



MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendent Greg Baker

FROM: Simone Sangster, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, and Jessica Sankey, Director of Wellness on behalf of Food Services Advisory Group

RE: Food Service Vision Recommendation

DATE: January 20, 2016

We are pleased to present the following document that provides information on the Food Service Advisory Group process, describes our recommended vision, and outlines a some other recommendations for future follow-up related to the future food service program.

The document is organized in five sections:

- I. Project background and alignment with the Bellingham Promise
- II. The charge, membership, and process
- III. Summary of advisory group work and input
- IV. Recommendations
- V. Other items recommended for future follow-up
- VI. Next steps

I. Project background and alignment with the Bellingham Promise

In November 2013, voters in Bellingham passed a school bond measure supporting upgrades to district facilities, including a central cooking kitchen. The proposal for a central kitchen facility was based on a desire to change the way the food services program operates, specifically improving the quality and nutritional content of meals served. The goal was to “better meet the dietary needs of the students of Bellingham, and achieve the district’s goal of producing a less processed, more wholesome meal program.”

Changing the way the food services program operates also aligns with The Bellingham Promise. The Promise commits to developing students who are “healthy, active individuals.” Improving the quality of food provided by the district helps ensure that students will be healthier.

The promise also aims to “provide an equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all.” The majority of students participating in the school food services program are on the free and reduced meal schedule, which is a reflection of the number of students from families with higher economic need. Therefore, if the food served by the district isn’t of the best possible quality, students who are in greater need are disproportionately impacted. The Bellingham Promise describes how the district believes the whole child is important and aims to provide equitable services to all students (the “One Schoolhouse” key strategy); accordingly, the food services program should provide high quality meals that are appealing to all students.

Building a central kitchen allows the district to shift away from the current heat-and-serve model of food preparation, which relies on purchasing heavily processed, prepared foods, toward a food services program that prepares meals from predominately whole foods. Ideally, changes in food preparation would lead to increased participation in the school meal program and thus decrease the visible, daily distinction between students bringing lunch from home and students buying lunch at school.

Good nutrition is positively associated with student performance in school. Therefore offering and increasing the number of students who eat nutritious meals is an opportunity to positively influence student performance. Studies link increased fruit and vegetable consumption, alongside reduced dietary fat intake, with improved academic performance, while consumption of food lacking key food groups deprives children of vitamins, minerals, fats and proteins necessary for optimal cognitive functionⁱ. Children whose diets lack critical nutrients or who experience food insecurity are more likely to be absent from school and demonstrate more behavioral problems when they are in schoolⁱⁱ. Finally, research suggests an association between increased need for mental health and special education services and poor nutritionⁱⁱⁱ.

Transitioning to a food services program that provides more meals prepared from whole foods is a project with significant community support from a wide range of partners.

- The funders of the Sustainable Whatcom Fund of the **Whatcom Community Foundation** consistently provide guidance and financial support for the district food services program. Project grants make innovative food and education ideas a reality in individual schools. The fund also supports administrative education efforts so district staff can learn about new models of food services programs. Funders supported the district’s 2013 bond efforts and the Sustainable Whatcom Fund makes local food procurement expertise readily available by supporting the Whatcom Farm-to-School team.
- The **Bellingham Farm-to-School Advisory Group** is an official school district advisory group that meets monthly to support Bellingham Public Schools in increasing the healthy, whole, local and sustainably grown foods served to students. Members of the group design classroom education materials, manage a volunteer network, and offer local food procurement services. These efforts have led to the successes of “Taste Washington Day” and “Harvest of the Month,” which are special lunches that rank as the highest student participation days in the district food services program.

- **Common Threads Farm and School Garden Collective** build and maintain school gardens in participating schools, provide garden and cooking education for students, and link all student learning opportunities with district initiatives like Common Core, and Next Generation Science Standards. Examples include Harvest of the Month and Taste Washington Day.

The Bellingham Farm-to-School Advisory Team had earlier drafted a Farm-to-School Promise and provided recommendations for the program in a food services guiding document (See below – Summary of Work and Input). These documents aligned with the central strategies of the Bellingham Promise, the district’s collective commitment to students and the community.

During fall 2015, a Food Services Advisory Group met to develop a vision by integrating lessons learned from community partners, Farm-to-School Advisory Group work, and best practices research from around the country. The goal was to develop a vision of what the school community and stakeholders see as the future food services program. This vision is considered important in several ways. It will provide a common understanding of the desired food services program, it would bring the community together to talk about the desired program, it will guide the design of the future program and it will be used to guide changes to Bellingham School’s food services program including the design of the central kitchen.

II. The charge

The superintendent invited the advisory group to “recommend a progressive vision for Bellingham Public Schools’ food services program that delivers on The Bellingham Promise’s desired outcome of students who are healthy, active individuals.” The group was not responsible for looking at implementing the vision or designing the central kitchen. The vision statement written by the group will guide further food services program and facilities work.

Advisory Group membership

The Food Services Advisory Group membership was solicited through email invitation and word of mouth. The final membership was drawn from a wide range of stakeholder groups comprising the following:

- Jozlin Peterson, high school student
- Patrick Warner, Wade King Elementary parent
- Brianne Pugh, Kulshan Middle School parent
- Rob Rienstra, Bellingham High School parent
- Mardi Solomon, Farm-to-School representative
- Laura Plaut, Farm-to-School representative
- Sue Webber, Whatcom Community Foundation representative
- Sara Southerland, community group representative
- Elizabeth van Niekerk, Food Services staff member
- Mea Tyas, Food Services staff member
- Nichole Lockhart, Bellingham High School teacher
- Mylo Allen, Parkview Elementary School principal
- Mark Dalton, director of Food Services
- Heidi Rodriguez, assistant director of Food Services

- Margaret Gude, Communications and Community Relations representative
- Nora Klewiada, executive director of Human Resources
- Anda Adams and Rob McElroy, Department of Teaching and Learning representatives
- Co-chairs assistant superintendent Simone Sangster and director of wellness Jessica Sankey
- J.Marie Riche, facilitator

Process/ Work

The committee met as a whole on three occasions:

- October 22
- October 27
- December 10

A team of 5 agreed to write a draft vision statement using input from the full committee's October 27 meeting. This team met on November 5 and December 8.

III. Summary of work and input

The Food Services Advisory Group represented considerable local experience in institutional food service, school health and wellness practices, food systems, and food procurement methods. The members came together as individual experts to examine information from three different sources: Bellingham Farm-to-School Advisory Group recommendations; district administrators' site visits to public school systems serving whole foods; and findings from community and student focus groups.

Working together, the group synthesized local and national opinions, expert recommendations and food services practices to write a draft Food Services Vision Statement.

Specific data sources included:

- The Bellingham Farm-to-School Promise
- The Bellingham Farm-to-School Priorities
- Findings from site visits to Berkeley Unified School District, Oakland School District, Boulder Valley School District, and Greeley School District
- Findings from 4 categories of focus groups: students; parents; district personnel; community members
- Community Survey soliciting feedback on the draft food services vision

IV. Recommendations

The Food Services Advisory Group recommends the adoption of the following vision statement for the Bellingham Public Schools food services program:

Vision Statement

We encourage a lifetime of healthy eating by serving students nourishing, delicious, whole foods in a welcoming environment.

V. Other Items Recommended for Future Follow-up

- Lunchroom environment:

- Noise level
- Atmosphere
- Experience: Fun / joyful
- Real silverware, plates, cups
- Quality of light
- Wall color and furnishings
- Length of time set aside for lunch:
 - More time to eat
 - More focus on eating
 - Consider food architecture and serving lines
 - Include time for relationship building in the cafeteria
 - Recess Before Lunch
- Delicious Food:
 - Variety - Colorful, textures, shapes
 - Fresh / in season
 - Smell/Tasty/Appeals to the senses
 - Limited ingredients in less processed state
 - No MSG, HFCS, hydrogenated oil or other ingredients of concern
 - Nutritious – vitamins, minerals, balance of building blocks (protein, carbs, fat)
 - Water as a readily available beverage choice
- Equity:
 - Remove hunger as a barrier to learning
 - Food available throughout day, late arrivals, summer, dinner programs
- Integrate Education:
 - Use the cafeteria as a classroom
 - Provide more signage around healthy eating
 - Integrate food served and cafeteria environment with curriculum
 - Potential for some instruction in the cafeteria – CTE/ vocational/ horticulture gardens
 - Increase coordination between garden, classroom, cafeteria, and home and community
 - Culturally diverse offerings
 - Food preparation learning opportunities
- Sustainability of farming practices:
 - Local sourcing of ingredients
 - Reduced reliance on chemicals (certified organic less important than sustainably grown)
 - Create relationships with farmers
- Sustainability of program:
 - Doable, feasible
 - Fiscally sustainable
 - Continuous improvement / building over time
 - Family Engagement
 - Community support / partners
- Reducing waste stream:
 - Right sizing meals/ age appropriate

- Composting
- Reduce reliance on disposable containers

VI. Next Steps

There are several significant next steps for this work. The district will develop a wellness policy. The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 — federal legislation that authorizes funding and sets policy for the USDA’s core child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program — requires local school districts develop and implement a wellness policy. This policy should address student, staff and community wellness: nutrition, nutrition education, physical activity and physical activity education are key elements. The district will invite a group – a wellness committee – to work on developing the wellness policy. The vision statement developed by the Food Services Advisory Group will serve as an important guidepost for the wellness policy.

The vision will also guide the changes in the way the food service program operates, which includes significant programmatic changes as well as facilities updates to existing cafeterias and kitchens and the central kitchen build. The district will share the Food Services Advisory Group vision with Lunch Lessons LLC, who are the consultants working on assessment of the food services program. These consultants will also help strategize and develop step-by-step plans to implement the vision. Developing designs for the central kitchen, the work of a future educational specifications committee for Sehome High School, will also build on the Food Services Advisory Group vision.

Attaining the vision described above with a central kitchen and individual school kitchens will require sustained engagement, commitment, and resources from the district. Specific known costs include construction of a new facility, which will be considered by the Sehome educational specifications committee in 2016, the retrofit of existing facilities, and other training and staffing investments. It will also entail changes in operating costs. These changes will become clearer over the coming year as the district, with the assistance of outside funds, continues to engage with nationally reputed consultants to assist in identifying the anticipated key steps and long-term financial changes in revenues and expenditures.

ⁱ Northstone K, Joinson C, Emmett P, Ness A, Paus T. Are dietary patterns in childhood associated with IQ at 8 years of age? A population-based cohort study. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2012 Jul;66(7):624-8; Drake, V. Micronutrients and Cognitive Function. *Linus Pauling Institute Research Newsletter*. 2011: 12-15.

ⁱⁱ Belsky DW, Moffitt TE, Arseneault L, Melchior M, Caspi A. Context and sequelae of food insecurity in children's development. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2010 Oct 1;172(7):809-18; Belsky DW, Moffitt TE, Arseneault L, Melchior M, Caspi A. Context and sequelae of food insecurity in children's development. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2010 Oct 1;172(7):809-18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Basch, C. E. Healthier Students Are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap. *Journal of School Health*. 2011 Oct;81(10):593-8; Tomlinson, D., Wilkinson, H. and Wilkinson, P. Diet and Mental Health in Children. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. 2009 Sept; 14(3): 148–155.