

---

# FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES TASK FORCE

---

---

## PURPOSE OF THE FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES TASK FORCE

---

Jeffco Public Schools formed the Food and Nutrition Services Task Force to hold a representative community conversation regarding school nutrition and food-related topics. The Task Force examined current and best/next practices in providing healthy and nutritious meals for students while also considering the extensive regulatory requirements and substantial financial responsibility that Food and Nutrition Services must balance in order to remain a self-sustaining operation.

After evaluating the range of practices in the arenas of school nutrition, dining environments, and sustainability, the Food and Nutrition Services Task Force prepared both short and long-term suggestions that can improve our school nutrition program. The Task Force considered the regulatory and financial ramifications associated with these recommendations and attempted to present solutions throughout this final report.

Marketing the school lunch program and communicating with families is key to increasing participation. This need is addressed in each of the three discussion areas and will be further highlighted in the conclusion.

---

## WHAT WAS THE TASK FORCE'S TIMELINE?

---

During the 2018-19 school year, the Task Force engaged in a learning tour to increase understanding of current practices in Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). Grounded in what the Task Force learned, members created a set of suggestions to enhance food and dining environment quality with the end goal of increased student participation with Food and Nutrition Services.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Proposed Activity/Benchmark</b>
December 11, 2018	Food and Nutrition Services	Who are we? Why are we here? An overview and tour FNS
January 8, 2019	Colorow Elementary	Facilities and Equipment
February 12, 2019	Molholm Elementary	Cafeteria Environment and Sustainability
March 12, 2019	Three Creeks K-8	Menu Planning

April 9, 2019	Drake Middle School	A La Carte
May 14, 2019	Marshdale Elementary School	Summary, Refined Charge, and Next Steps
Summer 2019	Ed Center	Task Force creation of recommendations and report
Fall 2019		Final report of recommendations submitted

During the scheduled Learning events (December-May), Jeffco Public Schools staff shared pertinent information, provided experiences to better understand the topics above, and facilitated conversation to address Task Force Members needs to complete their charge.

---

### GUIDELINES FOR THE TASK FORCE

---

**The Task Force is an advisory committee.**

Jeffco Schools values the incredible dedication and commitment to improving experiences for Jeffco students that is demonstrated by volunteer Task Force members. Task Force members provide valuable information to improve current practices for Jeffco Schools and experiences for Jeffco Students. The final decision regarding implementation of suggestions by Task Force members is made by Jeffco Schools employees and the Board of Education.

---

### TASK FORCE REPORT

---

To facilitate greater specificity, members identified priority areas on which to focus the report and suggestions. The three areas addressed in this report are:

1. Dining Environments & Facilities
2. Menu Options
3. Environmental Impact & Sustainability

Each section includes a District response section articulating an implementation plan (if applicable) dependent on decisions by district employees and the Board of Education and available resources.

---

## DINING ENVIRONMENTS AND FACILITIES

---

Suggestions on the topic of Dining Environment and Facilities focus on five subtopics: Seated Meal Time, Facility Design & Construction, Central Production Facility, Food Display, and Food Trucks. Our goal was not to recommend what was deemed to be easy or acceptable by FNS but to push the boundaries beyond acceptable and plausible options for the sake of a much-needed fresh food and fresh thinking for our young learners.

### 1) Seated Meal Time

The Task Force identified the limited time to eat lunch as a barrier to student participation and to healthy eating habits. The suggestions below are motivated by the goal of providing more time for students to eat lunch:

**1.1)** Institute a 30-minute standard minimum time for students to eat lunch. This recommendation is based on an extensive literature review that finds longer lunch periods are associated with benefits to student health, weight, academics, behavior and general well-being. The Task Force expects challenges depending on the number of students and configuration of each school, and each school will need flexibility to accommodate minimum lunchtimes.

Research on lunch period length:

Hildebrand D, Millburg Ely C, Betts NM, Gates GE. Time to Eat School Lunch Affects Elementary Students' Nutrient Consumption. *Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*. 2018;42(2).

Huang TT, Sorensen D, Davis S, Frerichs L, Brittin J, Celentano J, et al. Healthy Eating Design Guidelines for School Architecture. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2013;10:120084. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd10.120084>

**1.2)** Schedule recess before lunch. This recommendation is based on research which demonstrates benefits of recess being scheduled prior to the lunch period. For schools who choose to implement this recommendation, scheduling and logistics to transition from recess to lunch need to be considered to align with the above recommendation 1.1).

Research supporting recess before lunch:

Graziose MM, Ang IYH. Factors Related to Fruit and Vegetable Consumption at Lunch Among Elementary Students: A Scoping Review. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2018;15:170373. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd15.170373>

"Recess Before Lunch, Montana Team Nutrition." Montana State University Health and Human Development, Montana Team Nutrition Program, 10 July 2019, [www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/smartpleasantmeals/rbl.html](http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/smartpleasantmeals/rbl.html)

NEA. "Recess Before Lunch." NEA, 6 Aug. 2019, <http://www.nea.org/archive/43158.htm>.

"Smart Pleasant Meals." Edited by University of Montana, *Team Nutrition Program*, Montana State University Health and Human Development, 6 Aug. 2019, <http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/smartpleasantmeals/rbl.html>.

Recess Before Lunch: Research Tested, Parent Approved. (n.d.). Retrieved August 6, 2019, from <https://www.smarterlunchrooms.org/articles/recess-before-lunch-research-tested-parent-approved>

**1.3)** Redesign or reconfigure lunch lines to more efficiently move students through. Improved traffic flow and serving logistics will result in a longer amount of time for students to eat. Not being able to get through the line in time to eat is an often-cited reason for not participating in school lunch programs, therefore any improvement in line efficiency would be another way to increase participation. This includes ideas for single item purchase, re-fills, account code reading, etc.

**1.4)** Empower FNS to partner with school administrators for the overall benefit of student seated lunch time, by working together to develop lunch schedules that will be most efficient and increase seated lunch time.

## **2) Facility Design and Construction**

The Task Force recognizes the opportunity that the passing of 5B in 2018 can have on Jeffco's ability to provide healthy and nutritious meals for students and the community and has the following recommendations for future Jeffco design and construction:

**2.1)** As stated above, creating an efficient means of expediting students through lunch lines is of huge importance. The Task Force understands that different facilities present challenges for this recommendation, and feels that efficiencies can be gained through redesign (especially in new buildings and facilities upgraded as a result of 5B funding), construction, layout, and technology which would minimize the amount of time students wait in line.

**2.2)** The Task Force recommends that all future facilities incorporate the equipment structure necessary to integrate salad bars in all cafeterias. This recommendation is made again in the Menu Options section of this report as the addition of salad bars would significantly impact student access to a range of fresh fruits and vegetables.

**2.3)** Refillable water stations should be considered to ensure fresh, free, cold, and safe drinking water access for every student in every building.

Division of Population Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. "CDC Healthy Schools Water Access." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npao/wateraccess.htm>

### 3) Central Production Facility

Discussion in the Task Force included two potential Facility Design and Construction opportunities that would increase Jeffco's capacity for providing quality meals:

1. A Central Production Facility
2. Upgrading individual sites for increased scratch cooking and preparation capabilities

**The dominant suggestion from the Task Force was to have scratch cooking at most individual sites. If this is not possible, then a central production facility could be utilized along with salad bars in every school to honor the community's push for whole fresh food.**

**The Task Force prioritizes a commitment that every new school built will have scratch cooking ability.** However, the Task Force recognizes the significant cost associated with this suggestion and that we cannot afford both a central facility and individual site upgrades.

While not all Task Force members agreed on the need, it was recognized that a central kitchen could increase the quality and nutrition of food served in Jeffco. In later sections of this report, it is noted that a central production kitchen could support sustainable practices by allowing FNS to work directly with farmers to plan for upcoming planting and harvest seasons. A central kitchen might also benefit participation by allowing for more varied and complex menu options and increasing the amount of freshly prepared food items. However, some members felt that the community's values for increased fresh food were better met by individual kitchen upgrades.

FNS hired a consultant to evaluate a central facility and compare that to the cost of bringing individual sites up to increased standards. The evaluation from the consultant has not been completed at the time of this report, and without adequate data the Task Force cannot make an educated recommendation on the topic. The Task Force suggests that the findings of the evaluation be considered in alignment with the suggestions outlined in this report.

### 4) Food Display and Marketing

The Task Force considered how food is displayed to highlight, promote, and deliver a healthier choice for our young eaters that includes fruits and vegetables. Improvements in food display could increase participation and revenue. Task Force recommendations regarding Food Display include:

**4.1)** Create a standard display model where fruits and vegetables are positioned at eye level in an attractive display as to "sell" and promote the eating/purchasing and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Research on food display and other guidelines to follow for lunchroom design can be found in the extensive literature reviews by the Smarter LunchRooms Movement Organization.

*Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Research*. Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, Cornell University, 1 Jan. 2017, <https://www.smarterlunchrooms.org/about/research>

**4.2)** Move the snack cart to a location that follows the exposure and purchasing of the main meal.

**4.3)** As addressed in the Facility Design and Construction section above, include equipment that will permit salad bars to be offered at every school cafeteria where student interest and kitchen configuration support implementation.

Salad Bars in the National School Lunch Program March 27, 2013 Memo from the USDA to all Regional and State Directors of School Nutrition Programs: Rothstein, Melissa. United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP31-2013os.pdf>.

## **5) Food Trucks**

The Task Force understands that Food Trucks are not a viable option for serving all students, but rather a means to add excitement to our overall lunch program by adding a “cool” factor and making the process fun. Additionally, a food truck’s focus on fresh/scratch cooking would align with community demand.

The Task Force recommends that FNS further explore the idea of food trucks as a supplemental and novel food delivery method, with the following suggestions:

**5.1)** Start with one truck and build revenue through evening and weekend catering opportunities at sporting events, community gatherings, and festivals to support additional trucks in the future if the program proves successful.

**5.2)** The Food Truck program could be an opportunity for career exposure and experience for students within Jeffco’s culinary arts, mechanical, and business management programs.

**5.3)** Jeffco students could staff the trucks and serve Jeffco-approved menus (approved for federal reimbursement).

One avenue to implementing a Food Truck program in Jeffco would be to partner with Warren Tech. Members of the Task Force engaged with staff and students from Warren Tech to explore this possibility. Including their marketing, mechanical, culinary and business management programs. Warren Tech is open to partnering and is willing to outline the program, timeline, and budgeting associated with the operation of Jeffco Food Trucks.

## District Response: Dining Environments and Facilities

The implementation plan below articulates the order in which recommendations from the Task Force will be considered and is contingent on available resources.

The implementation plan is articulated in three phases:

- Phase I (Immediate) - These are recommendations that the district already has underway in some form or will consider implementing within the next six months.
- Phase II (Short Term) - These are recommendations that the district will consider implementing within the next six months to two years.
- Phase III (Long Term) - These are recommendations that the district will consider implementing in the next two years and beyond.

The use of matrices (example below) is intended to summarize the phase in which recommendations are considered. The use of the matrices is for recommendations that require additional resources. The matrix distinguishes between resources that would be one-time expenditures and those that would require an on-going resource commitment. Recommendations that do not require resources may not be reflected in the matrices, but rather explained in the response from district staff.

Example:

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II	X	X
Phase III		

(In the above example, Jeffco Public Schools will consider the recommendations referenced in Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I, the implementation of the recommendations would require an on-going commitment of resources. In Phase II there are recommendations that will be considered that would require an allocation of one-time resources and on-going resources.)

**Recommendation #1: Seated Meal Time**

Phase I

Food and Nutrition Services will request to partner with district's *Start Time and Master Scheduling* committee to recommend a 30-minute lunch period (not including outdoor/recess time). This recommendation is consistent with both the FNS Task Force recommendation and research compiled by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and recently released in a research brief titled '[Making Time for School Lunch](#)'. The recommendation of a 30-minute lunch period aims to ensure that students receive 20 minutes of seated meal time.

This recommendation must also be aligned with other supportive factors such as staggering of classes in cafeteria, effective scheduling of FNS staff, and efficient line design in order create the seated time needed.

Phase II

Phase III

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II		
Phase III		

## **Recommendation #2: Facility Design and Construction**

---

### Phase I

---

- Food and Nutrition Services will continue to review and make changes as necessary to ensure that the serving lines in each of our schools are as efficient as possible given the resources and facilities available at each school.
  - Refillable water stations have become standard in the design and renovation of new schools and will continue to be included in these schools.
- 

### Phase II

---

The district recognizes the strong desire of the FNS Task Force to see Salad Bars implemented as an avenue to increase access to fresh food and increase fruit and vegetable consumption among Jeffco Students. Understanding this desire, FNS plans to address this request (as recommended later in Menu Options section of report) using a Feasibility Study rather than installing and/or planning for installation in each school at this time.

This study will include a representative sample of schools (varying grade levels, demographics and socioeconomics, size and current participation in the school meal program) and will assess the feasibility of salad bar implementation based upon cost (equipment, food, and labor), food waste, consumption of fruits and vegetables, and food safety measures.

In addition to measuring the data points associated with implementation of Salad Bars in sample schools within Jeffco, FNS will reach out to other districts implementing salad bars to gather feedback and experiences.

This feasibility study will occur during the 2020-21 school year. The results of this feasibility study will then be used to determine if implementing on a large scale is feasible financially, can be managed properly for food safety and has the potential to increase fruit and vegetable consumption as hypothesized.

---

### Phase III

---

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II	X	
Phase III		

***Recommendation #3: Central Production Facility***

---

Phase I

---

The district understands the clear desire from the FNS Task Force for fresh cooking in Jeffco Schools. The district is currently addressing this community desire from a district-wide facility and equipment standpoint. There are significant facility and equipment needs in Jeffco school kitchens that must be addressed in order to introduce more scratch cooking. To broadly address this need, Jeffco Schools and FNS have engaged in a Master Planning study and will complete this exploratory process in early 2020. This Master Planning process serves as a comprehensive assessment of the current state of FNS facilities and equipment and will assess multiple options for future FNS operations.

This Master Plan document will outline the feasibility and costs of three different models for investing in and most effectively operating the school meal program, while remaining flexible to foodservice trends and regulation changes. The basic models being explored include – One Central Production Facility, three Production Facilities and upgrading all sites for scratch cooking.

After a presentation to the Board of Education, this Master Planning Document will be available for review the FNS Task Force.

---

Phase II

---

To be determined based on direction provided by the Superintendent and Board of Education.

---

Phase III

---

To be determined based on direction provided by the Superintendent and Board of Education.

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I	X	
Phase II		
Phase III		

**Recommendation #4: Food Display and Marketing**

The FNS Task Force and Jeffco FNS have identified the significant need for focus on marketing of the school meal program to include increased education to parents and students, increased communication, and purposeful placement of healthy options available in the program.

As a department, FNS plans to address this need by engaging with an outside marketing firm (mentioned later in report), utilizing district communications avenues, and implementing increased training to our staff.

---

Phase I

---



---

Phase II

---

Beginning for the 2020-21 school year, FNS will provide increased communications and training to our kitchen teams focused on product display and marketing. The FNS All-Employee meeting and monthly manager meetings provide an opportunity to provide trainings. FNS plans for a training on the Smarter Lunchrooms techniques during the 2020 All Employee meeting and ongoing training at monthly manager meetings that includes the following:

- Smarter Lunchroom Techniques
- Product Display
- Student Sampling
- Signage and Visual Displays

---

Phase III

---

	One-Time	On-Going
--	----------	----------

Phase I		
Phase II	X	X
Phase III		

**Recommendation #5: Food Trucks**

---

Phase I

---



---

Phase II

---



---

Phase III

---

Jeffco FNS understands the possibility for a food truck concept to increase excitement around the school meal program and would welcome the opportunity to pilot this concept if funds became available.

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		
Phase II		
Phase III		X

---

## MENU OPTIONS

---

On the topic of Menu Options, the Task Force identified four subtopics on which to focus its recommendations: Funding, Menu Diversity, A la Carte Offerings, and Communication.

### **1) Funding**

The Task Force is aware that any decisions that impact funding must be approached from a net-neutral position since alternative funding avenues have not been identified to replace existing funds received through reimbursable meals, a la carte sales, or deficits related to unpaid meal charges. Other impacts on revenue streams include, but are not limited to, changes in enrollment and federal policy changes. Therefore, the strategies suggested in this section take advantage of new legislation and the creative thinking of Task Force membership to capitalize on FNS strengths:

**1.1)** Take advantage of recent legislation which provides for an additional \$.05 per reimbursable meal sold when items offered include Colorado Proud products. The district spends more than \$665,000 for fresh fruit and vegetables each year, and the Task Force strongly recommends that FNS capitalize on this new funding stream to provide some financial relief in this area. FNS voices strong support for this initiative and has the personnel resources already in place to manage this new funding mechanism.

**1.2)** Revamp how various school organizations procure snack foods with the goal that all requests for food for school and district related functions be procured from Food and Nutrition Services. These recommendations may provide efficiencies and additional revenue which Food and Nutrition Services could use to fund greater menu diversity:

**1.2.1)** Extend pricing options and ordering logistics to any and all district functions that involve purchased snack food and drinks such as PTA functions, athletic purchases for resale, and third-party afterschool programs. Food and Nutrition Services would provide pricing that includes a small markup percentage to cover their costs, but that ultimately saves money in transportation costs, time and effort, and food purchase costs based on their contracted volume discounts. The Task Force feels that this option is a win-win and could be implemented simply if uniform support is obtained from district and campus leadership.

**1.2.2)** Encourage districtwide Athletics programs to procure all concession-related purchases from Food and Nutrition Services. Although there was conversation about shifting concession sales revenue to Food and Nutrition

Services as a new funding stream, discussion yielded that this might have unintended consequences such as a deficit to athletic fundraising needs. Therefore, a compromise would be to strongly encourage districtwide Athletics programs to procure all concession-related purchases from Food and Nutrition Services. As with **1.2.1**, this recommendation could be a win-win in terms of consolidating transportation costs, time and effort, and benefit both departments as food purchase costs are based on contracted volume discounts.

**1.3)** Increase the use of FNS catering services for campus activities such as school celebrations and PTA/PTO and faculty functions. Revenues could be greatly increased if all catering of school and district related functions were arranged through Food and Nutrition Services.

**1.3.1)** Improve marketing of FNS catering services. Catering services are currently available but with limited communication and marketing of the breadth of services or procedures to utilize the option. FNS catering should be broadly marketed throughout the district with an identifiable phone number, email, and web address.

**1.4)** Utilize Food and Nutrition Services for all afterschool enrichment meal services. This may provide additional federal revenue for reimbursement but also will allow third-party entities to have the snacks necessary to equip children for full participation in afterschool learning and athletic events.

**1.4.1)** Evaluate the feasibility of the Supper Program as a means to provide nutritionally dense offering afterschool at select sites as an additional federal revenue source.

**1.4.2)** Evaluate and report the amount of revenue that could be generated if FNS was permitted to operate all after school snack programs districtwide.

**1.4.3)** Ideally, all requests for food or catering for school and district related functions should be procured through FNS. As in the above point **1.3.1**, access to FNS services should be broadly marketed with an identifiable phone number, email, and web address.

**1.5)** Research additional funding strategies. The Task Force discussed some innovative ideas such as businesses subsidizing campuses, PTA/PTO sponsorships of campuses that wish to restrict the sale of certain items and soliciting companies to donate services for the improvements that the group would like to see. The group felt that although these strategies may be improbable based on business needs to maintain profitability, additional research could be conducted to test the viability of these strategies.

As context for the following two subsections (Menu Diversity and A la Carte), the Task Force recognizes that the district received more than \$9,633,713, in various federal reimbursement dollars for the meal programs operated during the 2018-19 school year. It is improbable that a world exists whereby the district could forego these funds in order to have a carte blanche program to rival private sector competition. However, the Task Force believes that improvements to menu diversity and a la carte offerings can be achieved within current financial constraints.

## **2) Menu Diversity**

Task Force discussion around menu diversity included increasing variety, rotating offerings more seasonally within cycle menus, increasing the degree of consideration of student preferences in menu taste tasting, and reinforced introduction of uncommon offerings to expand the palates of students, with a focus on nutritionally healthy items. As with other areas in menu options, these strategies must be evaluated in terms of cost benefit, student participation, and medically necessary dietary constraints.

From the standpoint of expanding FNS's capacity to create more varied and complex menus, the Task Force supports the concept of a central production facility. A central kitchen could also increase the amount of freshly prepared food items. FNS's ability to offer a variety of fresh, complex, and diverse menu options are paramount to increasing participation. To that end, the Task Force recommends that:

**2.1)** School meals should be appealing to students in order to increase participation. Jeffco's current participation rates of 6.8% for breakfast and 30.75% for lunch demonstrate the potential for increased revenue that could be gained by improving student acceptance of offerings. As such, many of the recommendations for menu diversity are targeted at student acceptance and increased participation, with an emphasis on nutritionally healthy options:

**2.1.1)** The Task Force recognizes that Jeffco's size and diversity as a district is also reflected in the student population. Cultural differences among the population demand shifts to the typical offerings. The increased vegetarian population requires more offerings of non-meat entrees emphasizing healthy options, potentially even in combination with casserole offerings to ensure a nutrient blend to provide nutritionally sound offerings to this student segment. There is a desire to see additional diversification of the menu based on the diverse racial/ethnic makeup in some Jeffco schools.

**2.1.2)** The Task Force suggests that FNS evaluate the use of peanut butter alternatives. The group recognizes the high acceptance of peanut butter as a non-meat option for students. However, this offering must be balanced with the challenges of managing anaphylactic peanut allergies. The group suggests that

the district evaluate the acceptability of some of the peanut butter alternatives, such as Sunbutter, to address this gap in offering.

**2.1.3)** The Task Force suggests increasing the offering of new items, such as quinoa and casserole-type dishes that may be more filling to students but allow multiple meal components to be offered more easily. Examples included stir fry meals and vegetable pasta dishes.

**2.1.4)** The Task Force recommends expanding the variety of items offered seasonally. There may be challenges in this proposal due to procurement practices and cyclical menus developed and certified to meet federal standards. However, the Task Force would let the district determine if there are means by which more variety in similar typed offerings can be incorporated with makeups that may be more simply interchanged to maintain federal standards.

**2.1.5)** The Task Force endorses the expansion of flavored milk offering to students. Although there was a desire to see the fat content for milk options increased, program regulations restrict this practice. Therefore, we recommend the continued offering and possible expansion to other flavors, if made available to meet federal regulations.

**2.2)** Student taste-testing is critical to the acceptance of meals offered. Food and Nutrition Services currently conducts limited student testing for acceptability. The Task Force recommends that the testing structure and evaluation of acceptability be revamped to provide data necessary to meet student preferences in the following ways:

**2.2.1)** Offer taste testing opportunities across all grade/age groups in the district. Testing should be inclusive of new items and currently offered menu items. In instances where acceptability is poor, items should be removed from menus once current inventory is depleted to allow consideration for procurement rules. In instances where new items are highly desired, the department should include such items for pricing determination and cycle menu integration.

**2.2.2)** Consider various means for testing ranging from on campus time to panel convenings to mealtime sampling.

**2.2.3)** Utilize the district chefs on staff to be more engaged with menu/meal testing:

**2.2.3.1)** Chefs should ensure that the standards tested and accepted by students are those served as new items are rolled out in the district to ensure consistency and quality standards.

**2.2.3.2)** Chefs should also be evaluating feedback once new items are offered so that they can utilize the data to adjust any recipes that may benefit from a different spice or flavor profile mix to grow student participation.

**2.2.3.3)** Chefs should collect data on non-acceptable items as indicated by low student participation and determine how to contribute feedback to address cycle menu offerings.

**2.2.4)** Consider student sampling during meal periods. Students may be more likely to eat a meal if they know they will like the product offered. Since current participation rates are low, gradual increases based on sampling may be beneficial to change the perception of "school food." Although this may be difficult due to limited staff availability, there may be campus/parent/PTA volunteers willing to assist with these efforts to improve meal acceptance.

**2.2.5)** Make public the results of tested new and existing items. Publishing this data will allow parents and students to see the deliberate efforts to address preferences and accommodate student desires to the extent federally permitted.

**2.3)** Salad bars are implemented to varying degrees in schools nationwide as a means to provide variety, healthy offerings, and increased fruit and vegetable offerings. Withstanding demographic and cultural differences, salad bars may be integral in increasing the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables and overall school lunch participation. USDA memo on Salad Bars:

Rothstien, Melissa. United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP31-2013os.pdf>

**2.3.1)** The Task Force recommends that Food and Nutrition Services re-evaluate the feasibility of a salad bar program. Jeffco previously implemented a district wide salad bar program under prior leadership that did not yield the data necessary to define why the program was not successful. As such, the Task Force is interested in Food and Nutrition Services re-evaluating the feasibility of a salad bar program, even if on a pilot basis at limited campuses for data collection. The pilot should include campuses with varied demographics and poverty levels

to assess acceptability across the entire student population. The Task Force understands that this effort requires start up equipment and may result in additional food waste but feels that it is imperative to make this decision based on data and potential improvements to offerings with current leadership. Grant opportunities are available to school districts for salad bars through <http://www.saladbars2schools.org/>.

**2.3.2)** The Task Force recommends that Jeffco survey other districts offering salad bars to ascertain challenges, successes, and strategies that may inform the implementation of this initiative for students. Information should include whether salad bars are more utilized in a specific age/grade group, regional makeup, and the variation of items offered on the impact of utilization.

**2.3.3)** The Task Force recommends that all future facilities incorporate the equipment structure necessary to integrate salad bars in all cafeterias. This echoes an earlier recommendation from the Facility Design and Construction section of this report and acknowledges that current facilities do not appear to be adequate to allow the space needed for salad bars.

**2.3.4)** The Task Force recommends that resources be allocated to market fruit and vegetable offerings. The Task Force discussed a common value of increased whole fruit and vegetable offerings, even in instances where this is not accomplished through a salad bar medium. In response, FNS indicated that a variety of whole fruits such as apples, oranges, bananas, carrots, and celery are routinely available. So, there appears to be a gap in communicating to students and parents the availability of fresh and whole fruit and vegetables, even as an a la carte option. The Task Force feels that more emphasis is needed in this area and recommends that resources be allocated to message these offerings and their associated benefits to health and performance, both athletic and academic.

### **3) A la Carte Offerings**

A la carte offerings for students is complex. Food and Nutrition Services relies on the revenue generated from a la carte sales (\$5,332,303) to ensure that the program is self-sufficient. Additionally, parents with busy schedules rely on the availability of a la carte offerings to ensure that students engaged in after school activities have an additional energy boost to sustain them until dinner. The variety of viewpoints reflected in the Task Force is likely representative of the larger community, with opinions ranging from the elimination of a la carte to expanding its offerings and the prominence of healthy a la

carte items. Ultimately, the group agreed that clearer communication about what is available, the cost of the available items, and when a la carte items are available would allow parents to make the best-informed decisions for their respective students and thereby increase revenue.

**3.1)** The Task Force recognizes the need for improved communication and education about a la carte offerings and recommends investing in educating parents and students about this aspect of school lunch in Jeffco. Parents and students seem inadequately informed about a la carte, and this represents a barrier to participation. Ideas for improvement:

**3.1.1)** Graphic visual resources describing a la carte should be prepared and sent home with campus communication periodically, and especially included with new student enrollment information. Clear communication is needed to educate parents on a la carte offerings and the additional costs associated with students selecting inadequate meal components resulting in higher priced meals than district reflected pricing.

**3.1.2)** Principals and campus leadership must support opportunities for education at campus events such as back to school night and PTA/PTO fundraiser events. These events can be opportunities to deposit money on school accounts, but they also allow cafeteria staff to discuss how to establish account limits restricting purchases, utilization of the School Cafe website to view historical activity on purchases, and menu information. Lunch limit forms should be available in both hard copy and online to make it convenient for parents to set restrictions and have them in place in advance of purchases that are undesired by parents.

**3.1.3)** Parents must be given the opportunity to opt-out of a la carte, non-meal, and various snack options for their students. This recommendation is based on district computer systems for cafeterias and is in line with practices nationwide. With campus administrative support, the opportunity to opt-outs should be communicated frequently via campus folders, email, and district portal/website access.

**3.1.3.1)** Parents must be given the tools to modify restrictions, at least annually, to ensure that their preferences for their children are followed.

**3.1.3.2)** Parents are responsible for communicating their preferences with their students. Parents should inform students to select the required number of components to ensure that the district published reimbursable rate is charged.

**3.1.3.3)** Cafeteria staff must be trained on the opt-out system so that they can reinforce the messaging.

**3.2)** The Task Force recommends reconsideration of the placement of a la carte snack items and the time they are offered. This recommendation expands upon a number of points found in section 1 of this report (Dining Environments and Facilities).

**3.2.1)** The Task Force recommends that the district address the time permitted for student meal times as proposed in the Dining Environment section of this report. Instituting a standard minimum lunch period would permit adequate time for students to be served and consume meals fully.

**3.2.2)** The Task Force voiced interest in having a la carte items put out only after all students have accessed the lines for meals if 30-minute lunch periods are implemented. Without this change, it will be impossible for nutrition services to manage the logistics necessary to roll snack items in and out of the kitchen area and continue to batch cook food so that students have fresh and hot meals.

**3.2.3)** The Task Force recommends that snack and a la carte offerings be repositioned so that the healthier options, including fresh fruit, are at eye level for students and that less healthy options be placed lower on the snack cart to encourage healthy snack consumption. This recommendation echoes point **4.1** under Food Display in the previous section, Dining Environments and Facilities.

**3.2.3.1)** The Task Force considered a recommendation to modify cart offerings between breakfast and lunch. However, since cafeterias operate with limited staff, it seems more advantageous to students that staff time be spent in improving the meal offerings. Since there may not be time for such modifications between breakfast and lunch, consistently stocking carts with healthier items at eye level is a good compromise to address concerns.

**3.3)** The Task Force recommends expanding the selection of items available for purchase via a la carte, particularly those regarded as healthier options. FNS makes a variety of choices available through a la carte, though many are seen as less healthy than some of the new products on the market.

**3.3.1)** FNS offers a number of Task Force recommended items such as whole-grain baked breads, boiled eggs, baby carrots, and fresh fruit. FNS should consider expanding a la carte offering to include trail mix (with and without nuts due to potential allergies) and additional dried fruit options (e.g. apple chips,

mangos). Additional emphasis should be provided to market the availability of these healthier snack options to students through product placement and promotional material.

**3.3.1.1)** Increase the availability of whole-grain loaf bread varieties (banana, blueberry, etc.) served sliced at campuses to increase student appeal and demonstrate the freshness of offerings. If FNS were to have a Central Production Kitchen, these breakfast-type quick breads could be baked, packaged, and distributed by FNS in-house instead of purchased products that contain additional preservatives and limit variety.

**3.3.2)** Ensure that fresh whole fruit items are available for purchase a la carte on snack carts and displayed prominently at eye level to encourage purchase.

**3.3.3)** Evaluate whether there are locally produced items that can be sold as a la carte within the financial parameter of FNS. In instances where these products are affordable and accepted by students, make available for purchase.

The Task Force recognizes that all new a la carte snack offerings must comply with the Smart Snacks federal regulations and should be run through the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's snack calculator for compliance before testing or student consideration begins:

*Smart Snacks Product Calculator.* Alliance for a Healthier Generation, 8 Aug. 2019, <https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/calculator/>

#### **4) Communication**

Communication is the most essential function for changing both the perception and utilization of school meal programs in Jeffco. Through the work group meetings and educational sessions, the Task Force realized that much of our perception was based on misinformation and the lack of clear communication from the district on the processes that drive decisions impacting the food available to students for meals and a la carte purchases.

It will be impossible to actualize the full benefit of this Task Force's recommendations without an investment in a culture of clear communication. Funding is needed, at least an initial investment, to provide the infrastructure for ongoing education and communication on meal practices. As improved marketing and communication increases participation it also then increases revenue for FNS, therefore it is possible that successful marketing could ultimately cover its own costs.

This need for improved marketing and communication is vast and urgent and should be a priority for the district whether accomplished through a contractor or existing resources. Food and Nutrition Services is expected to operate as a self-sustaining entity within the school district. Therefore, the district should commit resources to marketing the program as the business that it is required to be.

**4.1)** The Task Force recommends increasing the scope of communication around Food and Nutrition Services practices to include the following examples derived from recommendations within this section of the report:

**4.1.1)** Graphic/visual information on what constitutes a meal at the published district rate.

**4.1.2)** Graphic/visual representation of a la carte offerings and their associated pricing.

**4.1.3)** Marketing and graphic representations of healthier food choices for student selection.

**4.1.4)** Marketing of taste testing results and student preferences and menu development at least annually but more frequently as available.

**4.1.5)** Marketing of the nutritional standards of meals and educational material on food components.

**4.1.6)** Development of videos that educate parents and students on a variety of FNS-related topics like menu items, pricing, a la carte offerings, sustainability, share tables, and opportunities to be involved in taste-testing.

**4.1.7)** Increase marketing and messaging around parental controls to restrict or permit student purchases and access purchase history online.

**4.1.8)** Developing a comprehensive campaign about catering services available through Food and Nutrition Services.

**4.2)** The Task Force recommends instituting a collaborative approach to market school meals and educate parents and students. Participation could increase through the following initiatives:

**4.2.1)** Encourage school administrators to engage FNS in opportunities to share information, i.e. new school year orientation events, campus folders, email.

**4.2.2)** Encourage the use of School Cafe online resources. Campuses should be equipped to direct parents to School Cafe irrespective of cafeteria staff to provide uniform messaging and facilitate participation by better serving parents.

**4.2.3)** Market and provide information about FNS catering services and options for PTA/PTO groups to utilize with messaging around the convenience and simplicity of the process (realizing the importance of convenience, simplicity, and responsiveness in how this process is carried out in real time).

**4.2.4)** Market FNS purchasing options to the YMCA, Athletics, and others offering services that involve food that can be procured from Food and Nutrition Services in lieu of grocery store runs at higher costs.

**4.2.5)** Market FNS information in Chalk Talk in addition to School Cafe and other means to reinforce the importance to access information about school meals.

**4.2.6)** Utilize the district's social media presence and resources to promote the positive aspects of Food and Nutrition Services and the healthy components of the meals served.

**4.3)** The Task Force recommends that FNS develop a mechanism to promote or market healthier menu offerings. Participation could be increased if parents and students felt that offerings were healthy or felt more confident about how menus fit their dietary restrictions. This could be accomplished by various means:

**4.3.1)** Identifying healthier options with symbols that students can easily recognize. For example: Green = good; Yellow = moderation; and Red = in smaller amounts. Similar strategies to this "Go, No, Whoa" philosophy already exist in the marketplace but will require an initial financial investment to implement.

**4.3.2)** Making items which fit within various dietary restrictions more easily identifiable on district provided menu information. Food and Nutrition Services staff demonstrated that this is currently a focus, and the Task Force agrees that the expansion of food content marketing and dietary restriction clarifications will only enhance the perception of the offerings made in the meal programs.

## District Response: Menu Options

The implementation plan below articulates the order in which recommendations from the Task Force will be considered and is contingent on available resources. The implementation plan is articulated in three phases:

- Phase I (Immediate) - These are recommendations that the district already has underway in some form or will consider implementing within the next six months.
- Phase II (Short Term) - These are recommendations that the district will consider implementing within the next six months to two years.
- Phase III (Long Term) - These are recommendations that the district will consider implementing in the next two years and beyond.

The use of matrices (example below) is intended to summarize the phase in which recommendations are considered. The use of the matrices is for recommendations that require additional resources. The matrix distinguishes between resources that would be one-time expenditures and those that would require an on-going resource commitment. Recommendations that do not require resources may not be reflected in the matrices, but rather explained in the response from district staff.

Example:

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II	X	X
Phase III		

(In the above example, Jeffco Public Schools will consider the recommendations referenced in Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I, the implementation of the recommendations would require an on-going commitment of resources. In Phase II there are recommendations that will be considered that would require an allocation of one-time resources and on-going resources.)

## **Recommendation #1: Funding**

---

### Phase I

---

Food and Nutrition Services plans to explore a variety of options available to increase the amount of local products sourced for service in our schools and incorporate farm to table concepts into our program. These actions include the following over the next 2-5 years.

- Incorporate local products and farm to table education (example a harvest of month program) into the Salad Bar feasibility study mentioned earlier.
  - Partner with local allied agencies to implement and evaluate farm to table and local procurement efforts.
  - Seek funding to support local food procurement (such as the USDA Farm to School Grant or other supportive funds) in future years.
- 

### Phase II

---

The district understands the need to better market programs that may increase funding to the non-profit foodservice fund. Through established communications channels, FNS will market the ability for groups to purchase food through our department for the following programs and events:

- Snacks for district-sponsored functions
  - Food for Athletics and Activities Concessions
  - Afterschool Snack Programs
  - Catering Service for district functions
- 

### Phase III

---

Food and Nutrition Services plans to explore a variety of options available to increase the amount of local products sourced for service in our schools and incorporate farm to table concepts into our program. These actions include the following over the next 2-5 years.

- Incorporate local products and farm to table education (example a harvest of month program) into the Salad Bar feasibility study mentioned earlier.
- Partner with local allied agencies to implement and evaluate farm to table and local procurement efforts.
- Seek funding to support local food procurement (such as the USDA Farm to School Grant or other supportive funds) in future years.

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I	X	X
Phase II		X
Phase III		

**Recommendation #2: Menu Diversity**

The district recognizes the wide range of diversity that exists among our student population and with that comes a wide spectrum of student tastes. In addition, FNS recognizes that there is potential for increased participation in the school meal program. The FNS Task Force has recommended that participation may be increased with an expansion of both our options available to students and the student input received when making menu decisions. The steps below aim to address a general expansion of menu diversity and a focus on the student input into this expansion.

---

Phase 1

---

FNS plans to develop and implement a more comprehensive avenue for student input into menu decisions. A Focus Kitchen concept that will be utilized to test new recipes, sample new products, provide input on marketing strategies for future expansion and test small equipment will be the first step. By fully developing this concept, FNS will be able to develop a more consistent method for collecting data and feedback from both our students and kitchen teams. This project will provide student testing survey data and possible student focus groups regarding the school meal program.

As products and recipes are tested, FNS will place an overall focus on expanded diversity in products and will test the following in particular:

- Expanded grain options
- Vegetarian and Vegan options
- Peanut Alternatives such as SunButter
- Seasonal options
- Entrée Salads
- Ethnic cuisine
- Expanded milk options (including 1% flavored options)

---

Phase II

---

FNS plans to utilize the School Café system to more consistently collect student and parent menu feedback. Using this platform, we believe we will be able to collect district-wide feedback regarding the menu including:

- Favorite Menu Items
- Least favorite items
- Items students would like to see on menu
- Why students do or do not eat school lunch
- Etc.

---

Phase III

---

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I	X	X
Phase II		X
Phase III		

**Recommendation #3: A la Carte Offerings**

The FNS Task Force makes the following general recommendations surrounding a la carte options:

- Increased communications surrounding nutrition standards, pricing, and ability to opt-out of the a la carte program
- Placement of healthiest a la carte items at eye-level
- Evaluation of additional items that are provide more nutrient value and/or are perceived as healthier items.

---

### Phase I

---

Communications surrounding the a la carte program will be addressed in the overall effort to improve the communications and marketing of the school meal program (detailed in the District Response to Recommendation #4). The a la carte specific efforts will address the following:

- Nutrition Standards and requirements of a la carte options
- Ability to opt out of the a la carte program
- Pricing of a la carte options
- Nutritional content of all available a la carte items
- Availability of fruit and vegetable items

FNS will continue to evaluate a la carte product offerings to provide a wide variety of options that appeal to students. The products will be evaluated based on cost, student appeal, nutrition standards and ability to efficiently purchase.

---

### Phase II

---

Beginning for the 2020-21 school year, FNS will provide increased communications and training to our kitchen teams focused on product display and marketing. The FNS All-Employee meeting and monthly manager meetings provide an opportunity to provide trainings. FNS plans for a training on the Smarter Lunchrooms techniques during the 2020 All Employee meeting and ongoing training at monthly manager meetings that includes the following:

- Smarter Lunchroom Techniques
- Product Display
- Student Sampling

---

### Phase III

---

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II		X
Phase III		

#### **Recommendation #4: Communication**

Jeffco FNS recognizes the need for improved marketing of the school meal program and increasing the avenues for which information about the program can be accessed. This need was consistently discussed in FNS Task Force conversations and is therefore identified multiple times in this report. To address this need, FNS plans to take the following steps (addressed in Phase I and II) to ensure that marketing and communication are prioritized over the next 2 years.

The topics to be addressed in these marketing, communications and training efforts will include the following:

- Nutrition Standards in school meals (reimbursable meals and a la carte)
- Availability of the Free and Reduced-Priced Meal Program
- Features of School Café for managing school meal accounts
- Availability of School Café App
- Online menu availability
- Ability to opt-out of a la carte purchase using document or School Cafe
- Availability of fruit and vegetable options for a la carte purchase
- Catering and snack purchase services
- Consistent product placement to highlight availability of healthy options
- 'What Makes a Meal' - graphic and written communications of meal components
- Pricing of meals and a la carte offerings
- New Menu Items
- Availability of locally produced menu items when offered
- Student sampling and taste-testing opportunities

---

#### Phase 1

---

The most immediate steps being taken to improve the marketing of the school meal program are as follows:

- Engage with an outside firm for ongoing contracted marketing services.
- Provide detailed and comprehensive information to families on the Jeffco FNS public facing website
- Utilize district communication channels (Chalk Talk, Leadership News, Jeffco Minute, Social Media, school newsletters, orientation events) at strategic times throughout school year to highlight the school meal program.

---

### Phase II

---

Over the next two years (beginning with 2020-21 school year), the following priorities will be implemented to ensure improved marketing of the school meal program:

- Provide trainings to our school kitchen teams focused on marketing (including Smarter Lunchrooms and student sampling).
- Develop consistent method for collecting student input and making this input public.
- Market the availability of both catering and snack purchase services through Jeffco FNS

---

### Phase III

---

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II		X
Phase III		

---

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

---

The Task Force is committed to ensuring Jeffco Public Schools is doing all it can to benefit the environment. As environmental concerns are one barrier to participation in the school lunch program, better aligning FNS practices with sustainable environmental concerns will increase participation. The Task Force commends Food and Nutrition Services on the sustainable practices they have already implemented, as well as those they have planned and are continuously rolling out.

Task Force recommendations on the topic of Environmental Impact & Sustainability focus on a few key areas: Food Waste, Replacing Single-Use Items with Reusable Materials, the Sustainable Practices of Composting/Recycling and Farm-to-Table, and the importance of Communication and Education to making these efforts a success.

## **1) Food Waste**

Food waste is a problem both economically and environmentally for most every entity in the food service industry, and Jeffco's Food and Nutrition Services is no exception. Community concerns about waste represent one barrier to school lunch participation. Jeffco parents frequently mention food waste as topic of concern in terms of our collective environmental responsibility, and also in regard to how we teach our students to steward resources. The Task Force has heard from FNS about measures they are currently taking to reduce food waste, and are eager to expand those efforts through the following suggestions:

**1.1)** Increase school participation in Share Tables. A Share Table is a place for students to put surplus unopened food/drinks, and a place for other students to get additional helpings of food/drinks at no cost. By implementing Share Tables, food that might otherwise be thrown away has the opportunity to be put to good use. The Task Force views the Share Table and its expansion as a practical, very low- to no-cost solution for reducing food waste.

USDA memo on Share Tables: Kline, Angela. USDA, [https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP41\\_CACFP13\\_SFSP15\\_2016os.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP41_CACFP13_SFSP15_2016os.pdf)

**1.1.1)** Clearly communicate with cafeteria staff, families, and students about the availability of the Share Table and its regulations. The Task Force suggests sending photos of allowable foods for the Share Table out to parents in a separate email in September describing the Share Table and outlining its benefits.

**1.1.2)** Work with the Jefferson County Public Health Department to expand what is currently allowed at Share Tables. The Task Force suggests FNS converse with the Jefferson County Public Health Department to discuss share tables from the perspective of food waste and hungry kids.

**1.1.3)** Explore the possibility of allowing cold foods to be included in the Share Table and what supplies would be required in order to make this possible.

**1.2)** Explore food rescue as one way to reduce food waste in cafeterias. Food rescue is the practice of collecting and redistributing still-edible food that would otherwise go to waste. The Task Force recognizes that prepared hot or cold food may be the most complicated ones to save but would like to see options explored. There are many different options for food rescue, with varying coordination and labor requirements. Some ideas generated by the group:

**1.2.1)** FNS reports that they are currently working directly with Food Bank of the Rockies to connect resources. This Task Force recommends that that partnership extend into individual school cafeterias to donate unused ingredients to Food Bank of the Rockies whenever possible.

**1.2.2)** Packaging foods to send with students who are on Free or Reduced Lunch. There is a school district in Indiana piloting a program that seals up unserved meals to send home to students who may be in need over the weekends.

**1.2.3)** There is an organization at Children's Hospital freezing food and delivering it to local shelters.

**1.2.4)** Copia is an organization that picks up prepared food for immediate delivery on refrigerated trucks. Organizations can set up a free account with them and message through their app when food is ready to be picked up.

**1.3)** Evaluate current food waste practices. The Task Force commends FNS for their efforts to partner with "We Don't Waste" and Food Bank of the Rockies to reduce the volume of food wasted from the central warehouse. The Task Force recommends an evaluation of current practices to ensure that the maximum efforts are being put forth.

**1.4)** Communicate about FNS food waste reduction efforts. Communicating with Jeffco families about this topic may encourage a more positive view of FNS. This positive view may increase participation in the school lunch program and support of FNS by Jeffco families.

## **2) Replacing Single-Use Serving Materials with More Sustainable Choices**

This Task Force sees that even though single-use materials serve very clear purposes in food service, they are an ongoing cost for FNS, harmful for the environment, and a barrier to participation. Ultimately, the goal should be to decrease their use or eliminate them entirely. Students have organized to demand changes to the environmental impact of their lunch, and parent groups have also formed throughout Jeffco to press for improvements in sustainability.

**2.1)** The Task Force recommends discontinuing the use of Styrofoam trays, plastic containers that cannot be composted or recycled, and plastic utensils as soon as possible.

**2.1.1)** Jeffco FNS is currently in the process of replacing Styrofoam trays with compostable ones. The Task Force commends this effort entirely and recommends that this move be accompanied by the addition of an industrial/commercial composting program in Jeffco cafeterias using

compostable trays, since that is the best use of compostable materials (see section 3, below for Task Force recommendations on composting).

**2.1.2)** The Task Force recommends communicating with families and students about the move towards compostable trays as this will improve the public's view of FNS and reduce this barrier to participation.

**2.2)** The Task Force ultimately recommends stainless steel trays and utensils as the best environmental choice for schools whose equipment and numbers allow for the labor hours to make it feasible. Reusable items are less taxing on the environment than single-use items, regardless of if they are compostable or recyclable.

**2.2.1)** FNS has stated that around 140-150 of Jeffco schools are equipped with dishwashers. The Task Force recommends that FNS identify those schools whose labor ratios and equipment would support reusable trays and begin implementing reusable trays at those locations.

**2.2.2)** FNS has stated that many schools have plastic reusable trays available that are not currently in use. The Task Force recommends that these plastic trays be used in schools that have the labor available for dishwashing in the interim time until stainless steel trays can be obtained.

**2.2.3)** Similar to **2.1.2**, the Task Force recommends communicating with Jeffco families and students about any move toward reusable trays as this will improve the public's view of FNS and reduce this barrier to participation.

**2.3)** The Task Force sees single-use bottled water as a concern environmentally. The group recommends that schools make water bottle/cup filling stations clearly visible and attractive for students. Demonstrating to students how to use the filling stations during the first few weeks of school may be beneficial. The Task Force understands that water bottle filling-station style drinking fountains are becoming a standard installation in new Jeffco schools and that is commended.

The Task Force ultimately wants to drive participation because that drives revenue which can then be spent on more sustainable practices. Providing options in the cafeteria that support the environmental messages Jeffco promotes in the classroom and as an institution will make school lunch more positive overall, meet community demand, and thereby drive participation.

### **3) Sustainable Practices - Composting & Recycling**

The Task Force sees sustainable practices as a high priority for Jeffco as a whole as well as FNS. Many sustainable practices that the Task Force recommends implementing ultimately fall under the jurisdiction of another department, such as facilities. Regardless of purview, this Task Force supports efforts to move towards solar energy, filtering and

reusing gray water whenever possible, transitioning to LED lighting, and making recycling and composting accessible via the following recommendations:

**3.1)** The Task Force recommends employing a third-party industrial/commercial composting service to pick up compostable materials, as is the practice of our neighboring school districts.

**3.1.1)** If Jeffco is charged for trash service by number of pickups and size of container, both of those costs could potentially go down if items are diverted to recycling and/or composting. Decreasing the amount of trash being picked up might then create more budgetary space to cover the cost of composting.

**3.2)** The Task Force recommends that Jeffco Public Schools employ a Sustainability Coordinator, as is the practice of our neighboring school districts.

**3.2.1)** The Task Force recommends that Jeffco Public Schools and the FNS department determine if there is anyone already on staff who could take on this role. If not, explore the costs and benefits of employing a Sustainability Coordinator for the school district.

**3.2.2)** The Task Force envisions the Sustainability Coordinator creating educational materials and coordinating the training of students, teachers, and kitchen and custodial staff on how to dispose of compostable materials and foods correctly.

**3.3)** The Task Force recommends that each participating school form a “Green Team” or “Sustainability Club” from student and parent volunteers to support the successful implementation of composting.

**3.4)** The Task Force recommends that individual schools request a recycling/composting “champion” from the community to teach students about the importance of these practices and to demonstrate accessibility in their school.

**3.5)** The Task Force recommends ensuring that every school has sufficient recycling and composting bins and receptacles to encourage high participation.

**3.6)** As recycling and composting are of special interest for many Jeffco families, the Task Force recommends raising funds from the community for this specific goal of purchasing recycling and composting receptacles.

**3.7)** As an additional fundraising measure, the Task Force recommends that the school district include in Jeffco Connect school fees an option for parents to make a donation toward a set price, one-time fee FNS project that supports the goal of increasing school lunch participation through improved sustainability.

#### **4) Sustainable Practices - Farm to Table**

Many Jeffco families are interested in increasing the amount of local produce and proteins that are used to prepare school lunches. The Task Force sees the Central Production Kitchen proposal as the best solution for this practice. With the Central Production Kitchen, FNS could work directly with farmers to plan for upcoming planting and harvest seasons to meet the needs of FNS. The Task Force recognizes Jefferson County Public Health Food Policy Council as a good partner as FNS moves towards purchasing more local products.

## **5) Community Education/Communication**

Improving communication with Jeffco families has been a theme through all sections of this report. As part of the move towards more sustainable practices, the Task Force recommends that FNS implement the following community education efforts:

**5.1)** The Task Force recommends finding in-person opportunities to discuss FNS practices and concepts of sustainability when possible in order to increase the effectiveness of communication. While email communication is recognized as the most cost efficient and timely, it may not be the most effective way of communicating with Jeffco families.

**5.2)** The Task Force recommends the following practices to improve community education surrounding sustainable practices:

**5.2.1)** Monthly sustainability themes with practical ways Jeffco students can participate at school and home.

**5.2.2)** Bi-annual community nights hosted by schools to introduce the upcoming monthly themes and communicate sustainable district practices.

**5.2.3)** Partner with school administrators to participate in “round-up”-type events (i.e. Pre-K to Kindergarten, 5th grade to middle school, and 8th grade to high school). An FNS presence at these events could be used to reinforce FNS values and communicate recent updates to the program.

**5.2.4)** Making information on current and new district practices available online for Jeffco families via Chalk Talk. Especially as improvements are made, families whose participation has hinged on environmental concerns will need to be made aware of how FNS has improved the school lunch program in order to start or resume participation.

### **“Star” Rating System**

The Task Force suggests the implementation of a “star” rating system to encourage campuses to adopt sustainable practices, and to recognize schools which are outstanding in their environmental stewardship. Creating a set of standards for schools

to meet in order to rank highly on a “star” based system supports goals for sustainable lunchrooms and may increase participation by families who see environmental concerns as a barrier to school lunch participation.

For meeting two standards, a school could earn a Bronze Star rating; for meeting four, a Silver Star; for meeting six goals, they would earn Gold Star; and for meeting all 8 standards, a school would hold a Platinum Star rating. Standards by which schools could be ranked on the “star” system would include:

- Has a Share Table available at each lunch period
- Has recycling and/or composting available for students in the cafeteria with clear communication posted
- Has a school “*Green Team*” or “*Sustainability Club*” established from the parent body who organizes recycling/composting education efforts for their school and aids students and staff with proper waste practices
- Has practices in place to reduce waste and/or donate already prepared cafeteria foods
- Has regular communication with their families about sustainable FNS practices
- Uses reusable cafeteria materials (ideally stainless-steel trays and silverware) OR uses sustainably sourced materials (compostable)
- Has 30-minute lunches for all grades
- Has fresh and healthy options accessible and attractively displayed for A La Carte purchases

The Task Force foresees the Star Rating System as evidence the district may find useful in applying for grants and outside funding to further support environmental stewardship and sustainability.

## District Response: Environmental Impact and Sustainability

The implementation plan below articulates the order in which recommendations from the Task Force will be considered and is contingent on available resources.

The implementation plan is articulated in three phases:

- Phase I (Immediate) - These are recommendations that the district already has underway in some form or will consider implementing within the next six months.
- Phase II (Short Term) - These are recommendations that the district will consider implementing within the next six months to two years.
- Phase III (Long Term) - These are recommendations that the district will consider implementing in the next two years and beyond.

The use of matrices (example below) is intended to summarize the phase in which recommendations are considered. The use of the matrices is for recommendations that require additional resources. The matrix distinguishes between resources that would be one-time expenditures and those that would require an on-going resource commitment. Recommendations that do not require resources may not be reflected in the matrices, but rather explained in the response from district staff.

Example:

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II	X	X
Phase III		

(In the above example, Jeffco Public Schools will consider the recommendations referenced in Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I, the implementation of the recommendations would require an on-going commitment of resources. In Phase II there are recommendations that will be considered that would require an allocation of one-time resources and on-going resources.)

## **Recommendation #1: Food Waste**

---

### Phase I

---

- Jeffco FNS will continue to communicate to Kitchen Managers and School Principals the availability of Share Tables in their schools. FNS provides a Standard Operating Procedure and Marketing Materials for this program.
- FNS will continue to prioritize minimizing food waste in production and in our service model to our students. The following are practices within Jeffco kitchens to minimize food waste:
  - Offer vs. Serve (For example, a student must only take 3-5 of the offered meal components as long as one is a fruit or vegetable and students are not required to take milk if they don't choose.)
  - Production Planning and Ordering Software
- FNS will continue to work with community organizations to donate products as we are able to from the Central Warehouse with a focus on improving our process for donating fresh produce from the Central Warehouse and from school sites prior to school breaks.

---

### Phase II

---

---

### Phase III

---

While we understand the concept of food rescue programs, FNS prioritizes the prevention of food waste as noted above whenever possible. In addition, it is essential that FNS have the staff needed, storage space necessary, and the ability to keep rescued food safe before undertaking a more comprehensive, post-consumer food rescue program. At this time, we believe it is best to focus upon where we believe we are able to have the most impact (prevention of food waste) while utilizing the resources we have.

	One-Time	On-Going
--	----------	----------

Phase I		X
Phase II		
Phase III		

**Recommendation #2: Single-Use Materials**

Jeffco recognizes that single-use materials used in the Food and Nutrition Services operation is a concern of the community. While we understand this concern, FNS must consider food safety regulations, menu pattern requirements, cost and labor availability when considering the supplies used.

The FNS Task Force has made a recommendation to transition to washable, Stainless Steel lunch trays. Please note the following regarding this recommendation.

At the current time, approximately 15 elementary schools utilize washable trays in some or all grades. FNS plans to continue to work with schools wishing to use washable trays as they are able. This decision is made in partnership with the school administration, the Kitchen Manager, and the FNS Supervisor. When assessing whether a school is able to implement washable trays the following is considered:

- Availability of trays
- Labor and time availability in the kitchen
- Equipment necessary to wash trays

While we recognize that moving to a washable tray model is desired by this task force and the option recommended is a stainless-steel option, please note that FNS will make the product decision if this transition were to be made in the future. The FNS department must adhere to established procurement guidelines, must test the proposed products and come to decision based upon cost, availability, product quality, labor availability, and equipment needed.

---

Phase 1

---

To address one of our highest volume products, FNS moved away from Styrofoam, disposable trays for the 2019-20 school year as a first step for altering the single-use supplies used in the operation. This will be a significant cost investment as will transitioning the other supplies used in the operation. FNS plans to continue to examine ways for decreasing the use of single-use containers while also ensuring that food is served in a method that is safe and cost effective.

Phase II

Phase III

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I		X
Phase II		
Phase III		

**Recommendation #3: Composting and Recycling**

Composting remains difficult due to demands on resources. In order for composting to be effective food waste must be separated into what can be composted and what cannot. The personnel necessary to do the sorting currently do not exist. When the issue of composting has been raised, usually at community gardens, the district has not supported it. Primarily due to the pests composting attracts. There is not a central repository to handle district compostable material, and attempting it at individual sites could very quickly overwhelm the ability to compost. There may be a slight financial benefit to composting in that it reduces waste material that would otherwise end up as trash. The compost has limited marketability in small quantities.

The district currently has a recycle program. The program is single stream which means all recyclables are processed together. This is a more efficient method for the recycle company but the material to be recycled must be free of any food waste or the entire batch is considered contaminated and not suitable for recycle. Eliminating single serve disposables removes one potential source of contamination. Sorting of the materials are still required to assure that food products or potentially contaminating waste is not among the recycle material. The effectiveness of the program is very dependent on school participation. Without this commitment additional personnel will be required. At this time, there is no financial benefit to a recycle program, removing recyclable waste is the same cost as non-recyclable material.

---

### Phase I

---

Determine the cost benefit of composting / recycling vs. the acquisition of personnel necessary to support both programs.

---

### Phase II

---

If it is determined that composting programs are beneficial and at least cost neutral, decide which of the two, a centralized or decentralized approach, is best. A compost program would need to rely on volunteer labor, to prepare and process material. A market for the end product would have to be defined. The current recycle program does not provide a financial return to the district. Increasing personnel may increase the amount of recycle material but will not make the program viable since the vendor charges the same to process recyclables as it does waste.

---

### Phase III

---

If implemented there should periodic review of both programs to determine continued viability.

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I	X	
Phase II	X	X
Phase III		X

### **Recommendation #4: Farm to Table**

---

#### Phase I

---

Food and Nutrition Services plans to explore a variety of options available to increase the amount of local products sourced for service in our schools and incorporate farm to table concepts into our program. These actions include the following over the next 2-5 years.

- Incorporate local products and farm to table education (example a harvest of month program) into the Salad Bar feasibility study mentioned earlier.
- Partner with local allied agencies to implement and evaluate farm to table and local procurement efforts.
- Seek funding to support local food procurement (such as the USDA Farm to School Grant or other supportive funds) in future years.

---

Phase II

---



---

Phase III

---

If the Central Production Facility is approved and ultimately built as the best solution for providing increased scratch cooking to our schools, focus will be placed upon local foods procurement and farm-to-table initiatives.

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I	X	X
Phase II		
Phase III		X

**Recommendation #5: Community Education/Communication**

A proposal and business plan has been presented to the Chief Operating Officer to add a Sustainability Department to the Facilities group. A Sustainability Department will assist other departments throughout the district find sustainable solutions that consider economy, society, and environment through the performance of life cycle cost analysis, engineering analysis, and knowledge of current policies so that these departments do not have to undertake these analyses to provide efficient services. The department would incorporate building commissioning, energy management, some environmental and construction related programs that currently exist and would benefit from consolidation.

---

Phase I

---

Approve the proposal and business plan to consolidate personnel and resources from existing groups in Facilities. Hire a director, funded in part by General Fund and Capital since the position will cross into both funding sources.

---

Phase II

---

Refine and implement the business plan for the department, begin developing messaging working with Communications.

Provide behavioral training to minimize waste of district resources, advocate and educate departments and employees on sustainable practices, participate in curriculum development with educators, and apply for grants and rebates.

---

Phase III

---

The funding proposed assumes that 5 employees will be brought on over a three-year period. The new department will absorb the costs associated with the existing Coordinating Engineer and Energy Manager positions and budgets.

The Sustainability Department will prepare studies for operational savings and cost avoidance, conduct pilot programs for efficient equipment, implement resource conservation programs and behavioral training, and support sustainability curriculum while also promoting social and environmental benefits across the district. It will also provide consistent messaging to the public regarding district sustainability positions.

	One-Time	On-Going
Phase I	X	

Phase II		X
Phase III		X

---

## CONCLUSION

---

The Task Force believes that the goal of increased participation in the school lunch program is addressed through its recommendations in the areas of Dining Environment, Menu, and Sustainability. In each section, Task Force recommendations aim to remove barriers to participation and improve the program's perception through effective communication.

Communication is fundamental for changing the perception and utilization of school meal programs in Jeffco. Participation in the school lunch program will increase through better communication with families. Especially as changes are implemented, families whose participation has hinged on any of the barriers outlined in our report will need to be made aware of how FNS has improved the school lunch program in order to begin or resume participation.

Related to the gaps in communication, our recommendations also highlighted many opportunities for increased participation through improved and effective marketing. The Task Force is unanimous in its feeling that Food and Nutrition Services would greatly benefit from the addition of a dedicated food marketing professional. FNS is expected to operate as a self-sustaining entity within the school district, and therefore the district should commit resources to marketing the program as the business that it is required to be. As improved marketing and communication increase participation they also then increase revenue for FNS. In this way, it is possible that successful marketing could cover its own costs.

The addition of a dedicated food marketing specialist will also support FNS's efforts in hiring. Hiring challenges were a recurring theme in FNS's dialog with this Task Force. As we heard in each month of the "learning tour," staffing issues were at the core of compromises to food quality, menu diversity, dining environment, efficiency, and sustainability. While our group does not have specific recommendations to make regarding the hiring of personnel at each food service location, the addition of a marketing professional dedicated to the district's FNS office would free up FNS staff to

focus on hiring. Helping Food and Nutrition Services overcome their staffing challenges paves the way for many of the improvements and recommendations outlined in this report.

External communication to families is important, but the Task Force also realized that FNS's communication within schools must be strengthened. Internally, school and PTA decision makers should think of FNS first whenever food is a topic of discussion. Making FNS the go-to source for all campus food, snack, and catering needs would not only increase revenue for FNS, it would also strengthen the bond between the department and the schools. When FNS can better partner with principals and school staff, those improved lines of communication could be used to inform families, facilitate an FNS presence at back-to-school nights, highlight departmental improvements, and increase visibility of FNS job opportunities.

The recommendations presented in this report are based on community input and follow months of education on the many hurdles and variables that FNS must consider each day. Task Force recommendations capitalize on FNS strengths and envision the potential for Jeffco to increase quality of foods offered in pleasant and efficient dining environments under sustainable practices. As a group, our goal was to offer direction to FNS so that community priorities guide resource allotment. Increased participation is a goal shared by both FNS and this Task Force. Ultimately, increases in school lunch participation drive revenue which could be spent on the recommendations made in this report be they in the arena of Marketing/Communication, Dining Environments, Menu Options, or Sustainable Practices.