



Charlottesville Food Justice Network Food Equity Initiative - Policy & Action Areas



Chapter #1: Healthy School Foods



Charlottesville Food Justice Network

Food Equity Initiative – Action Policy Strategies

Chapter #1: Advocating at the Intersection of Healthy Schools & Food Equity

October 1, 2019

Authored by

Jeanette Abi-Nader, *City Schoolyard Garden*; Shantell Bingham, *Charlottesville Food Justice Network*; Laura Brown, *4P Foods Associate*; Jessica Duska, *UVA*; Jordan Johnson, *City Schoolyard Garden*; Alex London-Gross, *PB&J Fund*; Kristen Suokko, *Local Food Hub* with input from over forty community members, a dozen Charlottesville City School students, seven Food Justice Youth interns, and four Community Food Advocates.

Table of Contents

| | | |
|------|--|--------|
| I. | Overview Description -Advocating at the Intersection of Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 2 |
| II. | Vision & Goals - Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 4 |
| III. | Definition of Terms – Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 4 |
| IV. | Challenges - Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 5 |
| V. | Building Blocks for Change - Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 6 |
| VI. | Detailed Landscape – Charlottesville & Virginia | Page 8 |

Appendices

| | | |
|----|--|---------|
| A. | CFJN Food Equity Profile & Recommendations – Charlottesville City Schools | Page 11 |
| B. | CFJN Action Plan – Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 12 |
| C. | CFJN Timeline by Strategy - Healthy Schools & Food Equity | Page 17 |
| D. | Best Practices & Examples – Healthy Schools & Food Equity from Around the Country | Page 19 |

ADVOCATING AT THE INTERSECTION

Healthy Schools & Food Equity

Overview Description

Location

Charlottesville, Virginia | Population 48,117 (2018) | 10 square miles + | 15% of population is under 18 | 19% African American, 70% White | 25% live in poverty | 54% public school youth considered low-income | ¹

Background

The Charlottesville Food Justice Network (CFJN) is a collaborative effort among 25+ organizations working in unique and complementary ways to build a healthy and just community food system. As a network dedicated to systemic change, we work at the intersection of many fields and build bridges to understanding the role food equity plays in each. This brief highlights the intersection of the educational environment in public schools, food, and health.

Context

In the 2018-19 school year, 55% of Charlottesville City School children were eligible to receive free and reduced meals.² For some schools such as Johnson, Clark, and Jackson-Via elementary schools, the portion of students eligible surpasses 85%.³ Childhood food insecurity affects 1 in 7 children in our city schools,⁴ putting a greater burden on the breakfast and lunch services provided by CCS to nourish our children so they can perform at their academic best.

Research has demonstrated the link between food insecurity, poor child health, and academic outcomes at every age. At school, food-insecure children are at increased risk of falling behind their food-secure peers both academically and socially. Food insecurity is linked to lower reading and mathematics⁴ test scores, and food insecure children are more likely to exhibit behavioral hardship,⁵ including hyperactivity and lack of focus, aggression,⁶ and anxiety.⁷

Current State in Charlottesville

Understanding the narrative between academic achievement gaps and childhood food insecurity has never been more important. All of our city's children are bright, but not all are given the same plate to start.

¹ World Population Review: Charlottesville Virginia <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/charlottesville-population/>

² "VDOE :: Program Statistics & Reports." <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/statistics/index.shtml>

³ "VDOE :: Program Statistics & Reports." <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/nutrition/statistics/index.shtml>

⁴ Feeding America, "Child Food Insecurity in Virginia by County in 2016." https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/map-the-meal-gap/2016/child/VA_AllCounties_CDs_CFI_2016.pdf

⁵ Jyoti, D.F., Frongillo, E.A., & Jones, S.J. (2005). Food insecurity affects school children's academic performance, weight gain, and social skills. *Journal of Nutrition*, 135(12), 2831-9.

⁶ Slack, K.S., & Yoo, J. (2005). Food hardship and child behavior problems among low-income children. *Social Service Review*, 75 511–536.

⁷ Whitaker, R. C., Phillips, S. M., & Orzol, S. (2006). Food insecurity and the risks of depression and anxiety in mothers and behavior problems in their pre-school-aged children. *Pediatrics*, 118, e859–e868

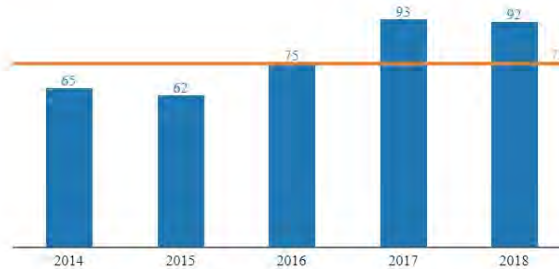
⁸ Slopen, N., Fitzmaurice, G., Williams, D. R., & Gilman, S. E. (2010). Poverty, food insecurity, and the behavior of childhood internalizing and externalizing disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49, 444-452.

While data on childhood food insecurity by race in Charlottesville is currently unavailable, we know what the academic outcomes are, and economic context impacted the shape of each learner’s plate in our city schools.

Source URL: <http://schoolquality.virginia.gov>
4/24/2019 9:49:57 AM

English Academic Achievement: Black

Reporting on the achievement and progress of student groups allows schools to identify learners in need of additional support and resources.



Source URL: <http://schoolquality.virginia.gov>
4/24/2019 9:50:06 AM

English Academic Achievement: White

Reporting on the achievement and progress of student groups allows schools to identify learners in need of additional support and resources.



Connecting the Pieces

Though food and education are basic human needs, we don’t advocate for them in unison. Currently, conversations on academic achievement fail to consider how each learner shows up to school in terms of nourishment. Access to good food is a multifaceted issue, and as we consider equity, we must advocate for health in our city schools. Adolescent food insecurity affects children across their lifespans, and the lack of access to nutritious and healthy foods is a definite food equity concern. In this report, Charlottesville Food Justice Network will work to provide support and guidance to Charlottesville City Schools and the City of Charlottesville in trying to tackle this element of inequity in our schools.

HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS

Healthy Schools & Food Equity

Blueprint for Change

Vision & Goals

The Charlottesville Food Justice Network engaged the Charlottesville community, with specific emphasis on the student body and low-income families, in productive conversations to explore hopes for school meals and to define a blueprint for change. Collectively, we envision a healthy and just local food system. Fresh, healthy, and appealing school food is a critical component of building an equitable food system, especially at Charlottesville City Schools (CCS) where the majority of students are in low-wealth situations.

Our vision is to ensure that every Charlottesville public school student has access to food that provides optimal nutrition, combats diet-related disease, is delicious, and provides energy for students to thrive throughout their day.

Food Equity Goals for Healthy School Foods:

1. **Transform Charlottesville City Schools' meal program to increase participation for all students, especially students eligible for the federal meals program.**
2. **Catalyze student leadership and leverage collaborative partnerships as central to building food equity.**
3. **Improve meal offerings to include increased fresh, from scratch and local menu items that are healthy and provide robust energy for students.**

Anticipated Impacts:

- ✓ Increased number of healthy foods offered to students
- ✓ Increased awareness of healthy school food options by students and families
- ✓ Increased student and family engagement in and leadership of decisions about school foods
- ✓ Increased enrollment in and consumption of breakfast and lunch at school
- ✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students

Definition of Terms

Farm to School: A system in which schools buy and feature locally produced, farm fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables, eggs, honey, meat, and beans on their menus, and farmers are encouraged to participate in programs designed to educate kids about local food and agriculture.

Food Equity: Providing healthy food with consideration for what is culturally appropriate, combats diet-related disease, and provides optimal nutrition for food-insecure communities. Food equity considers not only the immediate need to diminish hunger, but also recognizes the systems and structures that create barriers for access to healthy foods and actively pursues dismantling those barriers.

Healthy School Food: Food that is fresh, minimally processed, delicious and provides optimal nutrition so that students have the energy needed to maximize learning and achieve long-term health. Students respond best to healthy school food when they have a connection to learning about and/or growing food in the garden.

Highly-processed: Manufactured products that are designed to have a long shelf-life through the addition of preservatives, coloring, additives, and flavorings.

Local Food: Food grown on small, owner-operated, sustainable farms within the Chesapeake foodshed (approximately 4,000 square miles that includes Virginia and parts of West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York). Food sourced this way is better for the environment, the economy, and public health.

Participation: The number of students who purchase a school meal, either through federal reimbursements or direct family payments).

Scratch Cooking: Preparing food using basic raw ingredients - such as fruits, vegetables, eggs, honey, meat and beans - rather than buying meals that have already been prepared or that include highly-processed foods.

Value-added: A change in the physical state or form of a fresh product in a manner that enhances its value and preserves its freshness and healthy properties (such as milling wheat into flour or making strawberries into jam).

Current Challenges

School nutrition departments have restrictions and regulations set in place by contributing entities (USDA, the health department, schools/districts, etc.) While increasing access to healthy, from-scratch foods that nourish the students is a community goal in Charlottesville, we recognize that there are some systemic barriers that will need to be simultaneously addressed in order to create a successful department. The following challenges are recognized by CCS Nutrition Director, Carlton Jones.

Nutrition Department Resources: Like many other districts across the country, CCS's nutrition department is its own cost center. The money coming into the department from lunch purchases and government reimbursements are to be used to pay for the entirety of the departmental expenses including food purchasing, salaries, supplies, and equipment. This is particularly challenging as we aim to make changes because many of the school sites do not have the physical space or resources to prepare foods from scratch. Additionally, CCS nutrition staff are overstretched with high turn-over rates and often are short-staffed.

Limited enrollment in free and reduced meals for eligible families: In schools not enrolled in the Community Eligible Provisions (CEP) program, parents need to complete and return the free and reduced meal eligibility forms. CCS nutrition does not turn away a student regardless of ability to pay. With limited capacity to reach out to families, low-income neighborhoods and events, many forms are left uncomplete. These two factors, in combination, results in the nutrition department accruing debt from the first days of school that continually grows through the end of the year, ultimately ending the school year with a deficit. The 2018-2019 school year ended in a deficit of \$17,000.

Low numbers of students purchasing/obtaining the school meals: Only a small percentage of students participate in the school meal program. Many youth and families do not know about the healthy food

options that are currently being offered. Students in upper grades (5th-12th) express concern about limited time to make it through the meal line and recognizing the healthy food options can be challenging. Increasing enrollment in the school lunch program has continually been a goal for the CCS Nutrition Department.

Current Building Blocks for Food Equity & Healthy School Foods

Charlottesville City School's Nutrition Department has been working closely with City Schoolyard Garden (CSG), Local Food Hub, the Student Health Advisory Board, the CSG Youth Food Justice Interns and other community members to implement programs for healthier school meals. Three of the core building blocks implemented are:

Harvest of the Month: *Harvest of the Month* is a City Schoolyard Garden program in partnership with Charlottesville City Schools. The *Harvest of the Month* Program highlights a locally available crop each month by providing a fresh, locally available, healthy snack to students' classrooms, lunchrooms and in their gardens. The program runs for eight months, and is available to all Charlottesville City School students, Pre-K through 12th grade. *Harvest of the Month* gives students an opportunity to taste delicious, local crops and also uses the CCS central kitchen for preparation; building the nutrition department's capacity to prepare and serve local crops. We have, to this date, procured, prepared and distributed 38 crops through the central kitchen. The crops are prepared by volunteers and cooked by a CCS staff member. Students participate through art work that is used for posters and flyers that go home to families and include nutritional, cooking and growing information.

Lisa's Local on the Line: A program that grew out of the *Harvest of the Month* program. CCS highlights a local crop on the lunch line 1-2 times per month. This is prepared by CCS staff with no additional volunteer support from the community or partnering organizations and creates a thread from the crops students are growing in their schoolyard gardens, tasting through *Harvest of the Month*, and being served on the lunch line.

Farm to School week menu: The first full week of October is Virginia's Farm to School & Charlottesville's Healthy Schools week. This week highlights garden and farm activities in the school gardens and local scratch cooking each day during this week. The 2018 Farm to School Week highlighted a market fresh salsa, a side of local potatoes and onions, a spaghetti sauce with local beef, a homemade vegetable soup and local apples and pears every day. The preparation of the food was a combination of volunteers and CCS nutrition department staff.

Future Building Blocks for Food Equity & Healthy School Foods

Combined, the above programs have made significant strides in bringing more healthy and fresh foods to the meal lines. To leverage these programs for further improvements, the following strategies are recommended.

1. Establish and practice a new local standard for healthy school meals that goes beyond the current USDA regulations, which CCS is meeting, and significantly increases locally sourced, healthier meal options in the next five years.
2. Provide external financial supports for 3-5 years to build capacity for healthier meals. During this time we anticipate student participation numbers to increase providing sustainable funding for ongoing implementation.

3. Hire a Farm to School coordinator to increase the procurement of local food and oversee the implementation of healthy school meals programming in the kitchen, cafeteria, and community.
4. Revamp school lunch line infrastructure and central kitchen cooking equipment to create more appetizing serving lines and support the implementation of increased from scratch cooking as well as proper storage of locally sourced produce and meat.
5. Continue to host vibrant schoolyard garden programs that connect youth to how food is grown and cultivates healthy living skills.
6. Work with student leadership to design healthy school food program options in a way that supports their cultural and health needs, while also educating about nutrition and healthy living skills.
7. Develop and implement a robust outreach and feedback plan that engages students and families in school food equity practices and changes, including promotional materials, taste tests, special meal days, and other initiatives that will ensure students and families are aware of the healthy school food efforts.
8. Develop strategies to resolve the annual student meal debt that are financially sustainable and promote increased participation in CCS meal programs and decreases in-school hunger.
9. Increase CCS Nutrition Department employee benefits to include avenues for job readiness and certificate programs that build capacity to cook and prepare from scratch meals in order to retain and attract consistent and dedicated staff.

Harvest of the Month Photos



Detailed Food Landscape

Charlottesville's Landscape

Charlottesville is known for strong local food advocates however our food system does not serve everyone equally. Hunger, food insecurity, and poverty are entrenched problems and often seen along economic and racial lines. It is estimated that 16.7% of adults in Charlottesville and 14.9% of children are food insecure, a rate that outpaces Virginia's average.⁵ In Charlottesville City Schools, more than 57% of the student population is eligible to receive Free & Reduced Meals, and in some neighborhoods this number runs as high as 85%.⁶ While many students are eligible for free or reduced price meals, only 42% of Charlottesville City School students eat school breakfast and 65% eat school lunches.⁷ On average 19% of city residents are African American, but by the time students reach middle school the public school population is 41% African American. This begins to show the divide between White and Black Charlottesville City residents, and these disparities begin at a young age.

People with low economic resources and people of color suffer disproportionately higher rates of diet-related diseases and subsequent mortality than their white counterparts. This remains true in Charlottesville, where 19% of children live in poverty, but when examining the racial breakdown, significantly more Black residents (44%) live in poverty compared to White residents (11%).⁸ Similarly, the prevalence of obesity among Black Virginians is 39.2%, nearly 1.5 times greater than White Virginians.⁹ In Charlottesville, nearly 37% of third and fifth-graders are classified as overweight or obese, however this number is 49% for African American youth.¹⁰ These same youth are likely eligible to eat up to two meals a day at school and live in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, increasing the importance of providing healthy, minimally processed foods during the school day. As such, children in our city schools have firsthand experience with the multiple challenges of hunger and poor nutrition.

Inequities are seen in Charlottesville City Schools through the amount of student meal debt that accrues each year. At the end of the 2018-2019 school year there were \$17,000 of unpaid meals, highlighting the disparities among Charlottesville students and the number of students who cannot afford to pay for their meals. Charlottesville is not alone in this problem and schools continue to face challenges when students who are not enrolled in free meals lack the adequate funds to pay for their meals. A survey from the School Nutrition Associations found that 75% of school districts had unpaid student meal debt at the end of the 2016/17 school year, and 40% reported that the number of students without adequate funds had increased.¹¹ It is possible that some of these students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals but this data also shows the need to have food available for any hungry student. There is a need to provide healthy, affordable food to city residents and the school nutrition department is one way this need is met.

⁵ Feedva.org

⁶ Virginia Department of Education: Office of School Nutrition Programs, "School Year 2012-2013 National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Free and Reduced Lunch Price Eligibility Report, School Level."

⁷ Feedva.org

⁸ <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/virginia/2019/rankings/charlottesville-city/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot>

⁹ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "Virginia State Obesity Data, Rates and Trends: The State of Obesity."

¹⁰ Community Action on Obesity TEST, "Obesity and Overweight in Charlottesville & Albemarle."

¹¹ <http://schoolnutrition.org/news-publications/press-releases/2018/sna-survey-reveals-innovative-efforts-to-boost-consumption-curb-waste-in-school-cafeterias/>

School meals provide an opportunity to ensure all Charlottesville youth have access to fresh and nutritious foods that are critical to both academic success and positive health outcomes. Charlottesville City Schools (CCS) has identified the benefit of and need for providing nutritious food to students through both the Wellness Policy and the School Strategic Plan. The Wellness Policy recognizes the link between a poor diet and physical inactivity in contributing to the overweight and obesity epidemic, as well as negatively impacting mental health and academic performance. The policy states that “schools will provide students with access to a variety of affordable, nutritious, and appealing foods and will provide clean, safe and pleasant settings with adequate time for students to enjoy their meal.” Additionally, goal SS5.2 of the strategic plan states that school will “serve and promote healthy, nutritious, and appealing goods and pursue suppliers offering sustainable and locally-sourced options.” When fully implemented, these policies will help to ensure that all City Schools students have the necessary nutrition to learn and thrive.

Charlottesville City Schools (CCS) has contributed to the Virginia school lunch landscape. CCS has collaborated with community partners to build programming that addresses fresh food access in the Charlottesville community; including relationships with City Schoolyard Garden and Local Food Hub. Each month, students in CCS are introduced to a fresh fruit or vegetable snack through the Harvest of the Month program. With volunteers coordinated through CSG and local produce secured through LFH, the Nutrition Department has determined capacity and procedures for preparing 38 fruit and vegetables. This program also connects food consumed in the cafeteria with the classroom and school garden through lessons and educational materials that connect back in the classroom.

Additionally, CCS has had success preparing fresh, local produce during farm to school week. Lunches for students are prepared from local produce and meats provided through the Local Food Hub. Some of the past menu items included from-scratch vegetable soup, fresh pasta sauce with local beef and steamed summer squash, fresh salsa and local apples or pears. Farm to School Week occurs in all nine of the city schools and shows the strong partnership between CCS, Local Food Hub and CSG. Growing the Harvest of the Month program to a weekly offering is one future opportunity CCS might consider to begin gradually increasing the number of fresh food options.

CCS has also worked independently to increase students’ access to fresh fruits and vegetable with numerous internal initiatives including Lisa’s Local on the Line that highlights a local crop as a side on the lunch line each month, Salad Sensations give elementary school student the opportunity to order a personalized salad daily and prepared salads are available at the upper grades. CCS has also pursued Community Eligible Provisions (CEP) meal service and currently has three schools with universal free breakfast and lunch regardless of economic status.

Growing the enrollment and participation in CCS’s breakfast program is a priority for the district administration and helps to meet the goals outlined in the strategic plan. Numerous studies have shown that students who participate in school breakfast show improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance as well as decreased tardiness.¹² Low-income children who eat school breakfast have better overall diet quality than those who eat breakfast elsewhere or skip breakfast.¹³ School breakfasts are another opportunity to begin introducing fresh or scratch made foods. One opportunity is to provide the yogurt parfait, which is a lunch option, at breakfast. Easy to make recipes such homemade oatmeal with fresh fruit can be made in large batches with minimal equipment. Engaging students in selecting recipes that meet their preferences could help to increase both awareness of the program and enrollment in school breakfast.

¹² <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>

¹³ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforhealth-1.pdf>

Virginia's Landscape

One challenge that is often cited for providing more fresh and from-scratch cooked meals is the lack of a fully equipped central kitchen or preparation space in the city as well as highly trained staff. Several school districts in Virginia have developed systems and infrastructures to be able to provide fresh foods to students. The Goochland County Schools' nutrition department is utilizing produce grown in the high school's greenhouse such as lettuce and kale for the cafeteria salad bar. The school system is also purchasing approximately 20% of food from local producers including ground beef. Another example of successful purchasing of local produce is the Harrisonburg City Public Schools. What began with lettuce purchases from a local farmer has expanded to 10% of total food dollars being spent each school year on locally grown and produced foods. These small changes have led to an increase in participation in both school lunch (79% eat lunch each day) and school breakfast (46% eat breakfast each day).¹⁴ The Prince William School District offers a self-serve garden vegetable and fruit bar at each school during lunch. The bar has fresh options such as cucumber slices and whole apples as well as some prepared items like mandarin oranges.¹⁵ These small changes are ways that schools are introducing fresh food options to students without major modifications to the cafeteria equipment or food production.

One of the biggest changes to public school meals is occurring in Virginia Beach, where the district is transitioning the kitchens in 82 schools into functioning scratch kitchens over five years. The changes to meals started small by first offering scratch meals in one high school and slowly expanding to others, by offering fresh baked bread and house made marinara sauce. Virginia Beach Public Schools started small by offering scratch meals in one high school but have slowly expanded to others. The district has seen success in growing the school meals program. Charging \$2.75 for lunch, the food services department went from a nearly break-even budget in 2011 to a surplus of \$2.4 million in 2018.¹⁶ The school is planning to reinvest the surplus by offering advancement opportunities for the kitchen employees as a way to retain staff and toward modernizing all school kitchens. While this is a lofty endeavor, it shows the monetary benefit of providing fresh, scratch made meals.

Charlottesville City Schools have successes in offering fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the school year which should be celebrated. These successes can be built upon to increase the number of fresh and scratch made options throughout the district. While the transition back to scratch made foods is slowly occurring throughout Virginia, small steps can be taken to implement changes that are both cost-effective and low labor.

¹⁴ https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/AEE/AEE-77/ALCE-181.pdf

¹⁵ <https://foodcorps.org/cms/assets/uploads/2018/07/case-study-production-kitchen.pdf>

¹⁶ https://pilotonline.com/news/local/education/public-schools/article_4f4b1c74-ac98-11e8-9878-4b90b6a9b2d5.html

Charlottesville City Schools

CCS alignment with Charlottesville Food Justice Network Equity Framework and Advocacy Issue Areas



Charlottesville City Schools' Food Equity Vision Statement

We recognize that healthy school food is a priority equity strategy to providing a safe and healthy school environment for all our students to thrive. A key piece of achieving food equity for our community, hinges upon the support and cultivation of infrastructure to advance healthier school meals in Charlottesville City Schools (CCS). Over half (54%) of youth in our city schools are at risk of childhood food insecurity, putting a greater burden on the breakfast and lunch services provided by CCS to nourish students so they can perform at their academic and social best.

"I don't know if we are going to get as many academic gains as we want – until we address nutrition along with the achievement gap. We need to move past the USDA requirements and significantly move beyond the fresh fruits and vegetables that we have right now to make those impacts."

- Dr. Rosa Atkins, Superintendent
Charlottesville City Schools

CCS Food Equity Goals

#1

Intentionally transform Charlottesville City Schools' meal program to increase participation for all students, especially students eligible for the federal meals program.

#2

Catalyze student leadership and leverage collaborative partnerships as central to building food equity.

#3

Improve meal offerings to include increased fresh, from scratch, and local menu items that are healthier and provide robust energy for students.

CFJN Food Equity Recommendations

1. Establish and practice a new local standard for healthy school meals that goes beyond the current USDA regulations, which CCS is meeting, and significantly increase fresh, from scratch locally sourced, and healthier meal options in the next five years.
2. Hire a Farm to School Coordinator to increase capacity for implementation of food equity practices that will lead to healthier school meal options, robust student and partner engagement, and increased participation in meal programs.
3. Work with student leadership to design healthy school food program options in a way that supports their cultural and health needs, while also educating about nutrition and healthy living skills.
4. Develop and implement a robust outreach and feedback plan that engages students and families in school food equity practices and changes.
5. Revamp school lunch line infrastructure and central kitchen cooking equipment to create more appetizing serving lines and support the implementation of increased from scratch cooking as well as proper storage of locally sourced produce and meat.
6. Develop strategies to resolve the annual student meal debt in ways that are financially sustainable, promote increased participation in CCS meal programs, decrease in-school hunger, and reduce stress for families with limited financial resources.
7. Increase CCS Nutrition employee benefits to include avenues for job readiness and programs that build capacity for from scratch meals in order to retain and attract consistent and dedicated staff.

Supporting Partners

Charlottesville City Schools Nutrition Services | City Schoolyard Garden | Local Food Hub | PB&J Fund | CATEC | City of Charlottesville Economic Development Services "Go Program" | PVCC Network2Work

APPENDIX B

Healthy Schools & Food Equity - Action Plan

Overview Description

Goals

The overarching goal of the Food Equity Initiative for healthy schools is to ensure that Charlottesville City School students are eating healthier through increased and equitable access to healthy, from scratch school meals and snacks made with fresh and local ingredients. To achieve this goal we utilize multiple, coordinated strategies and action plans.

1. **Transform Charlottesville City Schools’ meal program to increase participation for all students, especially students eligible for the federal meals program.**
2. **Catalyze student leadership and leverage collaborative partnerships as central to building food equity.**
3. **Improve meal offerings to include increased fresh, from scratch and local menu items that are healthy and provide robust energy for students.**

Strategies

Appendix C includes a timeline that explains in detail the steps taken in each of these core strategies to implement actions for change.

- A. Build capacity to provide healthier school foods - staff and equipment
- B. Engage student and community leadership – youth voice and choice
- C. Increase healthy food options – fresh, from scratch, and local
- D. Increase student healthy living skills – youth nutrition and gardening education
- E. Increase student meal participation – equity through access

Actions

| Action 1: Establish and practice a new local standard for healthy school meals that goes beyond the current USDA regulations, which CCS is meeting, and significantly increases locally sourced, healthier meal options in the next five years. [Goal #3] | |
|--|--|
| What this is and why it is important | Providing healthier breakfast, lunch, and snack options is critical for building health equity in our schools where the majority of students rely on the free and reduced meal plan for 2 of their 3 meals a day. Building food equity will mean taking steps each year to add more healthy (fresh, from scratch, local) foods to the meal options. For example, in year one, our Harvest of the Month crops will be served on the line twice a month; in year three, three times a month; and in year 4, every week of the month. [See timeline for details.] |
| Measures of Success/Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Increased procurement of fresh and local produce, meat, and grains✓ Increased fresh, from scratch, and local meal item options✓ Increased number of healthy foods offered to students✓ Increased consumption of healthy foods by CCS youth✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students |
| Timeframe | Develop CCS standards for healthy school meals by January 31, 2020. Begin implementing standards beginning August, 2020. |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Key partners | CCS Nutrition Department Student Advocates City Schoolyard Garden |
| Required resources | Staff time to develop the document, additional resources will be needed for implementation of the standards. |

| | |
|--|---|
| Action 2: Hire a Farm to School Coordinator to increase capacity for implementation of food equity practices that will lead to healthier school meal options, robust student and partner engagement, and increased participation in school meals programming. [Goals #1 & #3] | |
| What this is and why it is important | <p>The sustainability strategy behind <i>Just Food For Us</i> is that by investing in building capacity and resources to serve healthier school meals, participation during the five years of this grant will increase significantly. After that time, increased participation will allow the school district resources to continue implementing these effective strategies without the same level of external support.</p> <p>A district wide coordinator serves as a thought partner for the Nutrition Department staff and liaison to student leaders. This role will help to implement taste tests of new menu items, conduct surveys of student satisfaction, and create promotional events/materials to highlight new menu items.</p> |
| Measures of Success/Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased student participation in school meals from the current average of 20% of students eating school meals to double = 40% participation at Charlottesville High School and 30% across the school district ✓ Increased number of healthy foods offered to students ✓ Increased consumption of healthy foods at school by CCS youth ✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students |
| Timeframe | By August, 2021 |
| Key partners | CCS Nutrition Department City Schoolyard Garden |
| Required resources | Grant funding for position salary and program materials. |

| | |
|--|---|
| Action 3: Work with student leadership to design healthy school food program options in a way that supports their cultural and health needs, while also implementing youth-led healthy school foods promotional materials and outreach. [Goals #1, #2 & #3] | |
| What this is and why it is important | Critical to impacting youth and family health is investing the leadership and decision-making of food insecure youth and adults to direct that change. Students will develop creative marketing strategies for new or local items that will appeal to their peers. Opportunities such as student designed nutrition labels or promotion of local ingredients will help to highlight what is available on the meal line. More student engagement in what is served and how it is served will help to |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| | increase outreach and feedback efforts that ensure changes in meal programs are aligned with the needs and interests of youth and families facing food insecurity. |
| Measures of Success/ Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased paid, leadership by youth and adults facing food insecurity ✓ Increased students and community members engaged in shaping their healthy futures ✓ Increased alignment of program activities and decisions with the needs and interests of youth facing food insecurity ✓ Increased awareness of CCS healthy school foods efforts ✓ Increased consumption of healthy foods by CCS youth and their families ✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students |
| Timeframe | <p>Youth engaged in development of marketing materials by December 2019</p> <p>Four marketing campaigns executed by June,2020</p> <p>One meeting between CCS Nutrition Department staff and youth advocates by June 2020</p> <p>Monthly marketing campaigns in place by September 2020</p> |
| Key partners | <p>CCS Nutrition Department</p> <p>CSG Youth Food Justice Advocates</p> <p>CHS teachers</p> |
| Required resources | <p>Software such as Photoshop</p> <p>Printed marketing materials for lunch lines</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| Action 4: Develop and implement a robust education, outreach and feedback plan that engages students and families in school food equity practices and changes, including cultivating nine urban, organic, educational schoolyard gardens at Charlottesville City Schools. [Goals #1, #2 & #3] | |
| What this is and why it is important | <p>While providing healthy school food options is a critical element of food equity, changing the food offered isn't enough. Without a complementary education program, students are not likely to change what they eat and may just skip meals. Engaging youth in garden activities on a regular basis, during the school day, afterschool, and in the summer, provides a foundational landscape for healthy eating and physical activity. Students are three times more likely to eat what they grow. The gardens provide experiences for youth upon which each of the core impacts for this project is nurtured.</p> |
| Measures of Success/ Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased knowledge of healthy living skills and where our food comes from ✓ Increased garden engagement and physical activity on a regular basis by 3,800 youth experiencing 45,000 garden interactions each year [# of students X # of times they are in the garden] ✓ Increased familiarity with and excitement around fresh foods and gardening ✓ Increased preference for and consumption of healthy foods by CCS youth ✓ Increased awareness of healthy school food options by students and families ✓ Increased student and family engagement in and leadership of decisions about school foods ✓ Increased enrollment in and consumption of breakfast and lunch at school |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| | ✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students |
| Timeframe | Training program implemented by August 2020 Staffing structure in place by August 2021 |
| Key partners | City Schoolyard Garden Charlottesville City School teachers |
| Required resources | Funding for schoolyard gardens and CSG staff support. |

| | |
|--|--|
| Action 5: Revamp school lunch line infrastructure and central kitchen cooking equipment to create more appetizing serving lines and support the implementation of increased from scratch cooking as well as proper storage of locally sourced produce and meat. [Goals #1 & #3] | |
| What this is and why it is important | Updating the school meal lines and kitchen resources is aimed at addressing the complex and significant barriers that have hindered CCS's ability to leverage the monthly <i>Harvest of the Month</i> program to more robust inclusion of fresh, from-scratch meal items. Barriers to address include adequate and experienced staffing, kitchen and cafeteria equipment, and outdated food delivery systems that do not keep food fresh, cause longer lines and are unappealing. Updating the school meal lines provides an opportunity to highlight local ingredients and scratch cooked items. A more appealing line is one immediate step that can be taken to increase student interest in school meals. Renovating the central kitchen is necessary to ensure that the school has proper equipment to store fresh ingredients, cook scratch menu items, and safely transfer food to other schools. |
| Measures of Success/ Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased staffing, training and expertise within CCS nutrition to prepare fresh meals ✓ Increased equipment to prepare fresh and from scratch foods ✓ Improved delivery of food items ensuring food stays fresher and there is less time in meal lines ✓ Increased consumption of healthy, from scratch and locally sourced foods by CCS youth ✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students |
| Timeframe | Lines redesigned and updated by February 2020 Funding opportunities explored and presented to CCS leadership by July 2020 Renovation of Central kitchen complete by August 2021 |
| Key partners | CCS School Board CCS Leadership CCS Nutrition Department City Schoolyard Garden |
| Required resources | Farm to School Coordinator Staff time to manage the effective implementation of this robust work plan and to build skills in nutrition staff for long-term viability. Financial resources for new cafeteria equipment required for scratch cooking and line improvements. |

| Action 6: Develop strategies to resolve the annual student meal debt which is financially sustainable and promotes increased participation in CCS meal programs and decreases in-school hunger. [Goal #1] | |
|--|---|
| What this is and why it is important | During the 2018-2019 school year, \$17,000 of unpaid meal debt was accrued by the Nutrition Department and students are not turned away due to inability to pay for their meals. Three elementary schools are part of the Community Eligibility Provision and the district as a whole is near eligibility. If the district is able to measure eligibility at 40% or greater all schools could offer free meals, therefore ensuring every meal served is reimbursed. |
| Measures of Success/ Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase the number of families who enroll in free or reduced-price meals ✓ Increase the number of full price meals sold by 40% ✓ Launch a marketing campaign for all families about meal options provided at CCS ✓ Increased enrollment in and consumption of breakfast and lunch at school ✓ Increased health, energy and focus for students |
| Timeframe | Implement enrollment opportunities throughout each academic year. Implement marketing strategies to parents beginning in October 2019 to coincide with Farm to School week. |
| Key partners | CCS Nutrition Department CCS Family Support Workers |
| Required resources | Staff time Print materials to distribute to families Marketing materials for school meals |

| Action 7: Increase CCS Nutrition Department employee benefits to include avenues for job readiness and certificate programs that build capacity to cook and prepare from scratch meals in order to retain and attract consistent and dedicated staff. [Goal #1] | |
|--|--|
| What this is and why it is important | Current CCS Nutrition Department employees are hired as contract positions. A pathway to full time employment along with the training for skills needed to prepare scratch meals will ensure that CCS retains and attracts dedicated staff. Training programs such as “GO Cook” could be modified to match the skills needed for large batch preparation and meals and ensure that all staff have a background in food safety. Well trained and committed staff will ensure that CCS has the capacity to prepare scratch food and provides a pathway for employment. |
| Measures of Success/ Impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ One new training program implemented for current and prospective staff implemented ✓ Five full-time school cooks hired |
| Timeframe | Training program implemented by August 2020 Staffing structure in place by August 2021 |
| Key partners | CCS Nutrition Department Culinary Concepts AB CATEC PVCC |
| Required resources | Funding for training program participation and staff salaries. |

Overall Goal: Ensure that all Charlottesville City School students are eating healthier through increased and equitable access to healthy, from scratch, school meals and snacks made with fresh and local ingredients.

STRATEGIES



Build Capacity to Provide Healthier Food

Engage Student & Community Leadership

Increase Healthy Food Options

Increase Student Healthy Living Skills

Increase Student Meal Participation

ACTIVITIES



STAFF & EQUIPMENT

YEAR 1

- Hire Farm2School Coordinator (continues all five years)
- Upgrade small kitchen tools (all schools for prep)
- Launch outreach campaign (continues all 5 years)

YEAR 2

- Train CCS Kitchen staff in fresh food preparation
- Upgrade CHS serving line equipment, Phase I

YEAR 3

- Upgrade CHS serving line equipment, Phase II

YEAR 4

- Upgrade Buford serving line equipment, Phase I

YEAR 5

- Hire Farm2School Coordinator (CCS)
- Upgrade Buford serving line equipment, Phase II

YOUTH VOICE & CHOICE

YEAR 1

- Launch CSG Food Justice Interns' *Healthy School Foods Campaign*
- Students host taste tests and recipe voting

YEAR 2

- Same as above +
- Expand Intern program to 10 students at CHS/Buford and add Health Teams at Elementary schools
- Engage Community Advocates in outreach to families about healthy meal improvements

YEAR 3

- Same as above +
- Launch Youth Intern Harvest2Kitchen project utilizing student grown tomatoes & herbs to make sauce for cafeteria Farm2School week

YEAR 4

- Same as above +
- Student & community led evaluation of school meals with recommendations

YEAR 5

- Same as above

FRESH, SCRATCH, LOCAL

YEAR 1

- Fresh fruit (2 options)
- Fall Farm2School week
- Harvest of the Month - 2x/month on the line
- Breakfast Grab & Go at Buford & CHS

YEAR 2

- Same as above +
- Late breakfast at Walker, Buford & CHS
- Fresh, healthy pantry snacks at all schools

YEAR 3

- Same as above +
- Add a Spring Farm2School week
- Harvest of the Month - 3x/month on the line
- Local on the Line 2x/week

YEAR 4

- Same as above +
- Farm2School meals serve 50% from scratch items
- Harvest of the Month served weekly on the line (4x/month)

YEAR 5

- Same as above +
- LoL hosted daily, 5x/week

YOUTH NUTRITION & EDUCATION

YEAR 1

- Host 3,500+ students in hands-on garden learning at 8 school gardens
- Grow Harvest of the Month crops in the gardens

YEAR 2

- Same as above +
- Utilize mobile kitchens for garden to table cooking classes

YEAR 3

- Same as above +
- Add garden at Walker
- Host 3,800+ students in hands-on garden learning at 9 school gardens
- Add value-added crop of tomatoes & herbs for Farm2School week

YEAR 4

- Same as above +

YEAR 5

- Same as above +
- Implement community & student recommendations cultivate healthy living habits

EQUITY THROUGH ACCESS

YEAR 1

- Youth led outreach campaign to provide nutritional information
- Develop plan to cover student meal debt

YEAR 2

- Hire Farm2School Coordinator (CSG)
- Purchase small kitchen tools (knives, cutting boards, etc.)

YEAR 3

- Hire Farm2School Coordinator (1/2 CSG, 1/2 CCS)
- Purchase small kitchen tools (knives, cutting boards, etc.)

YEAR 4

- Hire Farm2School Coordinator (1/4 CSG, 3/4 CCS)
- Purchase small kitchen tools (knives, cutting boards, etc.)

YEAR 5

- Hire Farm2School Coordinator (CCS)
- Purchase small kitchen tools

Overall Goal: Ensure that all Charlottesville City School students are eating healthier through increased and equitable access to healthy, from scratch, school meals and snacks made with fresh and local ingredients.

| STRATEGIES | Build Capacity to Provide Healthier Food | Engage Student & Community Leadership | Increase Healthy Food Options | Increase Student Healthy Living Skills | Increase Student Meal Participation |
|------------|--|--|---|--|---|
| | STAFF & EQUIPMENT | YOUTH VOICE & CHOICE | FRESH, SCRATCH, LOCAL | YOUTH NUTRITION EDUCATION | EQUITY THROUGH ACCESS |
| IMPACTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased staffing and expertise within CCS nutrition to prepare fresh meals ✓ Decreased CCS kitchen staff turnover ✓ Increased equipment to prepare and enhance appeal and access to fresh, healthy school foods ✓ Increased procurement of fresh, healthy, local produce, meat and grains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased number of CCS youth and community members engaged and paid in food justice leadership roles ✓ Increased engagement of youth and community members in planning and decision making around school meal improvements ✓ Increased awareness of efforts to transform CCS meals and snacks to be healthier and more accessible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased healthy food options in CCS meals by 60% by end of five year program – this is measured by increased fresh, from scratch and locally sourced menu items ✓ Increased consumption of healthy foods by CCS youth and their families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased knowledge of nutrition and healthy living skills among Charlottesville students ✓ Increased familiarity with and excitement around eating fresh foods ✓ Increased preference for healthy foods ✓ Increased consumption of healthy foods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased enrollment and participation in school meals program ✓ Increased access to healthy food for all Charlottesville youth, especially impactful for youth eligible for federal meals program ✓ Increased student health and ability to thrive ✓ Decreased disparities among racial and economic lines for access to healthy food |
| MEASURES | Decrease in # of kitchen staff turnover # of equipment upgrades % of students find food delivery more accessible and timely | # of youth and community advocates engaged in decision making around healthy foods # of families that know about CCS healthy foods efforts | # of healthy food options each meal [Healthy =fresh, from scratch, high nutrient value, local] # of healthy foods consumed by students | # of students engaged in the gardens & # of garden interactions [# of students X # of times they are in the garden] # of youth increased preference for healthy foods #of youth increased knowledge | # of students consuming school meals [participation] # of students enrolled in federal meal programs # of students & families indicating they are eating healthier foods |

APENDIX D

Best Practices & Examples

Best Practices

Overview

The team looked at examples from school districts in Vermont, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Georgia. One major impact in all of the school districts was that improvements in school meals resulted in increased participation in the meal programs, offsetting some of the costs of purchasing more fresh, local ingredients.

Common attributes of successful programs were nutrition department staff whose portfolio included farm to school efforts; programming that was coordinated among the cafeteria, classroom, and community; and extensive partnerships.

While the Detroit school system is much larger than Charlottesville's – serving 55,000 students in 141 schools – the demographic and socioeconomic challenges are perhaps closest to those experienced by our school nutrition department, including high free and reduced lunch enrollment. Yet Detroit is currently purchasing 22 percent of the food in its cafeterias from local or regional sources, and has eliminated almost all use of trans fat and hydrogenated oil; processed and artificial sweeteners; hormones and antibiotics; artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives; and bleached flour. The program runs in the black, taking advantage of partnerships and philanthropic support to make that happen.

An example closer to home is a partnership among FRESH (Fauquier Reaches for Excellence in School Health) at Fauquier Schools, Commit to Be Fit at Rappahannock Schools, the Warrenton Farmers Market, the Fauquier Boys & Girls Club, Fauquier Community Childcare, and several local foundations. Not only is this coalition working together on school food, but it has also created a program that allows students to shop at farmers' markets during the summer months.

Budget

- a) A schoolwide tracking system for local food purchasing
- b) A budget analysis identifying price deltas for different products, which can then be used to negotiate prices or identify subsidies
- c) Starting small and replacing a few items consistently - this can bring prices down if farmers or food hubs know they have guaranteed sales over an extended period of time

Staffing

- a) Creating a position for a farm to school coordinator in the nutrition department; in some cases, this position is a combination of sustainability coordinator, garden manager, and/or food service director
- b) Creating a committee of staff and community members to build momentum and provide support
- c) As new cafeteria staff is hired, make experience with fresh food an explicit job requirement
- d) Work with a local nonprofit that employs agricultural education outreach coordinators to work with teachers (already happening with CSG)

Engagement

- a) The team looked at examples from school districts in Vermont, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Georgia. One Farm to School Mixers that bring local producers and school nutrition staff together; this could also have a farmers' market component
- b) Farm to Table community meals for school families hosted by local nonprofits
- c) Cooking clubs hosted by local nonprofits
- d) Catering for local events done by food service to bring in additional revenue
- e) Involvement by school board in events

Menu*

- a) The team looked at examples from school districts in Vermont, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Georgia. One Replacing packaged items, such as fruit cups, with fresh fruit
- b) Identifying low-preparation, easy-to-eat items (such as cherry tomatoes or snap peas) to ease burden on staff
- c) Swapping pre-made for scratch on easy items like pizza sauce

* A common lunch children ate in Detroit in March included roasted chicken with maple sweet potatoes, a harvest salad, mini waffles, an apple, and, for those who don't eat meat, lentils and rice.

Examples

Berkeley, California

Practices <https://www.berkeleyschools.net/students-parents/food-service-menus/>

- Recognizes the importance of healthy food for the academic achievement of kids and the role that kids play in the education of families about healthy foods.
- Breakfast: Free to all kids.
- Lunch: "We have eliminated all processed foods, hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils, high fructose corn syrup, refined sugars, refined flour, chemicals, dyes, additives and nitrates from our school lunches. We also serve regional organic milk at lunch, local and/or organic fruits and vegetables as much as possible."
- No one goes hungry | And what they are eating is healthy | Committed to sustainable agriculture and nutritious foods that are above and beyond what the USDA requires.
- "Students at the K-8 level will not be involved in the sale of candy, sodas, cookies and sweets at any school sponsored event or for any fundraising activity."
- Lunch is an active learning time like all others.
- Lunches include an entrée, fresh fruits and vegetables, grain, and 1% or non-fat milk.

Healthy Options <https://www.berkeleyschools.net/departments/nutrition-services/>

Salad bars in all schools | Hormone and antibiotic-free milk | Fresh fruit and vegetables served daily | Almost all food made from scratch | All bread and dinner rolls are organic | All other rolls are whole-grain | Swipe card systems in almost all of our schools | A majority of our food is now purchased locally | Organic salad bars at Berkeley High School, middle and elementary schools | All hamburgers and hot dogs are natural and grass-fed

Field trip bagged lunches <https://www.berkeleyschools.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Request-for-Bag-Lunches-2016-17.pdf> https://berkeleyschools.net/uploads/nutrition/BUSD_Food_Policy.pdf

San Diego, California

Practices <https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/san-diego-unified-promotes-stellar-school-meal-program-help-california-thursdays>

- All in the presentation of the foods
- Daily Salad bar – self serve
- Special Days – Meatless Monday’s | California Thursday’s (locally sourced)
- Harvest of the Month - The item is seen repeatedly throughout the month
- Lunch is an integral part of education and always right after recess
- Increasing participation through personalized lunches – sandwiches, etc.

Prince William County

Practices <https://pwcsnutrition.com/index.php?sid=0408101731444083>

- Self-serving veggie and fruit bars at elementary schools

West New York | New Jersey City Schools, New York | New Jersey

Practices <http://www.chefannfoundation.org/news-media/the-lunch-line-blog/new-jersey-serves-up-education-and-creativity/>

- Six salad bars with kids’ favorite items: Beets (candy cane beets, golden beets, and red beets), field greens, and the chickpea-cucumber salad

Cheney Public Schools, Washington

Practices https://www.cheneysd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=509909&type=d&pREC_ID=1032255

- Fuel students with scratch-made, healthy breakfast and lunch consisting of fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat milk and cheese, and whole grains.
- Lunch Ladies are Lunch Teachers
- Harvest of the Month

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Practices https://pilotonline.com/news/local/education/public-schools/article_4f4b1c74-ac98-11e8-9878-4b90b6a9b2d5.html

- Farm to School week salad bar
- Created the position of executive chef
- Kid culinary advisory committees