

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

Action for our children's future

SCHOOL MEALS: UNIVERSAL IMPACT AND UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES

Dr Katie Wilson

Executive Director of the Urban School Food Alliance

Stephen Menyhart

Foodservice Consultant and Food Service Director

School Meals: Universal Impact and Universal Challenges

Creating Opportunities for Discussion, Collaboration, and Innovation

July 2023



Dr. Katie Wilson
Executive Director
Urban School Food Alliance
www.urbanschoolfoodalliance.org



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY



Our Mission

Leveraging our collective Voice to Transform School Meals

Value Statements

Elevate Environmental Stewardship

Partner with Purpose

Promote Equity

Be Visionary

Prioritize Student Health

Lead with Influence


Nourish Children

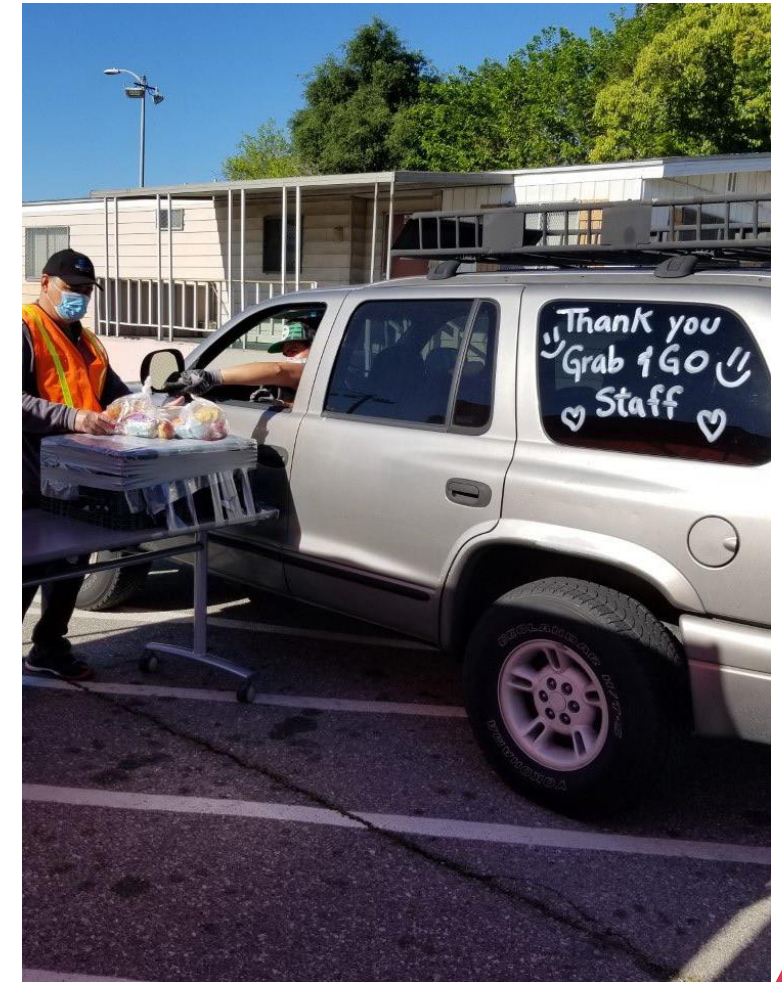
18 of the largest districts in U.S.

4.2 million meals per day

\$926 million US Dollars in procurement

COVID Challenges

- **Bulk meals to families, large increase in demand**
 - **Counting and claiming meals for reimbursement**
 - **Supply chain shortages**
 - **Loss of food distributors to schools**
 - **Adults needing food at school lunch distribution sites**
- 
- A large, solid red curved shape that starts from the bottom right corner and sweeps upwards and to the left, partially framing the content area.



**Universal Free Meals to
Everyone for Two Years**

Fresh Produce for Bulk Meals



Today's Challenges

- **Scaling up to feed more people**
- **Cost of food and labor**
- **Finding employees**
- **More sustainable food system**



Community Eligibility Provision CEP

- Any individual school or district (municipality) with 40% or greater “identified students” eligible to obtain free school meals may participate. Identified students are students certified for free school meals without filling out an application.
- Schools do not collect any school meal applications.
- Schools do not track each meal served by category.
- School nutrition staff do not collect fees.
- All students eat at no cost – with the school or district taking care of costs for those that would not have qualified.
- Takes away all stigma of school meals being only for those from low income households.
- 19.9 million children have daily access to meals at no cost

- Team Nutrition is an initiative of FNS to support the Child Nutrition Programs through:
 - training and technical assistance for foodservice,
 - nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and
 - school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.
- Team Nutrition's goal is to improve children's lifelong eating and physical activity habits by using the principles of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and MyPlate.

Team Nutrition



Team Nutrition

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/graphics-library>



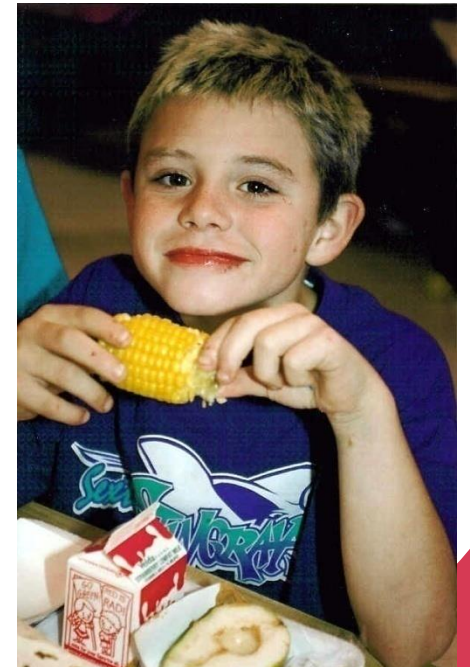
Summer Food Rocks!

Find a site serving summer meals:
Call 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE
Visit www.whyhunger.org/findfood



**For menus, newsletters, signs, labels,
stickers, posters**

USDA Farm to School



MARYLAND Farm to School



Marketing/Education

**New North Florida Cooperative
Small Farmer Distribution Network**

Go Orange & Green for Nutrition

BUTTERNUT SQUASH is an excellent way to eat healthy!

NUTRITIONAL FACTS

Butternut squash is a rich source of dietary fiber, and contains no saturated fats or cholesterol.

Butternut squash has a nutty flavor and mildly sweet taste.

Butternut squash seeds are used as nutritious snack food and are high in protein.

FUN FACTS

- Butternut squash is part of the pumpkin family.
- Butternut squash has the highest level of vitamin A of all the pumpkins.
- The fruit, leaves, flowers, and seeds of the butternut squash plant are also edible.

You can bake, roast, steam and stuff butternut squash. Even raw butternut cubes can add special tang to salads.

FRESH FROM FARMERS FIELDS TO SCHOOL MEALS

Marianna, FL



farm to school
VERNON COUNTY

Winter squash grows on vines that thrive in the climate of southwestern Wisconsin.

VITAMIN A
VITAMIN C
FIBER
MANGANESE
VITAMIN B

Their tough outer skin and dense flesh allow many winter squash varieties to be stored for up to six months. Perfect for long Wisconsin winters!

winter squash

Winter squash contains seeds in a hollow inner cavity.

HARVEST OF THE MONTH

fun facts:

- Winter squash comes from the same plant family as pumpkins, gourds, and cucurbits.
- Seeds from winter squash make a great snack food, just like pumpkin seeds.
- Both the skin and flesh of winter squash can be eaten.

history:

Modern day squash developed from the wild squash that originated in Central America. It was first grown for its edible seeds. Once the sweetest, tastiest with some nutty flesh for roasting were developed. Christopher Columbus brought squash back to Europe from the New World.

varieties:

- Butternut squash. Shaped like a large pear, this squash has cream-colored skin, deep orange-colored flesh and a sweet taste.
- Acorn squash. With bumpy green skin combined with orange patches and pale yellow-orange flesh, this squash has a unique flavor that is a combination of sweet, nutty and tangy.
- Delicata squash. A finger-shaped squash that can be both green, grey skin or orange/red in color. The Delicata's flesh is like sweet corn along with its texture.

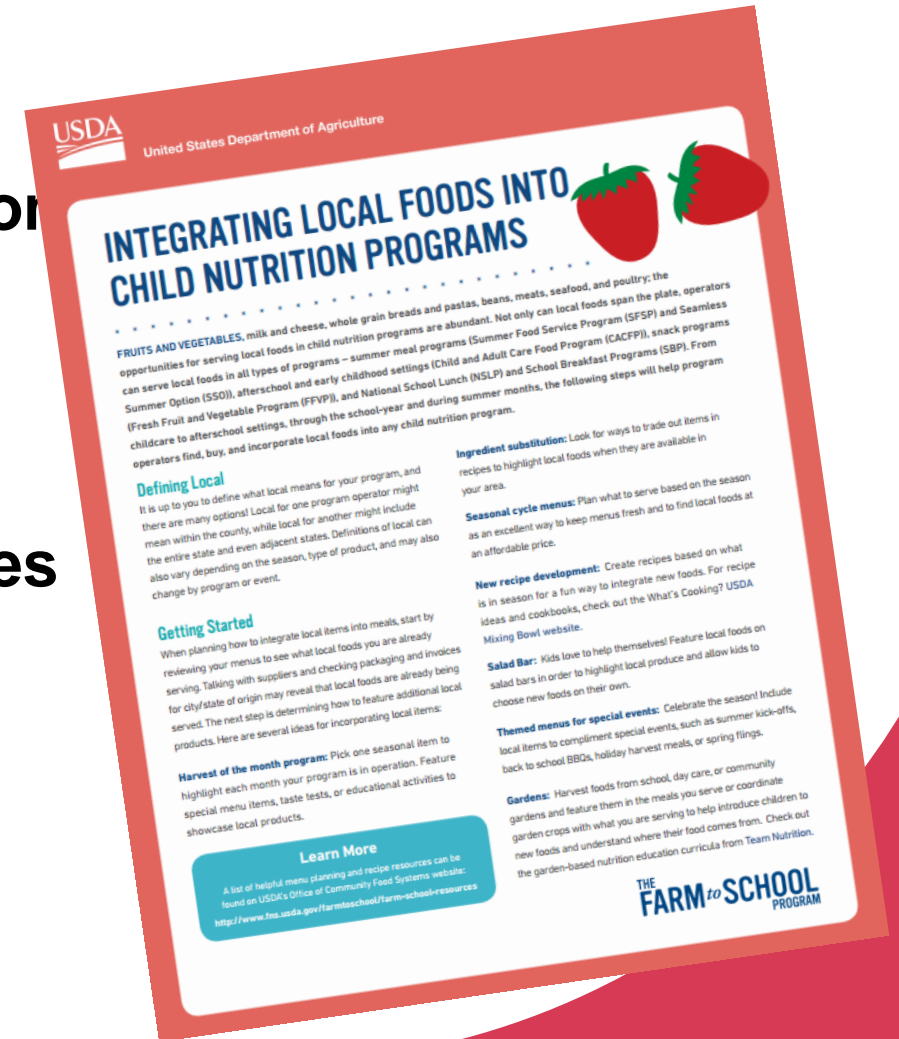
healthy eating:

The vitamins and minerals in winter squash help our immune systems to protect us from infection. The fiber and it contains in winter squash help our bodies to regulate blood sugar. Winter squash is considered to be a heart healthy food. Some raw squash can be eaten, when eating squash, use with a sharp knife. After removing the seeds, the squash can simply be baked until the flesh softens.



Results From Farm to School

- Local producers succeed: strengthening local communities
- Lower food costs
- Students understand where food comes from
- Students are willing to try new foods
- Less food waste
- Nutritional quality of school meals increases
- More students interested in farming



National Plastic Free Lunch Day



Engaging Students



Thank you!!!

Together We Can

Keep Moving Forward!



An Operator's View of Post Pandemic Challenges + Opportunities in US School Food Systems

Stephen Menyhart, RD, SNS
LACA Conference
July 2023
www.moltocuore.com



How it felt early pandemic – all in for the cause of feeding the community, stretching us into new roles and directions. Many had to step out of workforce to care for children, dependents, elderly parents.

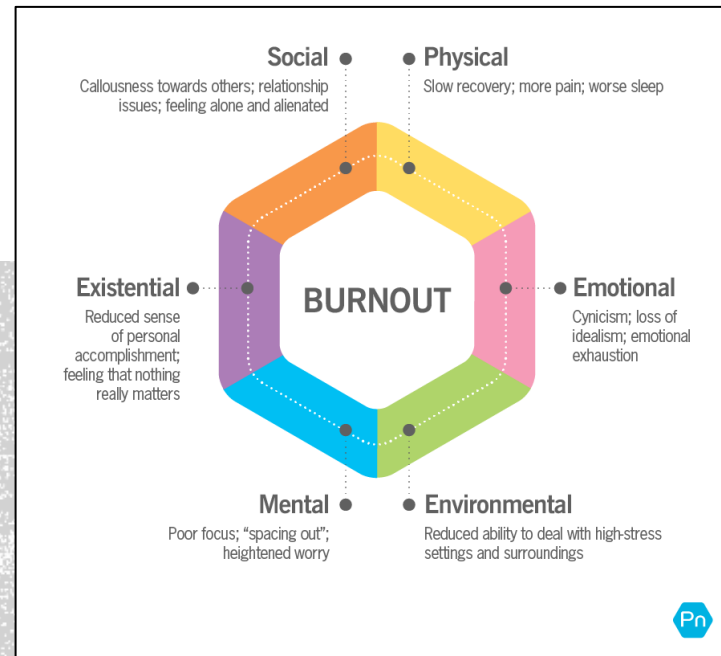


**How it felt middle pandemic –
neverending twists and turns,
students both in and out of school
for periods of time, need to simplify,
staffing levels critical, employees
exhausted.**





How it felt late pandemic – adrenaline had run out, trying to reach the finish line, adjusting to challenges we thought were temporary but are now ongoing. No longer treated as ‘heroes’, but the job remains incredibly difficult.





And here we are.





Context + Place:

- Boulder Valley School District
- State of Colorado (entire state is 10% larger in geographic area than the UK)
- 56 Schools, 28,000 students
- Boulder County - 1900 sq kilometers (slightly larger than Surrey)
- Schools in Boulder County range in elevation from 1500 meters above sea level to 2700 meters above sea level





Context + Place:

- Boulder Valley School District

- State of Colorado (entire state is 10% larger in geographic area than the UK)

- 56 Schools, 28,000 students

- Boulder County - 1900 sq kilometers (slightly larger than Surrey)

- Schools in Boulder County range in elevation from 1500 meters above sea level to 2700 meters above sea level





What Positives have grown out of the hardships?

- Enhanced collaborations with local hunger relief organizations – food banks, food pantries, etc.
- Recognition of gaps in food insecurity network
- Emphasis on local agriculture and local food economies as a practical way to decrease supply chain challenges + keep money in the community



Expansion of 'Healthy School Meals for All' at State Level

- 9 States have now passed some version of 'Free Meals for All' at State Level
- After 2 years of Free Meals across the country, many states recognized the advantages to families and communities

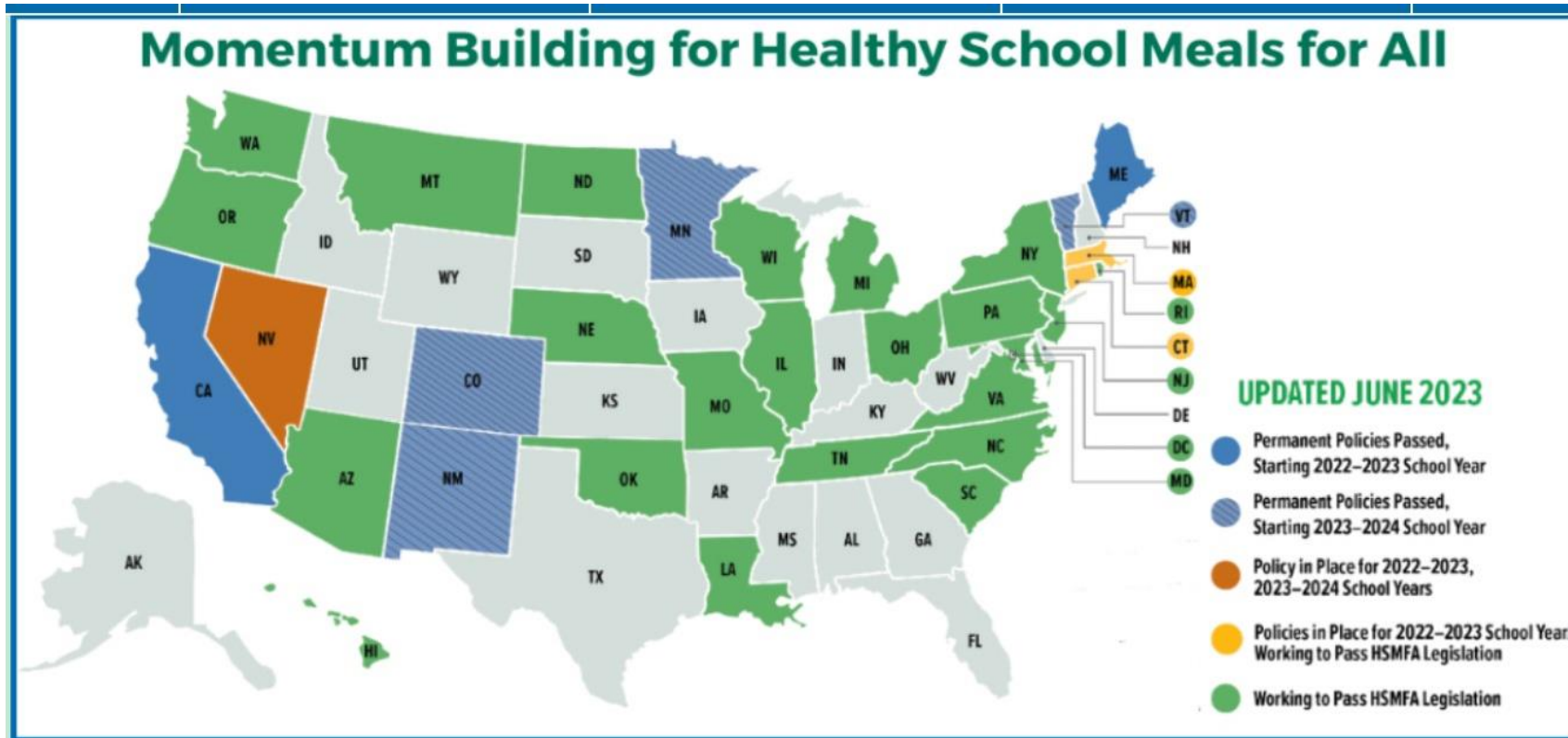


Image from Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) - <https://frac.org/>



COLORADO'S BALLOT INITIATIVE FOR FREE MEALS FOR STUDENTS

- Not by Decree or Legislative Action
- Passed by Popular Vote of the People of Colorado in November 2022
- Broad Collaborative Coalition
- \$100 Million estimated cost coming from reduced tax deductions for people earning over \$300,000 USD/year
- Written into the initiative is free meals for all students in perpetuity, as well as: financial \$ earmarked for local in-state food purchasing, and \$ to provide stipends and bonuses for school nutrition staff
- -Expect to see meal counts rise, unpaid debt to reduce, and for districts to invest more into the 'reimbursable meal'





NUTRITION RELATED REGULATION CHANGES

- -US Department of Agriculture draws its guidelines from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- New Guidelines likely to include:
 - Added Sugars – currently required on nutrition labels, limits proposed on sweetened items like yogurt and cereals, eventually across menus
 - Continued Sodium Reductions in Breakfast and Lunch
 - Maintain 80% of grain items must be 'whole grain rich' (51% or more whole grain by composition)



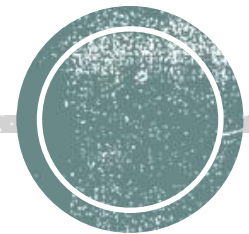


Ongoing Challenges

- Maintaining workforce adequate to serve students and increase from scratch cooking processes, especially in states with meals on the rise due to Free Meals for All
- Recruiting and Training new leaders in the field
- Complexity of Nutrition Challenges – larger districts often have Registered Dietitians in charge of meal planning and special diets, while most smaller districts do not
- Increasing awareness and number of food allergies, offering diversity of vegetarian/vegan/gluten free options
- Mental health awareness and resources for employees and students



**Thank
You!**



**IF NOT NOW,
WHEN?**

Action for our children's future