

Food Fuels Learning:

Annual Update

August 06, 2019

# Background

Food Fuels Learning is an initiative started by a parent who saw children coming to school hungry. With the support of the Cumberland County Food Security Council and the Portland Public Schools (PPS) superintendent, a community-driven effort was born. To truly understand our school food system, we needed to assess the school food system landscape before taking action. This led to a year-long process of gathering information, that we called “Phase 1”.

The Food Fuels Learning leadership team assembled a research team who met with over 200 members of the Portland, Maine community to discuss their greatest successes and struggles within the school food system. We focused our research on five main categories that we identified as making up the school food system: charitable food programs, federal nutrition programs, school gardens, nutrition education, and sustainable food practices.

After many interviews, focus groups, and surveys, we published our Food Fuels Learning Needs Assessment and presented to the full School Board in August, 2018. This report outlines our findings as pertaining to the five categories within the PPS food system, followed by a series of recommendations identified by community stakeholders on how to improve school food security within each of the five categories.

Since completion of the needs assessment, we have embarked on “Phase 2,” which is the implementation phase of the initiative. In Phase 2, we have invited the Portland community to participate in five action-oriented groups (based off of the five categories). These groups convene regularly to carry out the recommendations outlined in the report through building networks and sharing ideas and resources.

In order to keep the community updated on our work and to celebrate the progress we continue to make, we hold quarterly report events. This has also been our opportunity to make direct asks of the superintendent and broader school community.

It is our goal to have this process be as community-led as possible, in order to create sustainable and institutionalized structures within our school system.

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# Goals and Objectives

Food Fuels Learning began the project by articulating goals in five program areas:

1. *Charitable food*
   * Ensure that all children at risk of food insecurity have access to adequate, culturally relevant, nutritious food both at school and to supplement their diet beyond school.
2. *Federal nutrition program*
   * Increase overall school meal participation and reduce challenges for food service staff.
3. *School gardens*
   * Assist every school in developing and maintaining a successful school garden and school garden programming.
4. *Nutrition education*
   * Provide schools with the tools they need to coordinate staff and organizational partners working to provide nutrition education to students.
5. *Sustainable practices*
   * Support schools in creating procurement, waste management, and other practices that minimize their environmental impact and encourage their investment in local communities.

In pursuit of these goals, Food Fuels Learning conducted a needs assessment to explore the presence and impact of activities within each of these five areas throughout the PPS district.

# Action Group Updates

## Leadership Team

Members of the Leadership Team continue to meet at least twice per month and work in sub-committees on branding, development, outreach, toolkit, and policy to increase productivity outside of meeting times.

The Branding and Outreach Committees, with the technical support of Winslow Robinson, rebranded from the Portland Public Schools Food Security Task Force to Food Fuels Learning. This process included updating the logo, launching a new website (foodfuelslearning.org), and facebook page (facebook.com/foodfuelslearning). To increase avenues of stakeholder participation, we also founded an Advisory Team, which is comprised of influential members of the school food community who provide additional credibility and support of this initiative. Outreach is also forming a district-wide “Food Fuels Learning Listserv.” This platform is designed for school food security champions, partner organizations, and invested community members to **learn**, **share**, and **collaborate** with one another about strategies to address food insecurity in the Portland Public Schools. It is our hope that this network will allow us to create efficiencies (by working smarter not harder) in our school food system and help us work toward sustainable and lasting change.

The Development Committee wrote and submitted applications to the [Gamechangers Laboratory](https://vimeopro.com/wsr2104/gamechangers-and-ffl) and THRIVE 2020 of United Way to further support the work and recommendations of Food Fuels Learning. Additionally, this committee developed a request for proposals, application, application evaluation form, and grant reporting form to ensure an intentional process for the PPS Food Fund, which will act as a way to fund seed grants for school community-based projects that bolster food security.

The Toolkit Committee published the resource, *Food Fuels Learning Toolkit: Conducting an Assessment of School System Food Security*. It was presented and shared with participants at the Universities Fighting World Hunger Summit and Farm to Institution New England Summit. It will also be presented at the Maine Farm to School Conference in October. The Toolkit is available at foodfuelslearning.org/toolkit.

The Policy Committee has presented testimony in Augusta multiple times in support of relevant child nutrition policies.

## Charitable Food Programs

The Charitable Foods Action Group prioritizes implementing and maintaining charitable food programs at all schools. Site visits have been conducted at schools without food pantries to determine the needs at each school. Two new charitable food programs are now in development at Casco Bay High School and Ocean Avenue with the Locker Project which is the non profit that funds and maintains all of the Portland Public School food pantries and produce distribution tables. Casco Bay High School is expanding their peanut butter and jelly sandwich weekly distribution to include a pantry model and produce table. Ocean Avenue will no longer be able to participate in the Good Shepherd Food Bank (GSFB) funded backpack program as GSFB phases out of the backpack model. The Locker Project is working with Ocean Avenue to develop a food pantry.

The draft of expectations for school charitable food programs involvement with the Locker Project have been completed which will allow for greater efficiencies at each school. This document will be distributed to all school food pantry liaisons and principals after it has been finalized.

The Summer Food Resource Guide has been completed and will continue to be updated annually and distributed at the beginning and at the end of each school year. Additional distribution locations have been identified to help increase participation in summer meals.

Communication and outreach platforms to charitable food liaisons, school champions, parents, and community are being developed to share resources and to increase awareness and participation in charitable food programs. The Food Fuels Learning website and Facebook page are two platforms that are being utilized. A Food Fuels Learning listserv that includes all action groups is also in development.

Good Shepherd Food Bank has agreed to change their MOU with The Locker Project to base eligibility on Portland Public Schools as a district instead of by individual school. This now makes all schools eligible for free produce and for reduced costs on certain purchased items. This will increase efficiency for The Locker Project and will increase accessibility to charitable food for all Portland Schools.

Table 1. Charitable Food Programs Action Group Updates

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| **Recommendation** | **Action** | **Deadline** |
| 1.1 Circulate Portland Community Food Resource Guide and Portland Summer Food Resource Guide to families and all school staff at the beginning and end of the year, respectively | 1) Portland Community Summer Food Resource Guide is completed. Circulation will occur in paper form to all elementary schools and will be available on school and district websites | 1) Completed & Ongoing |
| 1.5 Strengthen communication and collaboration among organizational partners and liaisons managing charitable food programs | 1) Use Food Fuels Learning website and Facebook page as platform to increase charitable food program communication  2) Food Fuels Learning listserv in development | 1) Ongoing  2) September 2019 |
| 2.1 Ensure that there are adequate school liaisons (staff, volunteers) to manage the charitable food programs at the schools and to maintain adequate food supply | 1) Complete school site visits to identify what each school charitable food program needs for support  2) Draft of expectations for school involvement has been developed  3) Designate charitable food program liaison staff position so that there is a point of contact within each school to ensure charitable food program sustainability | 1) Two schools completed; June 2019  2) Completed April 2019  3) Ongoing |
| 3.1 Partner organizations collaborate with schools that do not have an existing charitable food program to prioritize what would serve their school best | 1) Two schools identified and charitable food programs in development | 1) Ongoing |

## Federal Nutrition Program

Over the past year the Federal Nutrition Programs Action Group has met monthly. We maintain our focus on the priority of increasing participation of students from families with limited resources. Our meetings have continued to discuss the realities of feeding thousands of students every day and integrating parent requests for improved meal quality within this context. The Food Service Department has worked hard to make some of these changes a reality.

In March, the Food Service Department partnered with Cultivating Community/FoodCorps to hold overnight oatmeal taste tests in three elementary schools. This prospective breakfast item was popular among students and while Central Kitchen encountered obstacles (including labor and equipment) to serving the meal as an all elementary schools breakfast, there are plans to try the pilot again next school year. Additionally, Central Kitchen has made great strides on introducing a regular plant-based option into the lunch menu. Next fall, a hot vegan option will be served nearly every day at elementary schools across the district. Over the next several months, the Federal Nutrition Action Group will continue to focus on how to best market, support and monitor these menu changes.

The Federal Nutrition Action Group has also worked to meet with outside School Nutrition Experts. The Action Group met with former PPS Food Service Director Ron Adams to understand the vision, limitations and benefits of Central Kitchen. Additionally we met with Windham/Raymond Chef extraordinaire, Samantha Gasbarro. Chef Sam discussed how she helped to increasing meal quality in her district through staff training and increasing kitchen efficiencies.

With the additional capacity of Summer Interns and VISTAs we have begun to analyze meal preference data. This data is critical to understanding what students like and where to focus our efforts in menu development. This staff capacity has also allowed us to convene monthly Summer Meals meetings with great community participation and develop a new Summer Meals Map that has helped families across Portland locate meal sites.

Central kitchen was implemented with an incomplete set of equipment as designed. Through Food Fuels Learning, we have identified other equipment that would create efficiencies in scratch cooking and processing whole foods. Parents involved with our Action Group have taken initiative to support fundraising to purchase equipment. Food Service Director McLucas has helped us assemble a central kitchen equipment wish list that identifies the items needed in order of priority. We expect to begin raising money through the Food Fund for these items this Fall.

We have been looking outside the school budget to build additional capacity to increase meals participation. This includes funding proposals, AmeriCorps/VISTA, interns and support from parents and the community. For example, we submitted a proposal to United Way of Greater Portland to create a position we are calling School Food Ambassador. This person would promote school food throughout the community while also providing additional support at Central Kitchen to integrate more whole foods into the menu.

Table 2. Federal Nutrition Programs Action Group Updates

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| **Recommendation** | **Action** | **Deadline** |
| 1.1 Launch a professional school meals marketing campaign to attract more students and families | 1) Educate ‘student influencers’ about the importance of school meals  2) Update Food Service Facebook page  3) Updated food service 101 document  4) Create School Food Ambassador position | 1) Ongoing  2) Ongoing  3) Completed July 2019  4) Initial funding application not awarded. Will continue to seek resources to support this position. |
| 1.2 Collect, analyze, and incorporate student feedback on menu options through districtwide taste tests and response forms | 1) Cultivating Community taste tests  2) Analyzing production sheet data | 1) Quarterly throughout school year  2) September 2019 (Data aggregation began July 2019) |
| 1.4 Support and evaluate CACFP meal program and maximize this program throughout district | 1) Program in place  2) Staff training  3) Evaluation plan in process | 1) Ongoing  2) Ongoing  3) Ongoing |
| 1.5 Develop a summer meals strategic plan that includes monthly stakeholder meetings beginning in February | 1) Monthly meetings with great community participation  2) Developed a new summer meals map | 1) June -August 2019  2) Completed June 2019 |
| 2.1 Continue to encourage registration of all eligible families for free and reduced-price meals | 1) Continue with current procedures and identify additional best practices  2) Plan to sign folks up at community events  3) New online F&R app | 1) Summer-September 2019  2) September 2019  3) October 2019 |
| 2.2 Continue to support families completing eligibility paperwork and implement additional best practices | 1) Continue with current procedures and identify additional best practices | 1) Summer-September 2019 |
| 3.4 Exceed federal nutritional requirements by focusing on nutrient dense, minimally processed foods | 1) Scratch made: chili, marinara sauce, mashed potatoes, hummus  2) Testing overnight oatmeal  3) Harvest of the Month Program  4) Daily hot vegan lunch option | 1) Currently Serving  2) Ongoing  3) Fall 2019  4) September roll out |

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## School Gardens

School Gardens provide an outdoor classroom that brings to life learning of all subjects, increases physical and mental wellbeing, provides an equitable learning space for EL students and others who struggle in a traditional classroom, teaches concrete skills about food and nutrition, and provides students and families with fresh, free produce that they are excited to eat.

The School Garden Action Group operates as the PPS School Garden Network (Recommendation 2). We have met monthly for 10 months, having nine different schools host, as well as Cultivating Community, the non-profit support for school gardens. At each meeting, we prioritize learning about the hosts garden program, and then continue to work on goals guided by the recommendations from the Food Fuels Learning report. The network is comprised of teachers, parents, community partners, and students of all school garden programs in Portland. The vibrant network has created a channel for communication, collaboration, and working towards shared goals in under a year. We are most proud of our wide reaching and continuous community involvement that shows the readiness and commitment to school garden programs being more integrated and supported by the district.

We are focused on collaboration and sustainability efforts to create more continuity and resources for all programs. In addition to our monthly in person meetings, we have a google drive for internal resource sharing, and a Facebook page to highlight our successes and connect with the larger community. We are gearing up to host a PPS School Garden Tour at the end of August to share successes and challenges, as well as educating the community about how to better incorporate school gardens into education to increase equitable and health based learning spaces for students.

Our largest initiative is creating the School Garden Coach model with the expertise and support from Maine School Garden Network. Representatives from 10 school garden programs in the district have collaborated to create an outline to work for our district's needs. This is a vital component to creating equity and sustainability across all garden-based education programs that benefit students on all planes of learning, including learning objectives, confidence and skills, community relations, emotional and physical well-being, and connection to nature. Our primary goal as a network is to institutionalize and gain more support for school garden programs in the school district. We propose the School Garden Coach model to be funded by the school board with the goal of taking a step towards continuity and sustainability for all the school gardens in Portland.

Goals for the upcoming school year include collaboration between Lily Chaleff, the Schools Coordinator at Cultivating Community and Brook Teller, the STEM District Coordinator, to begin to address subsections of Recommendation 1 - to move the district towards developing and implementing school-garden based learning goals integrated with Common Core Standards.

Table 3. School Gardens Action Group Updates

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| **Recommendation** | **Action** | **Outcome** |
| 1.1 Establish a school garden at every school | 1) Support Deering High students to build a greenhouse on campus  2) Support Rowe to rebuild a school garden after school renovation | 1) Greenhouse and 4 raised beds built in May 2019 with oversight from environmental club at Deering High  2) 10 handicap accessible raised beds built, filled, and planted in Spring 2019. Five fruit trees planted to start a school orchard |
| 2.1 Establish a platform to share resources, grants, tips, and ask questions | 1) Create and crowd source a Google Drive platform | 1) Established October 2019, ongoing use |
| 2.2 Convene in-person quarterly meetings | 1) Hold monthly meetings, rotating host and school garden program that is highlighted | 1) 9 schools and 1 non-profit have hosted meetings  2) 65 people have attended meetings  3) 10 schools are actively involved |
| 2.3 Maintain an online presence to promote school gardens in the district and recruit interested volunteers from the community | 1) Create a Facebook page  2) Identify 1-2 people from each school garden program to have editor and posting privileges  3) Promote events and ways to support school gardens | 1) Created March 2019  2) 292 followers by August 1st  3) 13 editors representing 11 schools managing the facebook page  4) Ongoing project |
| 2.5 Raise awareness of and fully utilize garden-based education resources in the state | 1) Invite reps from support organizations to attend and present at network meetings | 1) 7 support organizations have networked with the group: ReTree US, Maine School Garden Network, FoodCorps, Cultivating Community, Tower Gardens, Master Gardeners, Maine Organic Farmer & Gardener’s Association |
| 3.3 Provide stipends to school garden coordinators | 1) Develop school garden coach guidelines for PPS | 1) Idea presented at April Quarterly Report and there is an ongoing conversation about its potential for the next budget  2) Some schools are instating the model as possible this school year (Rowe, Riverton) |

## Nutrition Education

The Nutrition Education Action Group is passionate about ensuring that all students have access to quality nutrition and cooking education that inspires them to make healthy choices to support their learning and growth. Our largest undertaking is the creation of a comprehensive [Nutrition Education Map](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1oiCnmKHPal6nNXcPxdus_eq2JfaysVRluNlurKMG_lU/edit#gid=0) that compiles all of the nutrition education content, curriculum, and activity happening in the district by both partner organizations and school staff. We developed a survey and performed targeted outreach to school nurses, social workers, health, and physical education teachers to better understand the curriculum that educators are using and the barriers they are facing. With support from the Portland’s Department of Public Health, we were able to award $25 Amazon gift cards to every educator that completed the survey. We created a [report](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ufbRYsxcYRK7F0w5GrH8_slTTpkBSPOPo1M7n8ac7pg/edit#heading=h.cplz7io0ylb5) of our survey findings, which represent nine schools, and will continue to do outreach in the hopes of having feedback from every school in the district.

By mapping where nutrition education is, and is not, happening we have been able to determine ways to increase access to information that is the least burdensome to teachers as possible. Thanks to this action group EFNEP educators from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension were able to meet with principals from Casco Bay and Deering High Schools and are moving forward with plans on how to integrate their curriculum with students in health classes this year. Additionally, we were able to convene partners from Cultivating Community, FoodCorps, SNAP-Ed, Cooking Matters, EFNEP, and NEAT to strategize on the most effective ways to provide nutrition education to all eligible elementary schools while also respecting grant restrictions and teacher capacity.

Before the school year begins, we will create individual nutrition education school reports to bring to principals. We hope this will be a tool that encourages principals to support teachers opting in to whichever type of nutrition education would best suit their needs.

Table 4. Nutrition Education Action Group Updates

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| **Recommendation** | **Action** | **Deadline** |
| 2.1 Coordinate existing nutrition education efforts by partner organizations, eliminating redundancies and increasing reach | 1) Creating comprehensive Nutrition Education Map with partner organizations and school staff teaching nutrition ed  2) Creating and administered school staff survey  3) Generated Nutrition Survey Report  3) Strategize around how to encourage eligible elementary school teachers to opt-in to free nutrition education from nonprofit service providers | 1) Began March 2019, ongoing  2) May 2019  3) July 2019  4) July 2019 |
| 3.1 Equip schools with the basic infrastructure to teach nutrition education | 1) Group explores option of “nutrition education carts” with cooking resources that teachers or program staff could check out of the library  2) Partner organizations share out what they bring with them for classes and approximate costs  3) Draft estimate of how much one “nutrition education cart” will cost | 1) May 7th  2) May 7th  3) June 2019 |
| 3.3 Foster greater awareness of available nutrition programs, and strengthen student and family participation | 1) Partner organizations share about what they offer and which schools they are eligible to work in  2) Connecting high school principals with EFNEP service providers | 1) March 2019  2) June 2019 |

## Sustainable Practices

The Sustainable Practices Action Group aims to ​support schools in creating procurement, waste management, and other practices that minimize environmental impact and encourage investment in local communities. Our action group includes representation from We Compost It!, NRCM, NE Environmental Finance Center, FoodCorps, district facilities staff, community members, teachers, and parents.

Our priority has been the completion of a PPS Best Practices Guide to cafeteria waste separation. So far we have conducted a site visit to almost every school in the district. At each school, we have asked about the successes and challenges that they face regarding their composting and recycling system, share table, and use of cafeteria materials (e.g., packets of plastic cutlery, condiment dispensers, etc). We are now working on the best practices guide, using the information and feedback from each site visit. We are also working with facilities and the custodial staff to inform this guide. Once the guide is completed, we will disseminate this information to each school and assist schools with implementation of the best practices. We will update the 2012 Sustainability Policy to reflect the information within the best practices guide and ask the School Board to approve.

Our action group is also working to institute more sustainable practices within cafeteria purchasing and operations. We are helping Rowe Elementary School replace plastic cutlery with reusable cutlery. We have received funding from the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) for silverware and all other necessary materials and will now work with Rowe’s administration and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to determine volunteer and/or funding opportunities for the increased labor costs.

Starting this fall, Jane McLucus will eliminate “spork” packets in the rest of the elementary cafeterias and replace them with individual forks, spoons, napkins, and straws. This will eliminate the plastic packets and decrease the amount of unused utensils that end up in the trash. To further decrease the amount of trash PPS produces, we are researching alternative disposal methods for a common cafeteria material, the Oliver container, which is not compostable or recyclable. These changes could significantly decrease the amount of trash produced in our cafeterias.

Table 5. Sustainable Practices Action Group Updates

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| **Recommendation** | **Action** | **Deadline** |
| 2.1 Involve custodial and lunchroom staff in trainings and discussions | 1) Meet with head custodians at their monthly meeting to explain what we are doing and ask for their feedback.  2) Create a PPS composting / recycling guide to inform schools about best practices and the successes of other schools in the district | 1) Custodial meeting: August 23rd  2) Began June 2019, ongoing |
| 2.3 Incorporate composting into education goals, and involve students in composting | 1) Visit each school to understand the barriers with each composting and recycling program  2) Create a PPS composting / recycling guide to inform schools about best practices and the successes of other schools in the district | 1) Completed site visits in May 2019  2) Began June 2019, ongoing |
| 3.0 Institute sustainable practices in cafeteria purchases and operations | 1) Research alternative ways to dispose of a cafeteria lunch container that is not compostable or recyclable | 1) Beginning of 2019-2020 school year |
| 3.3 Reduce use of single-use plastic by decreasing use of plastic straws and packaged cutlery | 1) Work with Rowe Elementary School to eliminate plastic cutlery in their cafeteria and replace it with reusable cutlery  2) Apply for a grant from NRCM to fund the materials for the silverware project | 1) Ongoing  2) Received grant on 4/27/19 |

# Food Fuels Learning Asks/Requests

Since Superintendent Botana blessed this project with his support and endorsement, we have been clear that we cannot and will not ask school staff to do more than they are already doing. We recognize that everyone employed by PPS has a job description that has them working at or beyond their capacity.

Our approach to working with PPS began with identifying people outside of the schools who are providing food and nutrition related services. We mapped those providers to educate each other and Portland schools staff about what we do. This has resulted in efficiencies and improved services.

Food Fuels Learning has also sought additional resources and funds to support more food access for PPS students. We have identified systems and policies maintained by well-intentioned partners that limit access and waste resources and asked those be changed.

Even with these additional resources and improved systems, there are still transformative changes that can only result from attention by the PPS Board and investments from the school budget.

The following are Food Fuels Learning’s most important requests for support at this time.

Table 6. Food Fuels Learning Asks/Requests

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| **Requests** |
| **Attend upcoming events**:   * School Garden Tour (August 25th, 1-5pm, Start at East End Community School) * Food Fuels Learning Community Celebration (September 16th, 6-7:30pm, Riverton Elementary) |
| **Promote the PPS Food Fund** |
| **Share Food Fuels Learning with your networks** |
| **Encourage the community to eat school meals** |
| **Advocate for these in the school budget:**   * Positions that increase capacity of Central Kitchen * School Garden Coaches * District Wellness Coordinator |

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# Appendix A: Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with the overall goal of ending food insecurity within the PPS district:

## District

**District Recommendation 1:** Develop and implement district-wide and school-specific strategic plans based on the PPS Food Security Needs Assessment:

1.1 Develop and implement food security strategic plans that align with the PPS District Wellness Plan and Portland Promise through collaboration with PPS District Wellness Committee, schools, and partner organizations

1.2 Use the Portland Education Foundation; Full Plates, Full Potential; Farm to School grants; and other funding opportunities to support the implementation of PPS Food Security Needs Assessment recommendations

**District Recommendation 2:** Develop a yearly monitoring and evaluation plan to track progress implementing the district-wide and school-specific strategic plans:

2.1 Develop shared indicators for schools and partner organizations for data collection and tracking

2.2 Institutionalize data collection and data sharing practices

2.3 Report on yearly findings at the end of each school year

2.4 Build upon PPS food system successes in subsequent years’ strategic, monitoring and evaluation plans

**District Recommendation 3:** Institutionalize and maintain a PPS Wellness Coordinator position whose responsibilities include acting as food security advocate on the PPS District Wellness Committee, as follows:

3.1 Coordinate food security efforts by partner organizations and schools; eliminate redundancies, increase reach, oversee networks and resource sharing, and ensure equitable access to food security resources across the district

3.2 Participate on the PPS District Wellness Committee and in development and implementation of district-wide and school-specific strategic plans

3.3 Participate in development of school-based wellness teams

3.4 Identify and research potential funding sources for the implementation of district-wide and school-specific strategic plans

3.5 Provide professional development training and learning opportunities for school staff on poverty and food security

3.6 Create and implement an outreach plan to increase awareness of student food insecurity and promote available food security resources through district-organized events

**District Recommendation 4**: Designate one or more “food security champions” on each school Wellness Team, with responsibilities as follows:

4.1 Serve as liaison between the appropriate school staff members and partner organizations with regards to food security programming

4.2 Participate in development and implementation of district-wide and school-specific food security strategic plan

4.3 Oversee monitoring and evaluation of food security programming at their school

4.4 Report to PPS Wellness Coordinator on District Wellness Committee

## Charitable Foods

**Charitable Foods Recommendation 1 -** Enhance consistent resource-sharing within, and among, school communities:

1.1 Circulate Portland Community Food Resource Guide (Appendix A) and Portland Community Summer Food Resource Guide (Appendix B) to families and all school staff at the beginning and end of the school year, respectively

1.2 Incorporate charitable food program information into trainings for school staff. All staff should be informed on what resources are available, trauma-informed ways to help families access services, and the appropriate contact people

1.3 Distribute a general information packet and food security survey at the beginning of each school year to determine wants and needs and enable families to opt in to programs

1.4 Send home feedback forms through backpack programs to improve communication with families receiving this service

1.5 Strengthen communication and collaboration among organizational partners and liaisons managing charitable food programs

1.6 Form charitable foods provider PPS network to share resources and best-practices developed at each school

**Charitable Foods Recommendation 2 -** Improve the reliability, efficiency, and sustainability of charitable food programs:

2.1 Ensure that there are adequate school liaisons (e.g., staff, volunteers) to manage the food programs at the schools and to maintain adequate food supply

2.2 Guarantee stipends for the school liaisons managing charitable food programs

2.3 Invest in necessary infrastructure (e.g., cold storage and equipment)

**Charitable Foods Recommendation 3-** Encourage low-barrier access and high availability of school pantries and food options:

3.1 Partner organizations collaborate with schools that do not have an existing charitable food program to prioritize what would serve their school best

3.2 Increase communication about charitable food opportunities at each school to students and families

3.3 Require no paperwork or eligibility checks for access

3.4 Work with partner organizations to offer free, nutritious food in more places (e.g., bowls of fruit in the classroom, Adult Ed, multicultural office)

3.5 Engage with partner organizations to increase the availability of fresh produce and of culturally appropriate foods such as labeled halal options

## Federal Nutrition Programs

**Federal Nutrition Programs Recommendation 1** - Increase overall student participation in federal nutrition programs:

1.1 Launch a professional school meals marketing campaign to attract more students and families

1.2 Collect, analyze, and incorporate student feedback on menu options through district-wide taste tests and response forms

1.3 Maximize cafeteria and lunch period efficiency to ensure students have sufficient time to enjoy and digest their food

1.4 Support and evaluate Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP) 2018 meal pilot and maximize this program throughout district

1.5 Develop a summer meals strategic plan that includes monthly stakeholder meetings beginning in January

**Federal Nutrition Programs Recommendation 2** - Encourage full participation of all eligible students in free and reduced-price meals:

2.1 Continue to encourage and incentivize registration of all eligible families for free and reduced-price meals

2.2 Continue to support families completing eligibility paperwork and implement additional best practices

2.3 Fully implement the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) in every eligible school

2.4 Train staff on how to manage breakfast in the classroom to ensure maximum reimbursement

**Federal Nutrition Programs Recommendation 3** - Cultivate a school culture of healthy and inclusive food practices:

3.1 Serve more meals, snacks, and taste tests that represent and celebrate the cultural diversity of the student body

3.2 Restore school budget line item that subsidizes food service, especially local food procurement

3.3 Increase capacity for food preparation to include more scratch cooking

3.4 Exceed federal nutritional requirements by focusing on nutrient dense, minimally processed foods

3.5 Limit access to unhealthy food options outside reimbursable school meals as specified in the District Wellness Policy and Smart Snacks regulations

### School Gardens

**School Gardens Recommendation 1 -** Develop and implement school garden–based learning goals integrated with Common Core State Standards:

1.1 Establish a school garden at every school

1.2 Institute teacher training on garden-based education as Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credit

1.3 Provide all teachers with a garden curriculum formulated from existing Maine-based lessons connected to Common Core State Standards

1.4 Maintain a resource list of existing curricula for teachers to draw from to connect to their learning goals

1.5 Increase garden-related summer programming for students that includes hands-on learning and maintenance

**School Gardens Recommendation 2 -** Create a district-wide School Garden Network:

2.1 Establish a platform to share resources, grants, tips, and ask questions

2.2 Convene in-person quarterly meetings

2.3 Maintain an online presence to promote school gardens in the district and recruit interested volunteers from the community

2.4 Increase efficiency of produce distribution between school garden coordinators and liaisons managing charitable food programs during the growing season

2.5 Raise awareness of and fully utilize garden-based education resources in the state

**School Gardens Recommendation 3 -** Increase funding and infrastructure for school garden programs:

3.1 Identify and utilize sources of funding for school garden maintenance and programming for all schools

3.2 Designate budget line in Parks & Recreation Department to support outdoor learning spaces on school property

3.3 Provide stipends to school garden coordinators

3.4 Create school garden committees at each school with representatives from the school administration, each grade, and the parent community to institutionalize gardening into school culture

3.5 Organize more and more-sustained support for summer maintenance

## Nutrition Education

**Nutrition Education Recommendation 1 -** Develop a district-wide comprehensive and equitable approach to nutrition education:

1.1 Establish nutrition education goals for each grade that build upon the previous year’s lessons

1.2 Create and implement a nutrition education curriculum aligned with Common Core State Standards through collaboration with the academic departments and organizational partners

**Nutrition Education Recommendation 2 -** Designate one person to oversee nutrition education in the district, with responsibilities as follows:

2.1 Coordinate existing nutrition education efforts by partner organizations, eliminating redundancies and increasing reach

2.2 Provide resources and training to teachers on how to teach basic nutrition education

2.3 Leverage funding opportunities among the district and partner organizations by collaborating on grant proposals

2.4 Convene bi-annual meetings among partner organizations

**Nutrition Education Recommendation 3 -** Prioritize and implement nutrition education in schools:

3.1 Equip schools with the basic infrastructure to teach nutrition education

3.2 Provide a stipend to teachers who provide after-school nutrition programming

3.3 Foster greater awareness of available nutrition programs, and strengthen student and family participation

## Sustainable Practices

**Sustainable Practices Recommendation 1 -** Develop measurable local food procurement goals for Food Services:

1.1 Set local food purchasing goal to at least 20-25% of total food budget

1.2 Launch a marketing campaign to promote local food among the school community

1.3 Prioritize local food procurement from small Maine farms

**Sustainable Practices Recommendation 2 -** Follow New England Environmental Finance Center’s (Sheils, M., & Webster, S. n.d.) best management practices for district-wide composting:

2.1 Involve custodial and lunchroom staff in trainings and discussions

2.2 Supply school cafeterias with additional composting and waste sorting stations

2.3 Incorporate composting into education goals, and involve students in composting

**Sustainable Practices Recommendation 3 -** Institute sustainable practices in cafeteria purchases and operations:

3.1 Clarify and institutionalize consistent share table practices

3.2 Purchase compostable or reusable utensils

3.3 Reduce use of single-use plastic by decreasing use of plastic straws and packaged cutlery

3.4 Use pump dispensers instead of individual packets for condiments