

Fueling Student Success

A SCHOOL LEADER PLAYBOOK FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL KITCHENS

Given that 63,000 Rhode Island students eat nutritious, low-cost or free lunches in school every day – and that for many of these students the meals they consume at school provide the majority of their daily caloric consumption – ***school leaders have a unique opportunity to help students make the healthiest choices possible.*** A [study](#) from Syracuse University indicated that increases in school lunch participation improve academic performance.

READY TO START BUILDING YOUR HEALTHY SCHOOL KITCHEN?

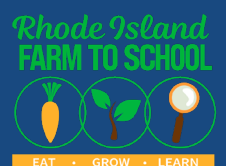
Contact the RIDE Child Nutrition Programs Team at childnutritionprograms@ride.ri.gov.



The building or renovation of a school kitchen presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help you prepare more nutritious, locally sourced meals for your school community.



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education



Putting Students at the Front of the Line

The evidence is clear: eating a nutritious breakfast and lunch improves the health and academic performance of students.

[Research](#) from the Food Research and Action Committee showed that school breakfast and lunch programs are effective in alleviating food insecurity, supporting good nutrition and improving learning.



RIDE administers a variety of federal child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, which serve over 100,000 healthy meals to students each school day. They also create opportunities to connect local agriculture to healthy eating habits through complementary efforts like Farm to School and other grant-funded projects. While RIDE is committed to ensuring that Rhode Island students have access to healthy meals, many school meal programs are limited by inadequate and outdated kitchen equipment and facilities.

GOOD NEWS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS!

- *With a generation of new or renovated schools coming online, district and school leaders can act now to make sure their new kitchens are built with student success in mind.*
- *RIDE has funding and expertise to help design modern, healthy kitchens and cafeterias.*
- *There have been unprecedented federal investments in school nutrition programs.*

Our students can only go as far as their diet can take them – acting now will help your entire school community access the nutrition they need to thrive.

RESOURCES READY FOR YOU

- See the RIDE MPA 627 Vendor List for Child Nutrition Program Consultants
- [Chef Anne Foundation: The Case for Central Kitchens](#)



DESIGNING HEALTHY KITCHENS: *FOUR STEPS FOR SUCCESS*

The building or renovation of a school kitchen presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help you prepare more nutritious, locally sourced meals for your school community. There are simple steps you can take before and during the design of your school to support high-quality meals.

- 1 Engage your school nutrition director early:** Food service directors can describe the ideal layout and equipment to best serve the nutritional needs of your school while also accounting for the unique needs of your district.
- 2 Design a flexible, forward-thinking kitchen and cafeteria:** School nutrition programs are critical food access points that improve student health and learning outcomes. Consider all their potential uses in your plan and whether a centralized kitchen model might work for your district.
- 3 Make it easy to store and prepare fresh whole foods:** Provide kitchen equipment that allows for a variety of storage, processing and preservation methods.
- 4 Design serving areas to support healthy choices:** School cafeterias feed many students in a short window of time. The way that healthy food items are prepared and displayed significantly affects how often they are chosen by hungry students in a rush.

We Can Do It! *How East Providence Folded Health Into their New High School*

In 2021, East Providence unveiled a long-awaited new high school. The four-story, 304,000 square-foot building features ten science labs; a 900-seat auditorium; a digital music lab with music classrooms and practice rooms; and a library resource center with open areas for students to work collaboratively.

Two features that received less attention but are critical to the health and well-being of the entire school are the new kitchen and cafeteria. The East Providence High School kitchen has been strategically designed to store, prepare and serve healthy school meals to the 1,600 high school students, as well as for an additional 2,204 students enrolled in 6 of the city's elementary and middle schools using a centralized production model.

Food Service Director Melissa Read was brought into the project early in the design process, which was critical to the kitchen's efficiency and functionality. Her experience serving the district for 26 years allowed for a thoughtful design that allows the school to store, prepare, serve and distribute a variety of fresh, healthy foods to students.





Design priorities included ensuring that the space was flexible to accommodate different uses by installing electricity in the ceiling, keeping ovens and large equipment on the perimeter of the kitchen and using stainless steel worktables on wheels to create extra storage underneath. The large-capacity freezer, coolers and dry storage are conveniently located close to the loading dock, which features two doorways so staff can prepare food without interrupting deliveries.

In the cafeteria, convertible tables serve a variety of hot and cold items simultaneously, allowing fresh local produce to be displayed in an appealing manner that meets all food safety requirements. Menu items such as a taco bar with all the fixings and recipes featuring local apples have been a hit. The open and flexible design of the kitchen and cafeteria also allows for collaboration with other school programs, such as the culinary arts track, and special events like local food taste-test days and outdoor barbecues.



RECIPE FOR ACTION: *GETTING STARTED*

When it comes to healthy kitchen and cafeteria design, district and school leaders don't need all the answers before they get started. RIDE recommends four ingredients to putting a smart plan into action.

- 1 Contact the RIDE Child Nutrition Programs Team today.** We can connect you to experts and resources to help you design your own forward-thinking kitchen.
- 2 Involve your food services director from the start.** They can and should be a full member of the building design team, offering their expertise every step of the way.
- 3 Talk to your peers in other districts** to see how they built or are building healthy food options into their schools. RIDE can connect you ASAP.
- 4 Tell the architects what you want.** Most of the design teams working on schools in Rhode Island have experience they can put to work to ensure your food service program delivers health from day one.



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RIDE would like to thank Melissa Read for so generously sharing her time, expertise and photos of her team's new kitchen space.

