

Lunch Lessons LLC

BVSD Nutrition Services Feasibility Study

Executive Summary – October 28, 2008

Contact Information:

Ann Cooper – 631-697-0844 – ann@lunchlessons.org

537 46th St

Oakland, CA 94609

Beth Collins – 231-633-0958 – beth@localplates.com

2013 E. Front Street

Traverse City, MI 49686

Executive Summary

Lunch Lessons LLC has been engaged by the Boulder Valley School District's Nutrition Services Department (known hereafter as NSD) since late May 2008. BVSD engaged Lunch Lessons LLC with a specific idea in mind; to ascertain the feasibility of bringing more "nutritious, closer-to-the-source" meals to Boulder's schools.

To discover the potential for change Lunch Lessons examined all facets of the Nutrition Services Department including; audits of all school sites, sanitation and standards of practice, analysis of organizational plan, NSD office operations, menu planning and production practice, procurement practices, inventory management, budget, sales, software systems, human resources and payroll.

The study was divided primarily into three discovery processes based on the time frame we had for the study; an on the ground look at operations and facilities in the school sites themselves; current system use in procurement and its relationship to menu, inventory management and accounting, and personnel and departmental structure including transportation.

Key Findings

Wellness Policies:

The policies currently in place, though compliant with Federal Law, are too broad to act as a real guide for practices in the district. Specific, achievable goals for the district with regard to nutrition and food, physical fitness or educational goals are absent and no implementation and evaluation strategies were developed to partner with these broad goals.

Food and Menu:

Highly processed foods are the cornerstone of the district's meal program as well as dominating its a la carte program. Reliance on heat and serve style service predominates among the main course school meal offerings. Middle and High School food programs are dominated by a la carte offerings that resemble mini-marts more than school cafeterias and the percentage of students participating in purchasing a "regular" or reimbursable meal is extremely low.

Meal periods in elementary schools average 20 minutes and depending on school schedule can sometimes be pressured into even shorter time frames with recess schedules reducing the quality of the meal period into a harried high energy affair.

Schedules in middle schools can also be under pressure, but lines are associated with the high volume of a la carte items and transactions and limitations of speed on checkout.

The menu program in the district is a Traditional Food Based menu as outlined by the National School Lunch Program, but the menu is analyzed for its weighted averages under the Nutrient Analysis menu plan which results in components added to the meal for calories that are primarily sugar based and add additional cost to the food budget while doing nothing to improve the quality of the ingredients in the meal.

The use of commodity entitlement foods is dominated by cheese, beef and chicken items that have been processed into nuggets, patties or meatballs. Cheese, since 2007, has been diverted to a local pizza company and burrito company for use in their products which are now used both in reimbursable regular school lunch and in a la carte sales. Fruit pies, a processed item using commodities, are an example of a meal component added to menus to meet the nutrient analysis.

Facilities:

BVSD possesses what many school districts in the United States often lack; dining rooms and for the most part working and serviceable kitchens. With comparatively small investments in upgrading key pieces of equipment, service lines, storage space and refrigeration, most of the school facilities in Boulder are already equipped to handle the safe serving of freshly prepared meals.

Several existing or to be built kitchens could be targeted as potential regional production kitchen sites with some redesign and improvement as an interim step before a central kitchen facility could be funded, built and implemented.

Because of the layout of Boulder Valley and the concentration of warehouse, cold storage and department/district offices being centrally located, build out of a central kitchen facility in this centralized location would be particularly effective and preferable to a long-term regional model.

Management and Staffing Structure:

The department lacks adequate management oversight to maintain consistent comparable service at all venues and not enough staff at the top level to address adequate improvement to the overall system. The site based management model has contributed to a reliance on autonomous operations which add to the overall inconsistency in the department. For example, one site we audited had not been visited in three years.

This structure affects the ability to identify problems and address them promptly. It affects the department's ability to continue to improve performance through regular reviews and training, and its ability to maintain and improve oversight of infrastructure related activities, for example; inventory management, purchasing, sales and accounting systems. Uniform vision in a multi-site food service operation drives efficiency and fiscal responsibility and this is missing in Boulder Valley.

Staffing levels at similar sites is also not consistent relative to meal counts, production volume, school schedules or facilities.

Technology and Accounting:

Though the NSD possesses free and reduced scanning software, Point of Sale software, two sets of menu analysis software, one being housed as part of a full suite food service software package and the linkage to the district's GL software, as well as support from Information Technology to help link all this software together, the department lacks adequate staff and training to use it efficiently and maximize its potential.

From an accounting standpoint the budget has not been based on actual participation numbers with regard to the school meal and a definitive understanding of the net gain with regard to the a la carte food sales. Tracking of inventory costs within the revenue categories is missing and even more clarity of food costs have been lost by blending commodity product item identification with similar products that are purchased, making it impossible to ascertain if the value of the commodities entitled and received by the district each year are actually used in the meals.

Procurement and Inventory Management:

As related to its use of software, the NSD system paired with its relationship to the Warehouse results in a highly inefficient pattern of food ordering management with the same order being handled multiple times in order for it to travel properly through the channels from school site to the general ledger.

In addition, there has not been enough transparency in the procurement system for the NSD to readily connect product in inventory with the menu and the needs at the sites; the result being some significant inventory overstocks that had accumulated over a number of years. The sheer over-complexity of the current ordering system and the fact the NSD is not fully responsible for procurement from order to the general ledger records enables this highly inefficient system.

At the site based management level large volumes of purchases are ordered, received and inventoried at sites which often do not have adequate recordkeeping systems in place or secure storage to handle the volume of retail items attributed to the a la carte food sale program.

Outline for Recommended Strategy for Change

Year One

Wellness Policy

- Review and update with specific goals and a plan for evaluation and growth.

Procurement

- Reorganize personnel, software implementation; centralize order systems, inventory management, food distribution and reporting.
- Identify new vendor relationships willing to work with BVSD and reevaluate all current vendor relationships, group purchasing relationships and commodity ordering strategies to align with future whole foods based model.

Food

- Identify and remove as many industrially manufactured foods from the school menus as possible within timeframe, replacing with products without additives, excessive levels of hydrogenated fats, salt, sugars and colorings.
- Simplify and improve product quality of a la carte offerings in middle and high schools.
- Reduce a la carte offerings at elementary schools.
- Implement sa lad bars in all elementary and middle schools. Unlike current Harvest Bars, sa lad bars would include age appropriate selections of higher quality vegetable and fruit ingredients, vegetable and meat based proteins, dairy and grains.
- Implement bulk milk service in all elementary schools, removing individually packaged flavored milks and replacing with regionally sourced, additive free milk.

Department Organization Model

- Reorganize department staff and personnel as outlined in the Organizational Chart.
- Simplify existing and/or create appropriate job categories and descriptions to align with implementation of program change.
- Increase number of field supervisors and relocate base of supervisory operations out of the district main office and into future regional kitchens throughout district.
- Increase labor hours on current satellite sites in order to implement training and time needs related to sa lad bar program and future whole foods based bulk service meal program.
- Reorganize departmental records, accounting and methods of operation to align with school site regional kitchen to satellite plan.
- Remove redundancy in food distribution throughout the district and respond to regional kitchen model and shifts in procurement practices.
- Increase cross utilization of skill sets and increase efficiency of accounting model by removing meal period cash handling, with the exception of student account funding at all grade levels.

Training

- Implement staff training at the school site level focusing on culinary skills, whole food menu concepts and inventory management.
- Introduce “front of the house” training to improve service and atmosphere in the dining rooms and create the groundwork for dynamic cafes as classrooms.
- Shift the NSD department into job appropriate uniforms which will create an immediate perception change by the school community and will increase the professional attitude and approach of the department.
- Implement staff training at the management level to retrain existing staff to new duties, cross train team on key daily operations.

Facilities

- Address critical equipment needs in current satellite sites to enable sa lad bar implementation at all elementary and middle schools.
- Intervene on current kitchen construction plans to align with future program plan.
- Improve two existing kitchens to align with future program plan.
- Address facilities limitations in Nederland so it can manage its own production, due to geographic limitations of a centralized food production link.

Program Expansion Goals

- Improve breakfast participation district wide.
- Identify and address barriers to offering universal meals at qualified sites.
- Identify key sites for summer meal programs throughout Boulder Valley and create program model.
- Continue to work with and resolve scheduling challenges to adequate meal time service.
- Educate NSD team on principals of student health, sustainable agriculture and cafeteria- to-classroom links.
- Create and implement Marketing and Outreach Plan to continue to build support for the program and increase participation.
- Refine financial modeling to identify and include greater revenue for the fund via expanded services and relationships in the community.

Year Two

Regional Kitchens

- Complete implementation of regional kitchen model replacing 22 production kitchens and 23 satellites with 4 production kitchens and 42 satellites.
- Begin implementation of scratch cooking in 4 regional kitchens, finishing and some scratch cooking in appropriate satellite sites
- Continued staff training and support to improve efficiency and maintain high quality of meals, service and education on wellness concepts throughout district.
- Upgrade and replace dated service line equipment in key sites.
- Identify and resolve any scheduling conflicts for high level of service and satisfaction in all schools.

Central Kitchen

- Finalize site location and funding for central kitchen.
- Continue to improve department organizational practice to support central kitchen model.

Other Areas

- Remove a la carte and competitive foods throughout the district.
- Expand Marketing and Outreach
- Continue implementation of Financial Sustainability Plan

Year Three

Central Kitchen Opening

- Fully implement scratch cooking model
- Continue staff development to gain efficiency in new model
- Fully implement local procurement model
- Document changes to allow for developing a replicable plan for other districts in the nation.