cooked products that the CNS team has implemented this past school year.

From-scratch foods at SRCS.

The CNS team has developed and implemented many new recipes at schools this school year. A primary focus of the cook-chill team is to serve authentic, healthy, and flavorful foods that reflect the community we serve. One of the notable additions of from-scratch foods, Turkey Tinga, was a hit at Elementary schools. When CNS served Turkey Tinga for the first time, Ed Burke covered a staff absence at an Elementary school. After a brief introduction of the ingredients and the preparation, students were eager to try the Tinga. Aside from a pointed negative comment about the appearance of the Tinga, “Did you chew this?” the students enjoyed the Tinga. The student who commented negatively returned for a second serving of the Tinga. The student shared that the shredded meat was too delicate and would have been better with a coarser shredded texture. A second serving is perhaps the most sincere compliment, especially after the initial comment.

Tinga is a stewed meat dish from central and southern Mexico with a tomato and chile base. It is typically served with Chicken thighs, whereas SRCS CNS used turkey because it was more readily available in the quantities needed. After stewing for several hours, the SRCS CNS dish was manually shredded and served with tortilla chips.

A limiting factor for scratch-cooked items is the infrastructure and equipment available at school sites and the central kitchen. CNS has developed several recipes that are ready for production once appropriate equipment has been installed. For example, CNS has created a delightful hummus formula to send to school sites from the central kitchen once a large food processor is installed.

Investing In Infrastructure

The CNS department is deeply grateful to the Santa Rosa City Schools community for passing the most recent bond measure. The planning process takes time, and we are eager to support the process with input related to making delicious and healthy scratch-cooked foods.

CNS plans to invest over 1 million dollars in equipment and infrastructure at the central kitchen and school sites during the 2024 school year. Additional investments to replace aging infrastructure and equipment will occur as needed.

Taste testing, student feedback, and nutrition education at schools.

CNS believes that consuming foods should be taught with explicit, direct instruction. While most dietary habits are established via exposure and repeated offerings, we can supplement these dietary habits with direct instruction. For example, when the Turkey Tinga was offered, students were given explicit instructions on how to use the tortilla chip as a scoop. Verbal instruction was presented as a simple addition. Turkey Tinga + Tortilla Chip is good. Turkey Tinga + Tortilla Chip + Salsa is awesome. SRCS CNS has developed a new scratch-made guajillo chile-based salsa to improve the Turkey Tinga eating experience.

At a prior district, Ed Burke observed that students required explicit direct instructions to eat the food as intended. For example, the Food Service team offered fish tacos featuring breaded catfish filets on corn tortillas. The intended taco experience was Fish Taco + Slaw + Salsa. Students who did not take the slaw or the salsa did not eat the fish taco as it was intended to be consumed. Most students who ate the fish taco without the slaw or salsa reported intense dissatisfaction. To be fair, a relatively unseasoned breaded fish filet on a corn tortilla is unappealing. With explicit direct instruction, the dissatisfied students discovered that adding their preferred salsa and slaw elevated the dish.

By presenting clear instructions using a structure of adding foods, students have relatable and explicit instructions on interacting with their foods. For example, we used a similar model at an Elementary school to introduce the sublime pairing of pupusas with a scratch-prepared Curtido. Pupusa + Curtido on the fork and eaten together is fantastic. Pupusas are thick pancakes made

of cornmeal dough called masa, and the interior is stuffed with beans, meat, and or cheese. Curtido is a slightly pickled vegetable side dish with shredded cabbage, carrots, and chiles. Pupusas and curtido are from El Salvador. The acid from pickled vegetables pairs well with the fat of the interior of the pupusa. While serving lunch, we presented the pairing to staff and students unfamiliar with curtido. A notable issue was a preoccupation with how spicy the curtido was. While CNS did not add spicy chiles because the curtido was unfamiliar and had a strong flavor profile that tickles the nose, students expressed concerns. This experience reinforced feedback from students about fears of the possibility that unfamiliar foods are spicy or may lead to an unpleasant eating experience. Our ongoing discussion with students addresses the conflation of strong flavors with heat and classifying the dish as spicy. For example, curry has a multitude of spices and herbs that define the dish's flavor profile. The relative heat of the curry, however, is a separate measure. Therefore, when we ask students and staff to evaluate a new dish, a central question is, "Does the dish have strong flavors, or does it feel like burning heat." While older students famously seek out the heat of "hot" flavor profiles, younger students are deeply concerned about the heat level of a dish. CNS is preparing training materials for staff to instruct students on the difference between heat and strong flavors. For example, the curtido has strong flavors but no heat.

There is an ongoing need to provide explicit direct instruction for trying new foods with strong flavor profiles. As such, CNS is developing best practices related to the explicit direct instruction of students regarding how they interact with their food. Appropriate scaffolding of concepts includes addressing student concerns related to trying new foods. One of the most prescient concerns is "What do I do with the food I don't like?" and normalizing and respectfully removing unwanted food and flavors from our mouths during meal periods.

Ed Burke and Erica Lipanovich are collaborating with the Boys and Girls Club of Sonoma-Marin at Hidden Valley Elementary School to develop a scalable nutrition education and taste-testing model. The first session featuring esquites was a success. We discussed the health benefits of eating many colors daily, being brave eaters, and the No Thank You lesson plan. Students reported that while initially concerned about trying esquites for the first time, they felt safe trying it. Some students enjoyed the esquites, and others did not. However, everyone reported excitement about trying more new dishes in the future. The students who participated in the learning experience will normalize the best practices of trying new foods and eating multiple food colors each day. As we develop the model, we will expand to other schools.

Nutrition education will explain to students what food is and the daily benefits of eating lots of colors. Students are more likely to be motivated by the short-term benefits of eating whole grains and whole fruits and vegetables. For example, eating whole grains, whole fruits, and vegetables helps you develop strong muscles, hair, and teeth. We can anticipate considerable growth with a role model demonstrating how to try new foods and a feedback loop for the CNS staff to evaluate offerings.

Teachers, if you are interested in classroom learning opportunities related to food and nutrition that use Common Core standards, please contact Ed Burke. The Center for Ecoliteracy has

developed unique content for teachers, aligning food and nutrition education with common core standards.

Local Procurement and Farm-to-School Programs

CNS has had a very successful experience connecting with local growers and community-based organizations to support our local procurement goals. SRCS is a partner district to four community-based organizations for the 2024 California Department of Food and Agriculture Farm to School Incubator Grant that will significantly benefit the district without any financial contributions from the district aside from planned procurement. If the partners are selected to receive funds from the State of California, they will expand their current support for SRCS CNS Farm to School Programs.

The four organizations that SRCS has partnered with to expand farm-to-school and local procurement are:

- Shared Plates Strategies will assist with connecting with local growers and addressing logistical challenges associated with working with smaller growers or growers that have not historically served public institutions.
- California Wheat Commission will assist CNS with connecting to local wheat growers, expert bakers, and nutrition education opportunities related to California wheat. Local freshly milled wheat tastes fantastic.
- FEED Sonoma will aggregate and deliver local produce grown in Sonoma County.
- EarthSeed Farms will expand its offerings of fresh fruits and provide educational opportunities related to biodynamic afroindigenous agricultural practices.

SRCS CNS has committed to expanding the purchase of locally produced products to serve Sonoma County Children.

Funding

SRCS CNS is deeply grateful to the state of California for approving Universal Free Meals for all students, in conjunction with one-time non-competitive grants. These changes to the funding of school meals will be transformative. Historically, CNS has struggled with insufficient funding from state and federal sources. With Universal Free Meals, the one-time grants from the state of California, and the increase in participation, CNS has used fiscal reserves to invest in the school food program. SRCS CNS has sufficient staff and infrastructure to begin scratch cooking. However, a complete implementation will require more staff and completed infrastructure investments.

Partnerships and gratitude note

Ed Burke met with students and parents from several elementary schools to discuss menu items, sustainability, and nutrition education. Hidden Valley Elementary School Leadership students and Cesar Chavez Language Academy MEChA students met with Ed Burke about menu items. The discussions have been instrumental in developing new menu items, addressing concerns about the foods served, and the sustainability of the materials used to serve meals.

CNS is deeply grateful for the partners listed below:

- Brigaid
- Chef Anne Foundation
- Friends of the Earth
- California Wheat Commission
- LunchAssist
- Redwood Empire Food Bank
- ScratchWorks
- Shared Plates Strategies
- Sonoma Food Runners
- The Artisan Baking Center of Petaluma
- The California Food for California Kids Network
- The Center for Ecoliteracy
- The Sonoma County Healthy School Meals Committee
 - The SRCS parents participating in this committee and their continued collaborations and insights.
- The MEChA Club of Cesar Chavez Language Academy
- Thought partners in school districts throughout the Northbay area