

CAFETERIA MAN

FIGHTING
FOR HEALTHIER
SCHOOL FOOD

A DOCUMENTARY FILM
FEATURING VISIONARY CHEF
TONY GERACI



SCHOOL FOOD Viewer Action Guide



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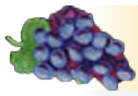
www.CafeteriaMan.com



www.specialtystudios.com



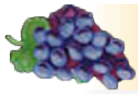
www.videoproject.com



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to share tools and steps that parents and concerned community members can take to play a role in transforming the school food culture where they live. School food culture refers not only to what's being served in the cafeteria, but how food is perceived in schools. To what extent are healthy foods promoted—in the lunchroom, the classroom, at snack time, and during sporting events?

A positive school food culture makes the connection between proper nutrition and improved learning, encourages healthy eating, and reinforces the notion that good eating habits contribute to improved health overall. Given that every school and school district is unique—with their own opportunities and challenges—this guide is not meant to be prescriptive; rather it includes experiences and lessons that can be adapted or used to inform school food reform efforts in diverse communities.



INTRODUCTION

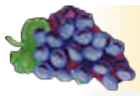
Cafeteria Man tells the inspiring story of Tony Geraci's efforts to transform an urban school food system that fell short of meeting student's needs. But as viewers quickly learn, this is far from a one-man job. ***Cafeteria Man*** shows how members of a school community—students, teachers, parents, and concerned citizens—can impact how food service departments operate and the quality of meals served.

We hope that ***Cafeteria Man*** inspires others to get involved with their schools and to be a force for change in improving school food culture. Finding the appropriate entry point into the school food world isn't always easy, but it can be done!

This ***School Food Viewer Action Guide*** is designed to help you identify ways to get involved in school food and to learn proven practices for positively influencing school food culture.



“Every community has a deep well of assets. One of the single most important drivers for change are parents.” –Tony Geraci, *Cafeteria Man*



CREATING CHANGE AT SCHOOL

While changing school food for the better may seem like a daunting task, it's important to recognize that you are not alone. Concern about childhood obesity and related health issues has sparked a nationwide movement and increased engagement among parents, community members, and young people themselves in seeking solutions. You might begin by identifying potential allies within your school's ecosystem, including other parents, students, teachers, and members of the PTA and school board.

View a video of Tony below emphasizing the invaluable role of parents in school food reform.

Tony's Tips for Success: Make a Plan and Get Parents Involved

www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW4vwP4xI3k



Also important is doing your homework. School food is a complex issue and highly regulated. As you chart a course for making change, you will want to familiarize yourself with the rules (e.g., USDA regulations, state laws, school district guidelines) governing what can be served at school. You'll also want to study your school's Wellness Policy. In 2004, Congress mandated that all schools and districts receiving federal funding for school meal programs create [wellness policies](#). You'll want to learn about specific goals established in your school, steps toward achieving those goals, and key stakeholders tasked with implementing the policy. (See the reference list at the end of this guide for helpful school food resources and a model wellness policy developed by the Center for Ecoliteracy.)

Also important is connecting with students and teachers with a passion for food and health-related issues. **Cafeteria Man** makes clear the powerful role that students can play in advocating for their own needs. Alice ("Cafeteria Girl") and her fellow students were encouraged to take action by their social studies teacher who, upon hearing their concerns, encouraged his class to create a School Food Bill of Rights. ([Similar School Food Bill of Rights' initiatives have been launched nationally.](#)) Pay attention to what your children and other students have to say about school food and support their efforts to learn about healthy eating and take positive, constructive action at school. The more you learn and get involved, the more you will realize that changing complex systems takes time and requires both patience and persistence.

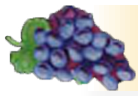
Part of what makes Tony Geraci's vision for Baltimore so compelling is his emphasis on integrated approaches to improving school food. The film portrays multiple entry points for taking action—from the sourcing of local produce to improved nutrition education, from cooking in the classroom to implementing school gardens. Take a moment to consider the various avenues available for influencing school food and where current needs align with your interests and passions.

Watch as Tony describes the importance of integrated approaches to school food in this video clip.

It's Not Just About Lunch: The Importance of an Integrated Approach

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuvrgESfrII





NINE IDEAS FOR INITIAL STEPS

Whether you choose to take action initially on your own, or within a group, below are some initial steps you might take to get involved in transforming the food culture within your school:

1. Have lunch with your children in the cafeteria to see and experience the school meal program. Pay attention to the environment and whether it contributes to healthful eating.
2. Introduce yourself to the Cafeteria Manager and learn how the school meal program works at your school. Volunteer to help out with big lunches, like Thanksgiving lunch.
3. Go to the district's website and read up on the Food Service Department and its programs.
4. Go to a PTA meeting to see what kind of healthy initiatives are part of its yearly plan.
5. Talk to the principal to see if there is an interest in having a school garden. Explore the status of school gardens across your district.
6. Talk to your classroom teacher about starting a "Healthy Celebration" policy for birthdays and holidays.
7. Arrange a field trip for the class to a local farm or ranch to learn about local food production.
8. Conduct a cooking class based on a theme that the class is studying in social studies.
9. Most Food Service departments have some sort of parent advisory committee that meets several times a year to discuss school food related issues. Attend the next meeting and see what kind of topics are discussed and whether there are any volunteer opportunities.



Ripples of Change: How One Parent Sparked a Local Movement in Denver, CO

Andrew Nowak got involved at his children's school as a paraprofessional shortly after his family moved to Denver, CO in 2001. Below is the story of how he parlayed his work in the classroom into a decade of volunteer activities that helped transform the school food culture in the Denver Public Schools.

In 2000, my wife and I moved our young family to Denver where our two children, ages 5 and 8, attended Steele Elementary. As luck would have, I heard about some paraprofessional positions at Steele and soon began a new career path as a second grade reading coach and a fifth-grade math teacher.

As I assisted students in reading, I found many references to food and cooking in the beginner chapter books we read. To bring these stories to life, I approached the teacher about conducting cooking classes. We started with a beef stew recipe from a Boxcar Children early reader. Over three days, we prepped the vegetables, cut the beef, seared it, and made the stew. On the third day, we served our creation to parents with the children assuming roles as characters from the book. Not only was the class a huge hit, but the students felt very connected to the book.

During the three days of cooking, I talked to the students about where the food in the recipe came from. With many students unfamiliar with how a potato grows or what celery looks like in the ground, I asked the principal about planting a small garden in the schoolyard. The children and teachers loved watching the plants mature. When it came time to harvest, the class was amazed to see the fruits of their efforts. Together, we made spinach salad and raspberry vinaigrette to share with the rest of the school.

About this time, I got involved with a new organization in Denver called Slow Food that was launching school gardens as their first project, to help teach children where their food comes from and re-introduce them to the flavors of fresh produce.



ENGAGING OTHER PARENTS AS PART OF THE SOLUTION

As I got involved with Slow Food Denver, I was paired with another parent of young children wanting to teach them about the origins of their food. Gigia Kolouch and I quickly discovered that we complimented each other well. She developed the education behind our gardens and I designed projects that the schools could do from the garden. We soon became the leaders of our fledging Seed-to-Table School Garden Program with the number of participating schools growing to over 25 within a couple of years. We developed a School Garden Alliance program so that we could support volunteer garden leaders at various schools while not having to be at the schools all the time. Gigia conducted workshops to train the volunteer parents and teachers on how to garden and cook with the students. I worked with the district and our partner, Denver Urban Gardens, to develop a farmers market program so that the students could run a small business out of the garden, learn about food access in their community, and raise money to sustain the garden program.

By 2008, 30 or so gardens had been created on Denver school grounds and students were working with volunteers to grow fresh produce and make simple recipes. Our programs received positive news coverage; but we started getting questions from parents about why this fresh food was not being served in the cafeteria. I got caught up in these discussions and started to get vocal in the local papers. I went as far as to challenge the district's Food Services to serve more fresh food. I thought if I pushed harder, then Food Services would prepare some of our garden produce in the school meals. The reality? The harder I pushed, the less access we were given to Food Services and no changes were made. We realized we had to change our tactic.

A FRUITFUL COLLABORATION AMONG PARENTS, THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, AND A LOCAL NONPROFIT

We finally convinced an assistant superintendent to call a meeting with Food Services so we could discuss our differences. The first step was for each side to share their missions. Well, surprise!! We discovered that we both had the same goal: "to feed Denver students healthy food so that they could achieve high levels of academic success."

Once we discovered that we were both working for the same goal, we started collaborating on small projects. Food Services asked us for help in reaching parents about their programs. Since we were already well connected to the parent-teacher associations (PTAs), we started to meet with parents to talk about the fledging programs in gardens and cafeterias.

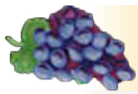
Our big break came in 2009 when Food Services asked us to help with a grant application to support getting local food into the cafeterias. Together, we were successful in winning the grant, which launched Denver Public Schools (DPS) in an 18-month project to look within the state for appropriate produce and meat products for the school meal program. Within a year, DPS was purchasing over \$1 million of local fruits, vegetables, milk, and meat from Colorado farms and ranches.

As all the fresh farm food started to come into the school kitchens, it became apparent that the kitchen staff would need additional training to handle the whole, raw, and fresh ingredients. Food Services came to Slow Food Denver for assistance in developing a scratch cooking boot camp to train over 650 staff in under 2 years. Together Food Services and Slow Food Denver developed a three-week boot camp to introduce scratch techniques, bread baking, salad bar presentation, and to improve basic knife skills. It took DPS less than 18 months to train all the staff in the district kitchens and now over 90% of the meals in the school cafeterias are made from scratch.



MAKING STUDENT-GROWN PRODUCE AVAILABLE IN SCHOOLS

The last success story during this time period was also the one that Slow Food Denver wanted for some time: to get fresh produce from the school gardens into the cafeteria. The biggest challenge we faced with the Garden-to-Cafeteria program was to convince everyone that students could grow, harvest, and deliver food from the school garden safely to the school kitchen. We could not find any large-scale programs like this back in 2010 so we developed our own protocols, relying on the USDA's "Good Agricultural and Good Harvesting Practices" for farmers guidance to develop a smaller-scale program for the school gardens. After four months of research and development, we received a green light from the Health Department and the District. The Garden-to-Cafeteria program launched in 2010 and in four seasons, the students have put over two tons of fresh produce into the cafeteria.



ENGAGING THE WIDER COMMUNITY

As **Cafeteria Man** demonstrates, comprehensive school food reform efforts are the product of many individuals and organizations working toward shared goals. You might take a moment to ‘map’ those organizations that are already active on school food issues in your community and those that could be tapped for support. These include civic organizations, nonprofits and advocacy groups, academic institutions, farmers, and local businesses.

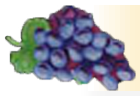
For example, restaurants and their chefs can be potent allies as was evident when several Baltimore restaurants joined Tony’s efforts, volunteering their time to demonstrate healthy meal preparation to students and providing exposure to culinary career paths. This is now a national trend with First Lady Michelle Obama’s Chefs Move to Schools program encouraging chefs and schools to collaborate in educating kids about food and healthy eating.

Given food and children’s health is a passion that many people share, you will likely find individuals and organizations willing to volunteer their time, services, or leftover materials to help. Local businesses (e.g., hardware stores, lumber shops) may be interested in providing materials to launch a school garden, with garden club members willing to lend their expertise. Printers, too, may be open to donating their services to reproduce posters and other educational materials to support your efforts.

Below are some ideas on how to get involved in transforming school food culture in your community:

1. **Check** with the mayor’s office to see if there are any active initiatives, such as procuring 20% of the city’s food needs from local sources or a Food Policy Council that is looking at food-related issues in your city.
2. **Locate** your local agricultural extension office and see what kind of support and technical assistance they can provide around gardening and nutrition programs.
3. **Visit** your local botanical garden or garden club to see what projects they are working on.
4. **Check** with your favorite independent restaurant to see if there is an association of independent restaurants that might be interested in school food issues.
5. **Invite** your local newspaper to do a story on the healthy food initiatives happening in your school.
6. **Attend** school board meetings to become familiar with school board members to see who may be an advocate for healthy foods.
7. **Screen** the Cafeteria Man film in your community to bring together potential allies and inspire local action – www.cafeteriaman.com/hostascreening





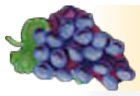
SETTING AN EXAMPLE AT HOME

There are many activities that families can do together to become more knowledgeable about local foods and the value of eating healthy, home-cooked meals made from fresh ingredients. It is important to put into practice at home the same kind of food purchasing and scratch cooking that you seek to achieve at school. Your children need to see that school food and home meals should not be any different and that the same types of meals can be found in both places. When children see the family eating healthy meals at home, they are more likely to be enthusiastic participants of the school meal program.

Here are some helpful ideas to get the family involved in learning about local, fresh food to support the transformation of school food:

1. **Plant** a vegetable garden at home to grow fresh produce for family meals.
2. **Visit** a farmers' market to see what kind of fresh produce is available in your region. Talk to a farmer to learn more about his farm.
3. **Join** a community-supported agricultural (CSA) program to receive fresh produce from a local farm on a weekly basis.
4. **Cook** meals together as a family. Allow everyone to suggest different dishes to be included at meals and go to the store to shop together.
5. **Walk** around your neighborhood to discover other home gardens and talk to the homeowners about how they use the food they grow.
6. **Watch** a food-related documentary, such as **Nourish** or **Fresh**, both available from The Video Project, and discuss as a family what the important issues are.
7. **Sensitize** your children to the influence of advertising – through TV, billboards, etc. – on their food preferences. Strive to make them more conscious consumers for life.
8. **Start** a family book club exploring different food topics.
9. **Talk** to a grandparent or some other older relative about family food traditions that they remember from their childhood.





RESOURCES

Free Guides

Rethinking School Lunch Guide (Center for Ecoliteracy, © 2010)

Download from: www.ecoliteracy.org/downloads/rethinking-school-lunch-guide

A planning framework that provides strategies for changing school meal programs, promoting health, and increasing ecological understanding. One of the best guides available.

Model Wellness Policy Guide (Center for Ecoliteracy, © 2010)

Download from: <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/downloads/rsi-wellness-policy>

In collaboration with Slow Food USA and the Chez Panisse Foundation, the Center for Ecoliteracy created a Model Wellness Policy Guide. It offers language and recommendations to assist users in developing and maintaining comprehensive policies that set high standards for healthy learning.

Making the Case (Center for Ecoliteracy, © 2010)

Download from: <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/downloads/making-case>

Summarizes extensive research that documents the links between school food, better nutrition, academic success, and student health; features reports from nutrition services directors describing their successes.

Books

Free for All: Fixing School Food in America by Janet Poppendieck (University of California Press, © 2011).

An examination of the politics of food from multiple perspectives—history, policy, nutrition, environmental sustainability, and taste—and a sweeping vision for change.

Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children by Ann Cooper & Lisa M. Holmes

(Harper Collins, © 2001)

An exploration of how parents and school employees can help instill healthy eating in children; how to support local, organic food; and ways to promote widespread community change.

School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare by Susan Levine.

(Princeton University Press, © 2008)

A history of the National School Lunch Program that investigates who decides what American schoolchildren should be eating, and the policies that surround those decisions.

Lunch Wars: How to Start a School Food Revolution and Win the Battle for Our Children's Health by Amy Kalafa (Penguin Press, © 2011)

Kalafa explains all the complicated issues surrounding school food; how to work with your school's "Wellness Policy;" the basics of self-operated vs. outsourced cafeterias; how to get funding for a school garden, and much more.

Fed Up with Lunch by Sarah Wu (Chronicle Books, © 2011)

An eye-opening account of school lunches in America. Provides invaluable resources for parents and health advocates who wish to help reform school lunch.

Organizations and Programs

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

www.healthiergeneration.org/schools.aspx?id=5655

The Alliance's Healthy Schools Program supports more than 14,000 schools nationwide and offers resources and tools to help schools purchase healthier options.

Bag the Junk

www.bagthejunk.com

The National Educational Association's campaign to champion healthy snack foods and beverages in schools.

Center for Science in the Public Interest

www.cspinet.org

Organizers of annual Food Day, focuses on issues of nutrition, health, food safety and more.

Chefs Move to School

www.chefsmovetoschools.org

Founded in 2010, Chefs Move to School is an integral part of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative and is designed to foster partnerships between local chefs and schools with the goal of collaboratively educating kids about food and healthy eating.

The Edible School Yard

www.edibleschoolyard.org

Tools include organic garden and kitchen lessons, class management tools and ideas for integrating food into the academic classroom.

FoodCorps

www.foodcorps.org

A nationwide team of AmeriCorps leaders who connect kids to real food and help them grow up healthy, especially in limited resource schools.

National Farm to School Network

www.farmtoschool.org

A program that connects K-12 schools and local farms to serve healthy school meals, provide agriculture and health education, and support farmers. Check the website for what's happening in your state.

Slow Food USA

www.slowfoodusa.org

A national organization dedicated to good, clean, and fair food, with 225 local chapters, many of which are working on school food issues, including school gardens.

The Lunch Box

www.thelunchbox.org

An online toolkit with Healthy Tools For All Schools, founded by pioneering school chef and author Ann Cooper.

Guide Credits

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