School Nutrition, Food Procurement, & Equitable Community Development

Report developed for The Praxis Project by Roxana Rodriguez, Health Justice Intern, 2020
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ABSTRACT

Advances in school nutrition policy help provide more K-12 students with a range of healthy and affordable foods. Food served in schools is important to individual student health and can affect community health throughout the entire food system. Nutritional and budget considerations drive many of the choices school districts make regarding what food is served in schools. However, the complexity of the food system offers opportunities for advancing health equity by focusing not only on the nutritional quality of food served in schools, but also the sourcing practices of those foods. Providing access to nutritious food in K-12 institutions that is sourced in alignment with the values of food justice* and racial equity* can promote overall health and well-being for students and communities. In this Praxis Brief, we highlight how nutrition policy and procurement in K-12 institutions can advance health, justice, sustainability, equity, and community power.

School food is important for all students, and especially for those affected by health disparities caused by structural inequities. The current structure of school food systems can perpetuate those disparities, as described in this brief’s section The Importance of School Food. To eliminate the structural effects of favoring low-cost foods and labor, the Healthy Food for All section details how we need to address the systems within which food security and nutrition are addressed. School Food Purchasing and Values Based Procurement has the potential to change food and agriculture practices by leveraging their demands for foods that are produced according to a set of identified values. We see current examples of these in the Case Studies section, and collect a set of Policy Change recommendations to move the work forward.
**Food justice**, as defined by the HEAL Food Alliance is “achieved when all people and all communities should have the right and the means to produce, procure, prepare, share, and eat food that is nutritionally and culturally appropriate, free from exploitation of themselves and any other people, and to be in their full power in harmony with the rest of the natural world.”¹

**Racial equity**, as defined by the Center for Social Inclusion is “…both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one’s socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.”² This brief looks at equitable food procurement as advancing racial equity processes as well as outcomes.

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### THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL FOOD

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) served an estimated 4.9 billion meals in 2019, the majority of which (74.1%) were provided free or at reduced cost in public and nonprofit schools across the United States.³ Research shows that school breakfast and lunch programs are effective in alleviating food insecurity and poverty, supporting good nutrition, and improving health and learning.⁴ School food availability has a positive influence on individual student health, school performance and graduation rates, as well as on the broader communities that interact with those schools, food, and students.

In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) authorized a major revision to federal nutrition guidelines for school meals. This included mandates to incorporate more healthful foods like unprocessed fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fewer salty and starchy foods like potatoes and pizza.⁵ These initiatives are a critical resource for all students, especially those who experience food insecurity and rely on the NSLP for a substantial portion of their daily caloric intake and nutritional needs.

Funding limitations impact the NSLP’s ability to prioritize dietary guidelines and sourcing practices that center equity. These practices include goals to improve environmental sustainability, racial equity, and healthy eating. In addition to providing more funding for school lunches and cafeterias, the definition of healthy food needs to consider health disparities present throughout the entire food system, and opportunities for equitable processes:

- **Disparities in NSLP:** The majority of the children who participate in the NSLP come from low-income households, are disproportionately students of color, and are children of single mothers.⁶ The NSLP is a longstanding measure attempting to ameliorate food insecurity. However, the NSLP pricing and budget has created an environment that favors low-cost food and labor sourcing.⁷ Schools with limited budgets often cannot supplement the NSLP

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₁ “Mission and Vision.”
₂ “What Is Racial Equity?”
₃ “Child Nutrition Tables | USDA-FNS.”
₄ “School Meals Are Essential for Student Health and Learning.”
₅ “Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act | USDA-FNS.”
₆ Ralston et al., “The National School Lunch Program Background, Trends, and Issues.”
₇ The Labor of Lunch.
average reimbursement rate for each lunch (about $3.50), which may barely cover the cost of ingredients.\textsuperscript{8} This leads to disparities in the school food environment.

- **Kitchen Capacity**: Schools located in neighborhoods with greater concentrations of poverty, which also correlate with greater populations of students of color,\textsuperscript{9} may not have necessary funds to maintain the infrastructure necessary to cook whole foods on site. Meanwhile, schools in higher income neighborhoods often purchase the equipment needed for all aspects of food service, particularly for receiving, storing, and preparing fresh produce. As a result, poorer districts, especially those in rural areas, must resort to outsourcing to food service management giants and contracting with industries to provide meals and beverages to their students.\textsuperscript{10} Majority-Black or majority-Latino schools have been less likely to offer fresh fruit than predominantly white schools.\textsuperscript{11}

- **School Nutrition Labor**: Preparing more nutritious food can also mean increased cafeteria staff workload.\textsuperscript{12} School cafeteria workers are among the lowest paid public sector workers, with low incomes pushing over one third of them in the nation to participate in at least one public assistance program to alleviate their own food insecurity or poverty.\textsuperscript{13} The increased staff workload that comes with preparing more nutritious food may disproportionately affect womxn\textsuperscript{*} cafeteria staff of color.\textsuperscript{14}

- **Food Source Infrastructure**: The time-consuming administrative work that comes with handling federal reimbursements and following nutritional requirements falls on individual school food authorities. One way to reduce the labor and food budget involved in this process is to partner with third party foodservice management companies. These companies take charge

\textsuperscript{8} “School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study | USDA-FNS.”
\textsuperscript{9} Jordan, “Millions of Black Students Attend Public Schools That Are Highly Segregated by Race and by Income.”
\textsuperscript{10} Jon M. Bailey, “Rural Grocery Stores.”
\textsuperscript{12} Rosenthal and Caruso, “Chapter 12 - Bringing School Foodservice Staff Back In.”
\textsuperscript{13} Jacobs and Graham-Squire, “Labor Standards for School Cafeteria Workers, Turnover and Public Program Utilization.”
\textsuperscript{*} Womxn is an alternative spelling of women that is inclusive of anyone identifying as a woman, including femme/feminine-identifying genderqueer and non-binary individuals.
\textsuperscript{14} The Labor of Lunch.
of food procurement (the process of sourcing and buying food), preparation, menu development, price negotiation with food suppliers, and even staffing. The influence of the industrial food system has increased the number of school contracts by partnering with these foodservice management companies.\textsuperscript{15} The foodservice company Aramark partnered with more than 380 school districts nationwide in 2015,\textsuperscript{16} but was also one of the nation’s lowest paying companies.\textsuperscript{17} Contracts with these for-profit companies and large scale agricultural corporations outcompete smaller, local, and more sustainable producers.\textsuperscript{18} Extensive research documents how institutional racism prevents Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) from participating in large scale agriculture business.

School food must prioritize racial justice at all levels through ethical sourcing, just labor practices in alignment with migrant justice, and equitable access to foods. Sourcing in alignment with the values of health, justice, sustainability, equity, and community power ensures that school nutrition programs do not perpetuate systems of inequity, but instead support healthy students and communities.

In order to eliminate the structural effects of favoring low-cost foods and labor, it is necessary to focus on the systems in which food security and nutrition are addressed. Within the NSLP and school nutrition, this includes rethinking the sourcing practices of foods served in K-12 institutions with a broader approach to nutrition.

Environmental nutrition, for example, examines the public health impacts of social, economic, and environmental factors related to the entire food system.\textsuperscript{19} While a traditional nutrition approach asks how much vitamin C and other nutrients are in an apple, environmental nutrition asks a broader set of questions, such as whether the apple was grown with toxic pesticides, whether the workers who grew it were treated justly, and which communities had access to purchasing it.\textsuperscript{20}

Grassroots organizers also advance healthy food access through a systems approach. They demonstrate that institutional racism, in its intersections with economic inequality, has removed BIPOC from local food sovereignty, preventing many from growing, eating, and accessing nutritious food.\textsuperscript{21} For example, discriminatory housing policies have pushed BIPOC to neighborhoods with weak retail climates and a surplus of low-wage labor, both of which can lead to the proliferation of fast food. Today, Detroit-based organization Black Community Food Security Network provides both food access and political education so members can "respond most specifically to the ways that the food system reflects powers of oppression" that ultimately determine who can

\textsuperscript{15} Apollonia-Brown et al., “Be-Trayed: How Kickbacks in the Cafeteria Industry Harm Our Communities – And What To Do About It.”
\textsuperscript{16} Chris Collom, “Aramark Heads Back to School with 39 New Partners.”
\textsuperscript{17} Frohlich, Sauter, and St, “The 10 Companies That Pay Americans The Least.”
\textsuperscript{18} Waterman et al., “Community Coalition for Real Meals Wants to End ‘Big Food.’”
\textsuperscript{*} This is an umbrella term to capture systems of oppression such as capitalism, racism, and sexism to name a few. For example, white settlement and the appropriation of Native American lands fueled by colonialism forced tribes to abandon sustainable, traditional foodways.
\textsuperscript{19} Klein, Newbrey, and Sirois, “Chapter 11 - Sustainable Food Purchasing in the Health Care Sector.”
\textsuperscript{20} Kendra, Sapna Thottathil, and Clinton, “Environmental Nutrition: Redefining Healthy Food in the Health Care Sector.”
\textsuperscript{21} Alkon and Agyeman, Cultivating Food Justice.
afford to be healthy." The National Black Farmers Association also addresses the systemic barriers that exist for Black and other small farmers to secure food sovereignty. A meat-processing facility owned by the Quapaw Tribe, the first of its kind to be USDA approved, supplies meat to local schools and is also a source of income coming into the tribe during the COVID-19 pandemic. These examples highlight how healthy food access can carry importance for community power, justice, and liberation. School nutrition can thus incorporate political meaning beyond feeding hungry children through community input, control, and investment in foods closer to the community.

A majority of schools supply their food from the aforementioned third-party food suppliers and industrial agriculture. Overall, the effects of cost-cutting impacts health across the fields, factories, and warehouses that form the supply chain (the sequence involved in the distribution of goods) of the NSLP. Industrial large-scale agriculture has harmful human health impacts, from pesticide poisonings to instances of drinking water becoming contaminated from animal waste or pesticide runoff. Many of the most severe health impacts of food systems trace back to core industrial food and farming practices. The adverse health impacts associated with the industrialized food system are not evenly distributed. They disproportionately affect farm workers, rural communities, and low-income BIPOC. For example, workers in the food system are majority BIPOC. Poor working conditions, below average wages, and discriminatory and abusive practices are all commonplace across the food chain including inability to access health insurance and quality healthcare.

22 Carolyn Mcclellan, “Food Sovereignty.”
23 Herrera, “Beef Supply Chain Breaking?”
24 “How Our Food System Affects Public Health.”
25 “Anderson et al. - IPES-FOOD WORKING GROUP.Pdf.”
27 “FCWA_NoPieceOfThePie_Pdf.”
SCHOOL FOOD PURCHASING POWER

Combined, school district meal programs buy more than $6 billion of food per year, and they receive more than an additional $1 billion in donated commodities from the federal government.28 Most of the public tax dollars spent on food leave the local region, as NSLP contracts are centralized to aforementioned foodservice management companies. Through their purchasing power, schools have a stake in shifting the food system towards health, justice, sustainability, equity, and community power. Schools have the potential to change food and agriculture practices by leveraging their demands for foods that are produced according to a set of values.

VALUES BASED PURCHASING APPROACHES

Values-based procurement initiatives represent a growing movement to harness the purchasing power of institutions to re-embed food markets in a set of social and environmental values.30 The billions of dollars school districts spend on food purchases can lead the movement for food systems change by expressing their community’s values. A school district can set the procurement criteria to

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28 “Child Nutrition Tables | USDA-FNS.”
29 Oostindjer et al., “Are School Meals a Viable and Sustainable Tool to Improve the Healthiness and Sustainability of Children’s Diet and Food Consumption?”
30 Institutions as Conscious Food Consumers.
encompass a holistic range of quality metrics, such as fair labor compensation in alignment with migrant justice. These market-based mechanisms may be able to effectively reorganize school lunch to promote social justice, equity, and sustainability.

Institutional food policies are guidelines that direct the internal foodservice and procurement practices of a school. Ranging from nutrition standards to values-based procurement criteria, internal food policies are often included in bid solicitations for foodservice agreements and commodity contracts. Specifically, procurement regulations can determine supply and the quality of that supply. These regulations can be altered to favor values-based procurement. Combined, the public and government regulations determine the quality and sustainability of the food available to schools. Therefore, a school district’s food policies can influence which contracts and agreements are made. The schools and hospitals that started this movement appear to be successful at gradually expanding infrastructure in regional food systems.31

By engaging with these policies, public health professionals can influence conditions for a food system that promotes values such as sustainability, maintenance of local economies, and racial justice:

- **Racial Justice**: BIPOC farmers face higher rates of land foreclosure and thus may not be guaranteed contracts to supply food to schools.32 These farmers would benefit from aggregating their product to a dedicated institutional contract. The USDA has been called on to recognize and support alternative, cooperatively owned marketplaces that value micro-market farms in order to advance racial equity.33 Providing incentives for contracting based on racial equity is one way the USDA can provide this support.

- **Economy**: Initial evidence has shown that local food purchasing supports the farmers and processors from which schools procure agricultural products.34 Agriculture has contributed to the economic health and employment of rural communities, particularly when they are locally owned and managed or at least maintain production and sales operations in local trade centers.35 School contracts can help these local farmers diversify their markets, increase off-season sales, gain an outlet for surplus, and increase their business autonomy. There are also other socioeconomic benefits coming from local food economies, such as the formation of relationships that strengthen social networks.36

- **Environment**: Institutions are including local and sustainable food procurement into their missions to achieve carbon neutral institutions. The long-term environmental effects have yet to be seen. Adoption of a dietary pattern high in foods from a sustainable food system, at a global scale, could provide major health benefits, including a large reduction in total mortality.38

Schools have a tremendous influence in advocating for district, state, and national policies that can change their food environments to advance health

31 Colasanti, Matts, and Wojciak, “Chapter 7 - Making Local Sourcing Standard Practice.”
32 Giancatarino and Noor, “Building The Case For Racial Equity In The Food System.”
33 Cooper, “Reframing Food Hubs.”
34 Pinchot, “The Economics of Local Food Systems.”
35 Nesheim et al., Social and Economic Effects of the U.S. Food System.
36 Rosenthal and Caruso, “Chapter 12 - Bringing School Foodservice Staff Back In.”
37 Illinois Public Health Institute and Crossroads Resource Center, “Exploring Economic and Health Impacts of Local Food Procurement.”
38 Willett et al., “Food in the Anthropocene.”
equity. Their scope of influence puts them in a unique position to be able to change local food environment interactions through approaches informed by community knowledge.

CASE STUDIES

School districts, food manufacturers, and suppliers across the country have been working to make more values-aligned products available to school cafeterias. Here, we highlight a few examples of these schools:

1. GOOD FOOD PURCHASING PROGRAM & CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

One initiative enabling large school districts to use their purchasing power to promote equity is the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP). It is a national effort to transform public institution food procurement to focus funds on creating a transparent and equitable food system. The program integrates the five core values of local economies, health, a valued workforce, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. School districts are evaluated based on standards for each value, such as purchasing whole and unprocessed vegetables or eliminating the use of deep frying.\(^\text{39}\) This focus on health as a value also rewards institutions that improve equity, affordability, accessibility, and consumption of high quality culturally relevant food. Since its implementation in the Los Angeles Unified School District, recipes for school lunches now use more healthy and sustainable ingredients such as low sodium bread made with local wheat. It has spurred new opportunities for advocacy organizations and coalitions to advocate not only for healthier school food, but also supply chain improvements such as fair working conditions for food chain workers.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) enrolls 355,156 students, a majority of whom are African American and Hispanic. CPS serves approximately 40 million lunch meals annually at free or reduced costs through the national school lunch program. Their sizable school district partnered with a network of advocates from the Chicago Food Policy Action Council (CFPAC), The Chicago & Cook County Department of Public Health, and other government agents to advance a Good Food Purchasing Initiative for the Chicago Metro Area. The momentum built by this coalition of stakeholders set the stage for the adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Policy by Chicago Public Schools in 2017, and later by the City and County in 2018.

Working together across sectors and districts facilitated this win. Early on, CPS was engaged in conversation with some of the largest school districts across the Midwest to get higher quality foods in their schools. Concerns over student public health and wellness, along with input from a cohort of learners, helped them push the envelope in the role of school food procurement. This momentum spurred the creation of a good food purchasing coalition made up of over forty organizations advocating for the adoption of the GFPP.

Recognizing that the $15.3 million spent on food and beverages in Cook County could be adopted to help local economies, the county policy language

\(^{39}\) "Good-Food-Purchasing-Program-Booklet-Reduced-2015-9-2.Pdf."
emphasizes the opportunity to build racial and social equity in the food system. The policy includes incentives for businesses located in and hiring from low income communities and persons with prison or arrest records.\(^{40}\) It also supports infrastructure to build land access for farmers and social entrepreneurs of color.

Its adoption presents both challenges and opportunities for implementation and evaluation in CPS. The early stages of adoption involve collecting data on food purchasing to see what standards CPS is already meeting through their existing programs and best practices. Large outsourced contracts complicate this process, but present an opportunity to rethink the current structure of contracts to be smaller and more controllable. The bidding process, where vendors propose prices and volumes to the schools, can also be difficult for small and mid-size farmers that may not have the capacity to supply the demands of a large school district. CPS and their partners want to address this challenge by creating more opportunities for smaller companies (more products from small and local growers) by working to break down the scale of this demand and conducting a food hub viability study for black and brown farmers. In the schools, they are also hoping to engage students and cafeteria workers in the implementation process.

CPS is carving a path to provide more students with culturally relevant, nutritious, and healthy food that will have tremendous local impacts. Potential regional impacts include increased quality of food for CPS meals and new job creation with living wages. This is an exciting opportunity to offer students eating in institutions and the community overall. The process of creating a local, resilient, and equitable food system is a long-term goal that presents an opportunity for the involvement of public schools and public health nutrition experts.

\(^{40}\) "18-1650 Substitute Good Food Purchasing Policy_5.14.18.Pdf."
2. FARM TO SCHOOL & OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Farm to School programs help schools source produce and other foods from nearby farms. In 2010, Farm to School became embedded within federal policy through the enactment of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA). This set aside funding for programming to improve access to local foods in eligible schools through the USDA Farm to School Grant Program in 2012. According to the National Farm to School Network, Farm to School programs positively impact and shape public health (through boosting child health and reducing health care costs associated with diet-related diseases, like childhood obesity), local economies (through school food dollars being used to support local farmers and food systems), the environment (through reduction of packaging and food transportation miles), and education (through experiential learning within school garden and nutrition education programs associated with Farm to School). Tools exist to help advance Farm to School programs commitments to racial and social equity.

“In 2013, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) received a $100K farm to school grant via the HHFKA to pilot “California Thursdays” (CT). CT was developed through a partnership between the Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) and OUSD to increase students’ access to local, fresh, and healthy school meals procured entirely from California. Specifically, CEL met districts where they were at (baseline level) and then guided them through an implementation process made up of actions (small, manageable tasks) that were the component parts, or building blocks for the co-construction of a desired outcome—in this case serving freshly prepared meals from California. Creation and scaling of California Thursdays reflect the ways that local level actors use their agency and will to develop innovative solutions for promoting educational equity and social justice across various contexts—despite numerous constraints. Clearly, California Thursdays cannot address the structural inequities that produce childhood hunger and obesity in the first place, but it can reshape the school food landscape and create broader impacts.”

3. LOCAL EMERGENCY FOOD CONTRACTS

The COVID-19 pandemic shines a spotlight on the relationships between public health, the food system, and racial/ethnic inequities. These inequities exist along the entire school food system, but there are also innovative ways that supply chains are responding to meet community needs. School meals can support recovery from COVID-19 if properly funded, and point to how a change in sourcing practices can be beneficial to schools and public health especially during this time of crisis.

Schools have become front-line providers of meals for communities disproportionately feeling the effects of rising food insecurity and unemployment. Communities of color that were already facing food apartheid*, unsafe working conditions, and economic inequality are now disproportionately affected by COVID-19 deaths and infections along with exacerbated food

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41 “Farm to School Grant Program | USDA-FNS.”
42 “Benefits of Farm to School.”
44 “People of Color Are at Greater Risk of COVID-19. Systemic Racism in the Food System Plays a Role.”
*Food Apartheid, as defined by activist Karen Washington, results from political and economic decisions rooted in structural racism, which have inequitably led to long-term disinvestment in primarily low-income communities and communities of color.
insecurity. Many essential workers who continue to work outside the home are BIPOC. Rampant outbreaks in US meat packing plants have resulted in thousands of sick workers, about half of whom are immigrants, and dozens of deaths. In response, organizers are demanding companies like Tyson, which supply a majority of the nation’s school meats, to implement essential worker safety measures.

Meanwhile, schools are facing disruptions in sourcing the foods they need from these large corporations to feed communities. This points to longstanding flaws with the current mode of food sourcing and distribution. Supply chains have been disrupted, meaning closed districts across the country are not able to connect to the same farmers that are being forced to waste most of their crops. Innovation in the ways that schools get their food has pointed to some solutions to feed the drastic influx of students and their families.

The USDA’s Coronavirus Farm Assistance Program has made it easier for farmers and distributors at local levels to connect with schools through temporary contracts. Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a nonprofit cooperative of Black farmers and landowners, received a small contract as well as The Common Market, a Black-led food hub that centers racial equity in its mission. These farmers and distributors are making progress on getting regional, mission-aligned food to the schools that are facing the most need. Fostering more partnerships like these can help a region remain healthy and resilient in times of crisis, and is also essential to ensure that school food programs receive adequate funding to sustain those contracts and labor. Reimbursement for these meals isn’t nearly enough to make up for the additional costs they’ve incurred. A recovery process from COVID-19 would drastically reconsider our food and health policies to advance racial justice.

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46 “Worker Action Center.”
47 “How Food Hubs and Co-Ops Are Overcoming the USDA Farm Box Program’s Flaws.”
48 Cooper, “Reframing Food Hubs.”
POLICY CHANGE

Through policy engagement, public health professionals can help create the conditions for a food system that integrates values and builds community power. Here are a few policy arenas that are moving the needle toward more equitable school lunch:

1. PROMOTING “MINORITY OWNED BUSINESSES (MBO)”

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<td>School Systems</td>
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Policies can place barriers for institutions affiliated with government entities to implement inclusive contracting, or the process of creating the environment for businesses owned by people of color and/or women to participate in a governmental procurement and contracting process. Inclusive business participation in local government procurement and contracting is an important source of income and jobs in communities of color and helps to strengthen community and business partnerships. Policies that address past and present institutional barriers in business development and the governmental procurement process can make it easier to connect businesses of color to schools.49

Example: California’s 2020 Prop 16 would allow consideration of race and gender in government contracting.

2. FUNDING STRUCTURE

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<th>Food systems level</th>
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<td>Stakeholders involved</td>
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<td>School Systems</td>
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<td>Small Businesses</td>
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Small-farmers and food businesses, especially those who are BIPOC, face challenges in accessing the capital, technical assistance, and resources required to scale their supply to meet the demand that larger school districts require.50 The existing funding structures used by banks and community development do not provide enough support for developing equity-oriented food businesses. Policies that allow for equity driven financing can create a financial environment where projects rooted in realizing the visions of impacted communities are supported.51

Example: Farm Bill at the Federal level should include a significant increase in funding opportunities for organizing and legal support needed to resist the structural barriers facing producers of color.52

49 Lohrentz and Insight Center for Community Economic Development, “Contracting for Equity.”
50 Cooper, “Reframing Food Hubs.”
51 EFOD Collaborative, “Equitable Food-Oriented Development.”
52 Cooper, “Reframing Food Hubs.”
### 3. SCHOOL FOOD ACCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food systems level</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
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<td>Stakeholders involved</td>
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<td>School Systems</td>
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Advocates in school nutrition are advancing several policy platforms to grant more students in need access to school meals by making eligibility for them easier,\(^53\) protecting the staff that prepare meals,\(^54\) and ensuring school meals are financially stable.\(^55\) Policy makers need to fully fund school nutrition programs to cover the costs of operating the program, buying needed equipment, doing nutrition education, prioritizing values-based procurement, and paying staff a living wage. Investments from the federal government will be especially important for school districts to maintain the financial stability of their school meal programs in the face of revenue loss and demand given the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Example:** A Universal School Meals Program would be able to reinvest back into the community by sourcing fresh and nutritious foods locally, and involve greater community control. Previously proposed legislation for Universal School Meals has included incentives for local food procurement.\(^56\)

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53 “Take-a-Fresh-Look-at-Community-Eligibility.Pdf.”
54 “Tell Congress.”
55 “Support School Food Service Workers.”
56 Sanders, Universal School Meals Program Act.
NEXT STEPS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

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<th>Who</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>• Organize among students and community members to create a set of demands for your school food menu and sourcing practices.</td>
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<td>• Find local organizations you would like your school to partner with or support.</td>
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<td>Community Members</td>
<td>• Start a book club to read about racial equity and racism in the food system.</td>
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<td>• In partnership with other community members, contact legislators around food systems policy change.</td>
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<td>School Districts</td>
<td>• Advocate for a change in your school district’s procurement practices.</td>
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<td>• Transparently outline the values your community and district prioritize in purchasing contracts.</td>
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<td>• Connect with other institutions and form a coalition of like-minded individuals to strategize over bringing values-based purchasing to your institutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Makers</td>
<td>• Develop food purchasing agreements endorsed by school boards.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Connect with community-based organizers to listen to their demands around food systems change.</td>
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CONSIDERATIONS

K-12 institutions can apply different food sourcing approaches to look upstream and put food at the center of community wellness. School food is important because it advances student nutrition, but it should not do so at the expense of communities, food chain workers, and the environment. Instead, equitable and justice-oriented food procurement practices can have a beneficial impact on the students’ health, as well as on the broader community.

Together, workers, public health professionals, and activists can advance food procurement policies that protect the environment, provide meaningful employment, and promote the health of whole communities. How food is produced, processed, and distributed matters in our assessment of what counts as healthy food. A much broader consideration of nutrition and how it intersects with the health of individuals, communities, and the ecosystems that sustain us is needed to ensure equitable food system development throughout the entire supply chain. A food system that conserves and renews natural resources, advances social justice, builds community wealth and power, and fulfills food and nutrition needs can be the future that schools work towards.
RESOURCES

Procurement

- USDA Guide on procuring local food, federal procurement regulations
- The USDA's Farm to School website contains helpful information about local food purchasing for school districts
- Five Models for Local School Food Procurement
- Setting the Table for Success: A Toolkit for Increasing Local Food Purchasing by Institutional Food Service Management
- Contracting for Equity: Best Local Government Practices that Advance Racial Equity in Government Contracting and Procurement
- Using the Power of Procurement for Healthier Communities

Race

- Measuring Racial Equity in the Food System: Established and Suggested Metrics - This report identifies metrics related to racial equity in the food system that are either in use by organizations currently or have been recommended. Includes a section on Food at Schools and Early Childhood Education Sites.
- Recommendations to Promote Racial Equity within Child Nutrition Programs
- Food Solutions New England: 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge
- An Annotated Bibliography on Structural Racism Present in the U.S. Food System

Labor

- No Piece of the Pie: U.S. Food Workers in 2016
- The Labor of Lunch Why We Need Real Food and Real Jobs in American Public Schools
- Good Food and Good Jobs for All: Challenges and Opportunities to Advance Racial and Economic Equity in the Food System

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The Praxis Project is a values-driven, national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve justice and equity through partnerships to build community power. Praxis believes strongly that organized communities are critical partners in the struggle to create just and equitable communities.

Our mission is to build healthy communities by transforming the power relationships and structures that affect our lives and communities.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK
Visit our website, www.thepraxisproject.org, to learn more about our initiatives and explore our multimedia resources.

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