

Al Puro Centavo and Poco a poco la gallina se llena el buche

During the Covid school closure period, CNS provided bundles of five to seven days of breakfast and lunch. There were periods in which the benefit to the community needed to be clarified or immediate. For example, we opened evening distributions with a team of three. The immediate response was disheartening. We served very few meal bundles on our first distribution, and it was not clear that there was a need at all serving sites. One evening service team member would remind me, “Poco a poco la gallina se llena el buche,” or little by little, the chicken fills its stomach. “They will come, Ed. It will be ok.” Sure enough, there was an overwhelming response. Those three staff members served 40% of the bundles we served that year. Soon we were worried that we would not have enough or we would turn someone away without a bundle. That team member told me “Al puro centavo, Ed.” The direct translation is unclear but it means doing your best and rising to the occasion. Are we running short on bundles, and do we need to return to the kitchen to pick up more? “Al puro centavo Ed, vayase.” Do your best and get more bundles to serve the community. School Food is more than a meal. It is an education that impacts life-long eating habits. The work of growth is ongoing, and the needs being met are urgent. Improving the meals CNS serves to thousands of students daily is an ongoing process, so we say, “Poco a poco la gallina se llena el buche. The need is urgent, so we say, “Al puro centavo.” As we discuss our next steps, we remember these powerful messages. Ed Burke would like to express his gratitude to the CNS team for their work supporting the students 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

Staffing

Staffing is the single greatest barrier to accomplishing all of CNS's goals. The 2022/23 SY has been our most successful hiring year recently, but we need more staff. Eight open positions will directly impact CNS's ability to prepare and serve meals from scratch.

Adequate staffing is the cornerstone of a successful and sustainable from-scratch food program. The more food prepared from scratch, the more staff are needed to prepare and serve those meals. CNS intends to place staff at school sites and the central kitchen to facilitate from-scratch cooking, purchase local minimally processed foods, and reduce the amount of plastic used in service. While CNS has enough staff to start the work of minimally processed

meals, there is more room for growth. As such, CNS has placed significant emphasis on recruiting and retaining staff.

CNS provided English and Spanish language Manager level food safety training to 9 staff members for one week and had a 100% pass rate by students at the start of the 2022/23 school year. This pass rate far exceeds the historical average of other exam sessions' typical 40-60% pass rate. To the instructor's delight and slight chagrin, two staff members scored higher than the exam instructor.

CNS invited staff members to work during the spring break for additional training and to provide support for community programs. CNS provided time during spring break for preparing and delivering meals to community partners throughout spring break. The remainder of the spring break was spent training staff on food safety, equipment use, and central kitchen best practices supporting from-scratch cooking. Most of the staff that worked during spring break were newly hired, staff members. The additional training provided an opportunity to explore the best practices for open positions and to build a sense of community amongst the staff present. Staff members demonstrated competencies to each other as a check for understanding and celebrated each other's accomplishments during training. Most staff members working spring break would have otherwise not been paid for the week. They did not have adequate vacation time because they had not been with SRCS for over six months.

Training opportunities will be offered to staff during the work year, and additional training opportunities outside of the work year. During these training sessions, CNS staff has demonstrated commitment to Santa Rosa and Sonoma County students. The CNS team is a source of inspiration for our leadership team to improve support for the CNS team.

From-scratch foods at SRCS.

Kids deserve the best foods to support academic achievement in alignment with the goals of Santa Rosa City Schools. When the food served to students is prepared with care and attention, students feel that their school cares about them. Anecdotally, staff had observed higher rates of student engagement at school when students were involved in recipe development, their feedback was considered during menu development, and nutrition education related to scratch cooking was offered. Scratch-cooking is crucial to the continued success of the CNS program. Scratch-cooking will be the throughline of the CNS team's decisions in the coming year. Each goal noted here depends on or directly supports scratch cooking at schools. Scratch-cooking allows CNS to directly control the ingredients, processing, and packaging of foods served to students. For example, in a neighboring school district, students requested pozole. The team developed and implemented a low-fat, low-sodium chicken pozole that was an inspiration to eat. Scratch cooking is local control of what we eat at school.

Historically schools and school food programs have been underfunded by state and federal sources. Recently California became the first state in the nation to make Universal Free Meals a permanent part of the Education Code. Every student will be offered breakfast and lunch for

free. The state of California is contributing to the difference in federal funding. The Universal Free Meals funding from California has led to CNS being more completely funded than at any other point. That said, staffing is the greatest challenge to scratch cooking and reducing the amount of packaging.

More staff and infrastructure are necessary to serve students' lunches efficiently with less packaging. CNS wants to reduce the amount of food packaging served to students. The model enabling CNS to do so requires more staff during meal service periods and more serving lines. For example, another district's local secondary school uses two U-shaped serving lines that require a minimum of three staff members to operate. Staff placed entrees on the students' trays as they passed through the serving line. This process took approximately nine minutes to serve, at a rate of roughly 27.77 students served per minute. Montgomery High School serves 436 students in 11 minutes at a rate of 39.63 students served per minute. The service model at Montgomery High School is 29.93% faster than the average lunch service at the local area secondary school site. The faster service at MHS is because there is much more packaging between the students of MSH and their food than those of local area secondary school. The solution for Montgomery to efficiently serve the students without the packaging is to open more serving areas with additional staff to operate them. Schools can consider many models and options, including serving meals from snack bars, mobile service carts, etc. A common need in these service models is that CNS needs additional staff to operate the additional serving lines to maintain or expedite the service rate while reducing the amount of packaging to a minimum.

As SRCS CNS transitions to offer more service lines, from scratch cooking, taste testings, student feedback, and nutrition education, CNS expects more students will be served. A scalable infrastructure and staffing plan is needed to ensure that capital equipment and infrastructure investments effectively meet our current and future needs.

Investing In Infrastructure

Infrastructure and capital equipment are the second most significant barrier to preparing and serving food from scratch without packaging in all schools. Aging equipment and school kitchens designed to reheat packaged food must be renovated to increase capacity to serve from-scratch foods without plastic. CNS is purchasing capital equipment valued at \$5,000 or more and investing in infrastructure updates such as increased electrical capacity and plumbing to support the capital equipment additions.

CNS is grateful to the Santa Rosa community for passing the most recent bond measure. The funding opportunity to improve the infrastructure of school site kitchens is crucial for the long-term success of the from-scratch food program. CNS is limited in the kind of investments it can make with cafeteria funds. Therefore, CNS's efforts would be significantly hampered and limited in scope without the passage of the most recent bond measure.

CNS uses fiscal reserves to purchase or replace capital equipment to increase the capacity to prepare and serve meals from scratch. CNS has allocated approximately 1.5 million dollars for capital equipment over two years. CNS is grateful to the California Department of Education and the United States Department of Agriculture for additional one-time grant funding opportunities that will offset capital equipment costs to support the from-scratch food program.

Capital equipment in schools and the central kitchen will allow staff to prepare and serve thousands of servings of from-scratch food safely. For example, we can prepare muffins from scratch to replace more expensive purchased frozen muffins. The barrier to preparing muffins from scratch is that staff would need to make a scooping motion thousands of times a week. The scooping motion puts staff at risk of a repetitive stress injury. CNS must purchase equipment that removes this repetitive stress injury risk factor to make fresh muffins with less sugar.

On a related note, sugar has hygroscopic (water-holding) properties that lend themselves well to frozen applications with other dough conditioners. As such, many frozen foods have added sugar not just for taste but to allow the product to be shipped worldwide in a frozen state. A muffin from scratch will not need additional sugar and ingredients to be preserved in a freezer. The SRCS from scratch blueberry muffin formula has 19% less sugar than the purchased frozen blueberry muffin currently offered. Once the barrier of scooping thousands of muffins has been addressed, CNS can move forward with reducing the amount of added sugars in the muffins served to students.

Added sugars in foods have been identified as a contributing factor to the increase in the diagnosis of Type II diabetes. A meta-analysis indicated that $\frac{2}{3}$ of Black and Latino children born in 2000 would develop type two diabetes in their lifetime, compared to the $\frac{1}{3}$ of children not in these demographics. There has been an alarming increase in the diagnosis of type two diabetes earlier in life for the Black and Latino communities over the past two decades. The insidious threat of type two diabetes is a destructive and cruel force that adversely impacts the Black and Latino community. CNS is eager to continue efforts to make food from scratch to control the ingredients that go into the foods served to students. From-scratch cooking can improve the meals served and provide excellent learning opportunities to support lifelong healthy eating habits. The purchase of equipment to assist our efforts to prepare meals from scratch safely is this goal's defining role.

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

Taste testing, student feedback loops, and nutrition education in schools are crucial to fulfilling the mission of the CNS department. CNS needs the feedback of students and stakeholders to successfully implement the from scratch cooking program. The best way to have students evaluate food is to develop relationships with CNS staff on campus. Students must feel comfortable conversing with cafeteria staff will enable us to respond more effectively to student feedback. For example, a student at a SRCS high school asked about offering more vegetarian options. Our cafeteria staff has continued the discussion, and the feedback from the students

has been constructive in determining our next steps. CNS staff prepared and taste-tested Roasted Red Pepper Hummus and Sun-Dried Tomato & Roasted Garlic Hummus on two consecutive days. Students reported that the roasted red pepper hummus was better than the sun-dried tomato hummus. CNS staff went to great lengths to make students feel comfortable sharing what they liked about the hummus and what they did not. CNS will evaluate a larger batch of hummus and re-engage in taste testing to solicit more feedback in more schools. The impact of our taste test has already demonstrated a positive outcome. A student reported they were on a meat, salt, and water-only diet then. We discussed the immediate and profound impact of eating fresh fruits and vegetables on the student's daily life. After tasting both hummus samples and the carrots served, the student resumed eating fruits and vegetables. The student has shared these experiences with their friends, and they have normalized healthy eating habits for a group of students. CNS is making plans and partnerships to take these learning experiences to every student at a Santa Rosa City Schools site.

Nutrition Education helps to normalize healthy lifelong eating habits. Eating foods is taught, often by example and with encouragement. How did you learn to eat a hamburger? By emulating a role model and with some trial and error. How do you learn to eat something you have not seen or eaten before? With a role model and a nutrition education lesson. For example, Ed Burke introduced shepherd's pie for lunch at a prior district. Classrooms that participated in the taste test enjoyed the dish. Some students separated each layer of food, ate the ingredients separately, and commented that they did not like the dish. For context, if someone were to eat a sandwich's ingredients separately, they would not have a good sandwich experience. Ed Burke taught students to put each layer on a spoon and eat it. Most students enjoyed the shepherd's pie when they ate as intended. Any student that did not like the dish was offered an alternative.

Another example of a nutrition education learning experience is how to taste new foods. Ed Burke offered seasoned zucchini to a second-grade student at a prior district's community event. The student could not identify the zucchini but determined that they did not like it. Ed Burke encouraged the student to try it, but they agreed on how to spit the food out. The student followed the procedure below and found that they enjoyed the zucchini and became a leader role modeling taste-testing best practices when presented with new menu items.

No thank you cafeteria lesson plan outline.

Students will need the following:

- A cup of water or water bottle with water.
- A spoon or fork
- A napkin
- Seasoned diced zucchini or another menu item
- Popsicle sticks
- Three containers with appropriate labels and emoji signs

- Liked it
- Loved it
- Not today
- To feel brave trying something new today

Procedure for students:

1. Place a cup of water or a water bottle nearby
2. Distribute popsicle sticks to each student
3. Make a triangle under the napkin.
4. Taste the zucchini
5. If you like the zucchini, eat it.
6. If you don't like the zucchini, bring the triangle to your mouth.
 - a. Quietly spit out the zucchini into the napkin triangle.
 - b. Close the napkin triangle.
 - c. Throw away the napkin and the zucchini.
7. Take a drink of water to remove the flavor from your mouth.
8. Put your popsicle stick in the container that reflects your feelings about the experience.

Taste tests will occur in the cafeteria during meal service periods. Results and updates will be shared via social media and other district publications as they become available. SRCS CNS staff will continue to report student feedback.

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 help 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 amazing content for teachers aligning food and nutrition education with common core standards.

Local Procurement and Farm-to-School Programs

Santa Rosa City Schools CNS wants to spend Santa Rosa dollars as close to Santa Rosa as possible. When CNS purchases a product or service, Santa Rosa dollars are sent to the vendor's location. For example, if we buy frozen entrees from Minneapolis, MN, Santa Rosa dollars will be sent to Minneapolis, MN. Santa Rosa dollars will enrich and support the Minneapolis, MN, community. The producers of the products made in Minneapolis, MN, can support their families almost 2,000 miles from the Santa Rosa families we support. CNS is very invested in the benefits of purchasing locally grown or produced goods and services.

CNS has worked with one Sonoma County grower and a handful of California growers, producers, and vendors for years. EarthSeed Farms is an innovative grower of Asian Pears, and CNS strongly encourages the Sonoma County community to visit and support their efforts to demonstrate indigenous biodynamic practices. CNS is eager to develop more partnerships. California grows and produces wonderful grains, proteins, fruits, and vegetables. California tastes amazing. Have you enjoyed a Chandler strawberry directly off the vine in Reedley, CA, and discussed the difference between the Chandler and an Albion strawberry? Have you had the pleasure of milling wheat berries grown in the Capay Valley? Or Triticale from San Luis Obispo County? Have you eaten the grapes of Delano, CA, while learning about the Filipino and Mexican growers that led the way to reform labor laws? California tastes amazing, and each bite is a potential learning experience. The Center for Ecoliteracy has published a series of lesson plans that incorporate food and nutrition into common core aligned standards. While a field trip to the central valley may be challenging, we will provide learning opportunities using California products in the cafeterias of SRCS.

Sustainability and reducing the carbon footprint of food miles for each meal served is another pressing reason to procure food as close to Santa Rosa as possible. A food mile is a distance each item and ingredient travels before being served to a consumer. By purchasing local foods as close to Santa Rosa as possible, CNS contributes to the local economy, helps to keep kids in their school, reduces the carbon footprint of each meal, and provides learning opportunities. California tastes amazing, and CNS is eager to work with partners in the 2023/24 school year to increase local foods served at school.

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.

Grant funding and related commitments in the 2023/24 school year

- Supply Chain Assistance grants have offset increased food costs
- The Kitchen Infrastructure and Training (KIT) grant allows SRCS to fund training and capital equipment purchases.
- Freshly Prepared Meals funding commits SRCS to 40% of all food served in the 2023/24 school year to be minimally processed from scratch foods.

- Local Food for Schools grant commits SRCS to use funds to purchase foods from historically disadvantaged group member-owned businesses with less than 10 million dollars in gross revenue within 400 miles.
- The Best Practices in School Food grant commits SRCS to use funds on plant-based menu items, local food purchases, and from-scratch cooking.
- SRCS is a partner district for the CDFA Farm to School Incubator program to increase local procurement.
- In the 2023/24 school year, SRCS CNS will apply for the equipment assistance grant to purchase capital equipment to support from-scratch school meals.
- In the 2023/24 school year, SRCS CNS will apply for the Farm to School planning grant to improve procurement of locally produced food, education nutrition, and garden-enhanced learning.

Partnerships and gratitude note

We will invite parents, teachers, students, community members, and other stakeholders to join a student wellness policy advisory committee in the 2023/24 school year. SRCS will publish more information about joining the advisory committee in September 2023.

Teachers, if you want to explore collaborations with CNS related to nutrition education, please contact Ed Burke.

CNS is deeply grateful for the partners listed below:

- Brigaid
- Chef Anne Foundation
- Friends of the Earth
- Lisa Herberg at Tamalpais Union High School District
- LunchAssist
- Redwood Empire Food Bank
- ScratchWorks
- Shared Plates Sonoma County
- Sonoma Food Runners
- The Artisan Baking Center of Petaluma
- The California Food for California Kids Network
- The Center for Ecoliteracy
- Thought partners in school districts throughout the Northbay area