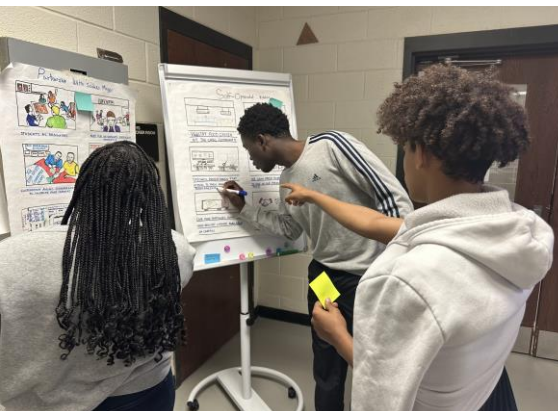# A New Beginning: The Journey to Student Voice at a DC High School

Jennifer Aguilar, Ydidiya Nadew, Mindele Nimon-Toki, Gustavo Rosas Cardoso, Elimane Samb
Columbia Heights Educational Campus, DC Education Research Collaborative at the Urban Institute

URBAN INSTITUTE · ELEVATE · THE · DEBATE

AERA Youth Teams in Education Research 2023

A New Beginning: The Journey to Student Voice at the Columbia Heights Educational Campus in Washington DC

CHEC Design Charette

Scoping Our Project
Interdisciplinary Projects Design Sprint

Making Prototypes
Interdisciplinary Projects Design Sprint

Identifying Areas of Opportunity
Food Equity Design Sprint

Running our Learning Launches

Partnership With Sodexo Magic

STUDENTS AS DESIGNERS

NEED FOR AN IMPROVED CAFETERIA EXPERIENCE

COOPERATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS TO IMPROVE FOOD SERVICES

STUDENT GIVE FEEDBACK ON MENU DESIGN

PROPOSED CAFETERIA LAYOUT

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SODEXO & CHEC BLOSSOMS FOR OUR STUDENTS

Possibilities...!

Design Criteria
1. Education, Training, Food-Health Connection
   - Balance of nutrition + taste
2. Accountability, Data, Money
   - Feasible Budget
3. Student Feelings
   - Students want to eat the food
4. Menu & Food Design
   - Culturally Relevant
5. Advocacy
   - Respond to Student Feedback
6. Environment
   - Welcoming + Attractive Physical Setting

Self-Operated Kitchen

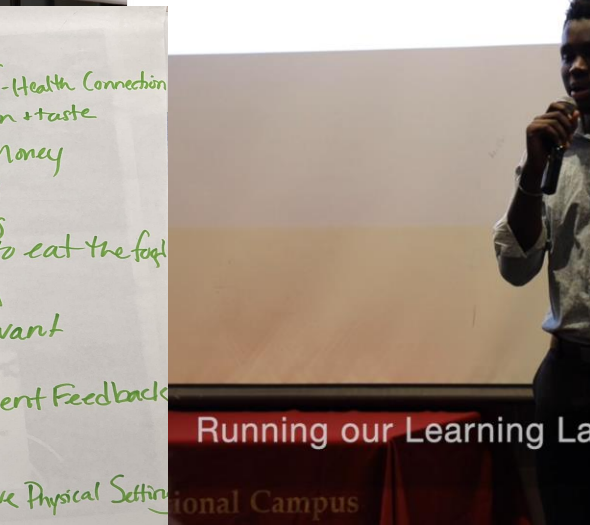HEALTHY FOOD CHOSEN BY THE CHEC COMMUNITY

OUR COOKING TEAM ARE TRAINED TO EXECUTE ON OUR MENU

STUDENTS DESIGN MENUS THAT APPEAL TO THEM. MENUS ARE TRANSPARENT.

WE GROW FRESH HERBS & VEGETABLES TO USE IN OUR FRESHLY COOKED FOOD

OUR FOOD PARTNERS MAKE THEIR HEALTHY CUISINE AVAILABLE ON CAMPUS

OUR MENUS ADHERE TO NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

About the Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC)

- A Washington DC public school

- 1,520 students in grades 6-12

- Students represent 67 countries and 41 home languages

- Nearly 99% of students are Black or African American or Hispanic

URBAN · INSTITUTE

Design thinking at CHEC

Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC) is a large public high school in Washington DC. In 2022-23, CHEC wanted to increase student voice, engagement and empowerment. CHEC adopted a student-centered design thinking and research process:

What are the opportunities for change?	→	How should the opportunities be addressed?	→	What is the impact of the solutions?

Design thinking has several steps: identifying opportunities, proposing change, putting change into place, and measuring whether the change made a difference. Each step involves asking research questions, gathering data, analyzing data, and understanding the results.

'Design Thinking is...

Collaborating to create solutions using different ideas to solve problems, thinking with empathy.

What is?   What if?   What wows?   What works?
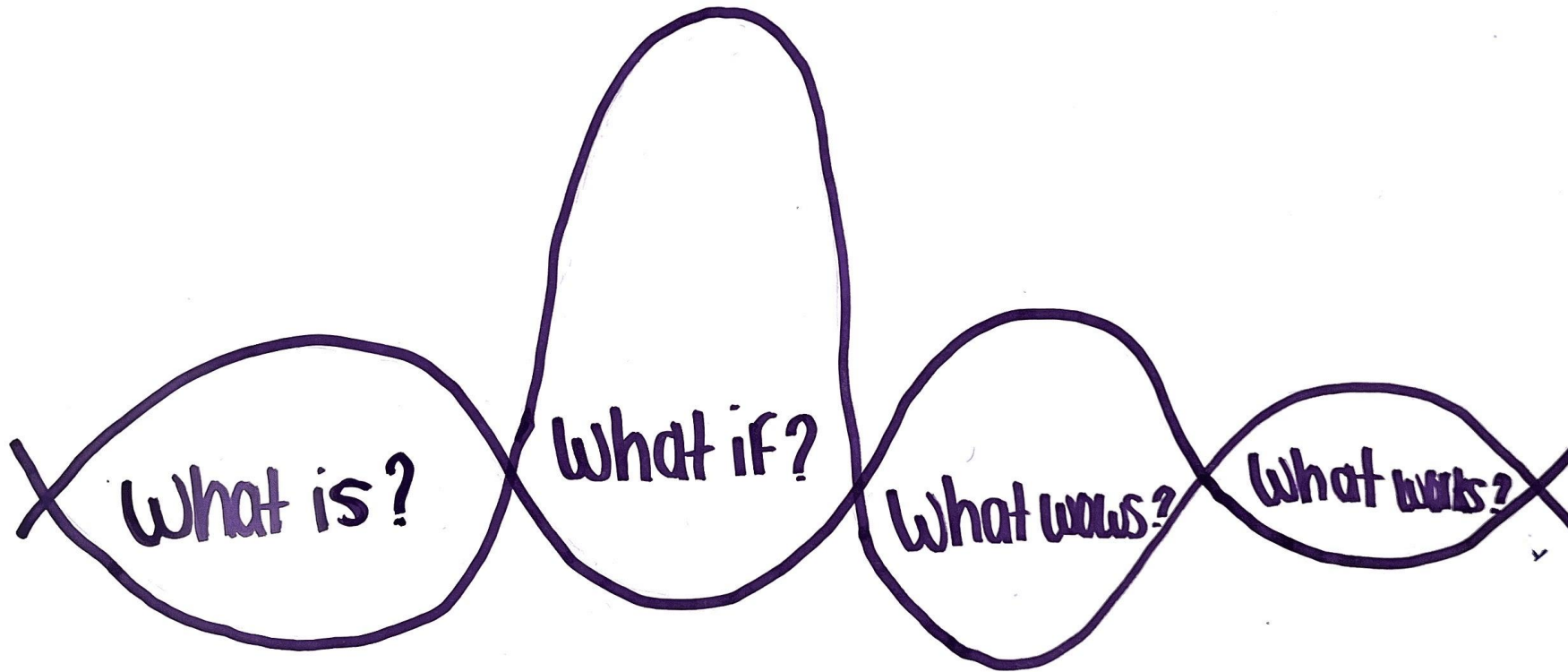
Using design thinking to empower students and make positive changes

- Students usually don't get a lot of choices. They don't get choices in what they learn. They don't get choices in what and how they eat. They don't get to make decisions for themselves about their education and their lives. In school, adults usually make decisions for the students. Adults try to keep students in mind, but adults also assume what's best for the students (often without asking them). And students are not used to saying what they want or need.

- **The big change we wanted to see at CHEC was for students to have control over their own decisions. We wanted students to have the skills to decide what to do, and to be able to act on their decisions. And we wanted a school where the adults listen to students and advocate for what students want.**

- Why now? Student engagement and motivation was at an all-time low when students returned after the pandemic. Students complained that they were not being heard, pushed hard for more empowerment, and had higher expectations that they should be able to affect their own decisions. School leaders saw what they had tried in the past to engage students wasn't working. This year, CHEC adopted "design thinking," a way of problem-solving where all people who use a system should be heard.

Data and methods

Primary Data	Secondary Research	Methods
• Empathy interviews with parents, teachers, administrators, and students • Classroom observations • Student shadows • Surveys: online and in-person • Food sampling sessions • Expert interviews (school district officials, food vendors, local restaurants) • Focus groups with CHEC community and answering their questions	• Learned about "design thinking" models to engage student voice • Researched project-based learning companies • Looked at older survey data from students and staff • Read district reports • Studied research about food preparation and production • Feedback on the school's redesign plan	• **All data was planned, collected, and analyzed by students** • All data were brought to team "design sprint" sessions to find insights, brainstorm ideas, and develop a plan of action • Sprint sessions were led by students, and plans of action were determined by students

1. What are the opportunities for change?

Our research found three opportunities:

- Increase students' **interest and options for the things they learn every day**
- Provide **healthy and culturally diverse meals** for students in a fun and engaging environment
- Make CHEC a place where adults listen to students, where students' cultures are valued, and where **students are heard, cared for, and can make decisions for themselves**

Design Criteria

1. Education, Training, Food-Health Connection
   - Balance of nutrition + taste

2. Accountability, Data, Money
   - Feasible Budget

3. Student Feelings
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   - Respond to Student Feedback

6. Environment
   - Welcoming + Attractive Physical Setting

Level 2
Food Equity

Research Q
how might eat
Chick-fil

What is a broader area of opportunity around this?
How could we

Lost cost for
students to.
buy expensive
food how much
survey how much
could be used
for college

Broaden foods of
cultural
more variety

Career exposure
Internship opportunity
Partnerships
Bolster workforce
R.O. DCPS
for DCPS

Everybody is
different so we need
to feed everybody
(inclusive of all
philosophical, cultural,
religious, ethical
needs/wants)

Food fuels brain &
body
Processed food
does not.

Inclusive + Good food

Access + Equity
Generates income

START HERE
Current area of opportunity
How could we

How can we
as students/teachers
get students more
engaged in
cafeteria again
with delicious
nutrition/cultural
relevant foods in
an attractive
teen space

How might we w/
an emphasis on St.
Vale, design
nutritional, delicious
and culturally and
subgroup aware. Menu
served in a dynamic
multi functional space.

Ask yourself
What's one barrier
that gets in the way?

Regulations
Compliance
It's really hard
to change the
status quo

Wants & Desires
very diverse

What is a narrower area of opportunity focused on this?
How could we
more engage students in class

Fruit
Snacks sell
day

What is a broader area of opportunity around this?
How could we

Build community
through an attractive
place to gather
+ socialize

Better attendance
Better Behavior
Better health

Ask yourself
What's another reason this matters?

Healthy habits
in palate
on first
gradual
Many students
don't have
food at home

Supports
athletic
program
after school
program
already

Ask yourself
What's another barrier that gets in the way?

Economy of Scale
how do we
from what we have

DCPS limits
+ vendors

Fed Requirements

What is a narrower area of opportunity focused on this?
How could we Educate on nutrition

Area of opportunity for (DCPS:) Create a culturally relevant model that works better

Seeing
. Food waste

Can you
measure the
food waste?
via weight
or survey?

Saying
Excited to get the ball rolling
- Maybe cut connection w/ Sidexo

"Grow!"
= the
"Hungry"
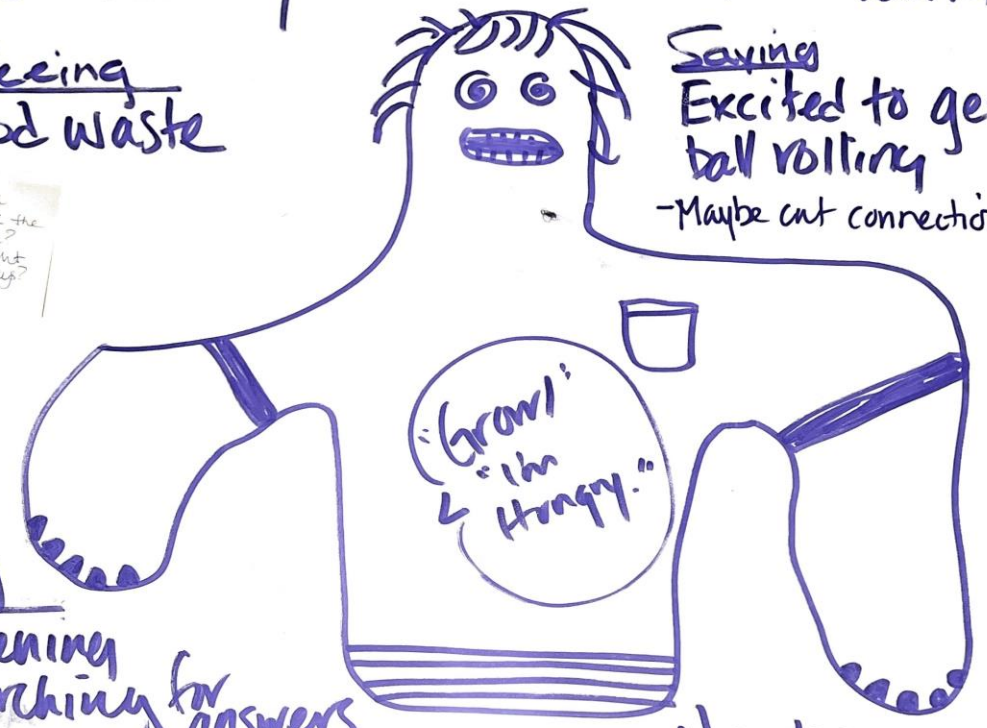
Seeing
Listening
Searching for answers

Feeling
Pressured

Hearing:
- National Problem
- Patrons are unhappy
- they want to be more conservative - vs. we want sweeping change.

Needs: Save money

Why these opportunities?

- Our data showed students wanted the cafeteria to be a more sustainable environment where students can have high interest activities available during meals in a multi-functionally designed space.

- We also discovered it is important that CHEC teaches students about other cultures and parts of the world. This is a way to get students interested in learning, to learn about other cultures and societies, and to inspire them. Learning how things work in other places can help students make decisions and form opinions based on more than what they know from their own neighborhood. We also want our school to include the many cultures of our students.

What solutions or actions should be taken to address the opportunities for change? Interdisciplinary learning.

The data we gathered showed students want learning opportunities that are:

- Based on current and relevant events
- Career oriented
- Would have diverse final products
- Connected to field work and travel
- Interdisciplinary
- Hands-on
- Not repetitive
- Exploration-focused
- Flexible
- Carefully structured and planned

The solution we designed:

- The school should offer an **inter-disciplinary class where students would earn credit for traveling and then completing projects based on what they learned.**

What solutions or actions should be taken to address the opportunities for change? Food equity.

The data we gathered showed students want food that is:

- Appealing
- Sanitary
- Fresh
- Culturally diverse
- Inviting

We also learned that:

- Over 60% of students didn't eat food provided by the school cafeteria
- There is a limited budget for food and there are restrictions due to nutritional guidelines
- There is poor communication between the food supplier and the district

The solution we designed:

- We would work with the **food supplier to make menu changes that offered students food they wanted, that would also fit within the nutritional requirement and budget.**

Left poster:

SODEXO 4

Area of opportunity : Getting feedback on meals at school to create a more delicious and nutritious menu.

STUDENTS
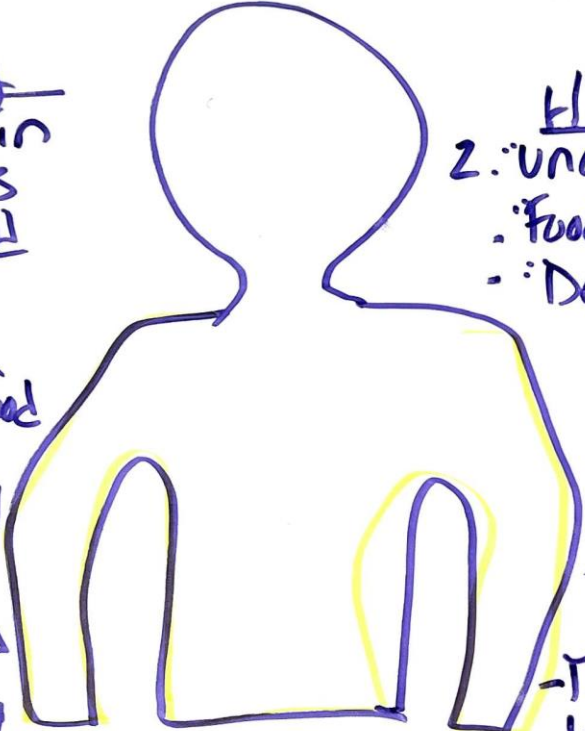
Seeing
1. – Bones in Burgers
   – Ugly food

Doing
3. Washing food
   – Throwing food away
   – Buying off-campus food
   – Going hungry

5. – Disgusted
   – Hungry
   – Unwelcomed
   – Not cared for

Hearing
2. "unappealing"
   – "Food Making people sick"
   – "Don't eat the lunch"

Saying
4: Blood on Chicken
   – Telling others to not eat
   – They don't know
   – What they are being served/eating

Right poster:

Research   2b

Student social/emotional health	Student engagement	Food program participation rate
• 76% feel challenged	• Shift student activities to lunch time (music, movies, games)	• Students deserve good, nutritious food.
• feeling loved 49%	• Incentives students like	• Not Enough inventory of what students want to eat.
• Don't feel welcome 8%	• Longer lunch period	• Students say re: food:
• No change since last survey	• Projects that include culinary arts.	28% soggy (breakfast)
	• Plan projects w/ teachers + students (prioritize student decision-making)	20% rubbery (breakfast)
		11% overcooked (breakfast)
		28% undercooked (breakfast)
		22% nothing wrong w/ the food
	• Cleaner environment.	47% food look unappetizing (breakfast)
• Students want snacks/beverages all day	• Flexible scheduling for personal learning gains.	58% lunch unappetizing
		42% undercooked (lunch)
		19% overcooked (lunch)
	• Meal time should be about nutrition + socialization.	63% food not good (lunch)
		61% don't eat either meal at school.

← 64% of students → don't feel safe

School safety is really important b/c students won't come to school b/c they are scared.
• Helps promote students' well-being

Area of opportunity: Work with DCPS/venders to create change aligned with our goal. (see poster #1)

Sodexo
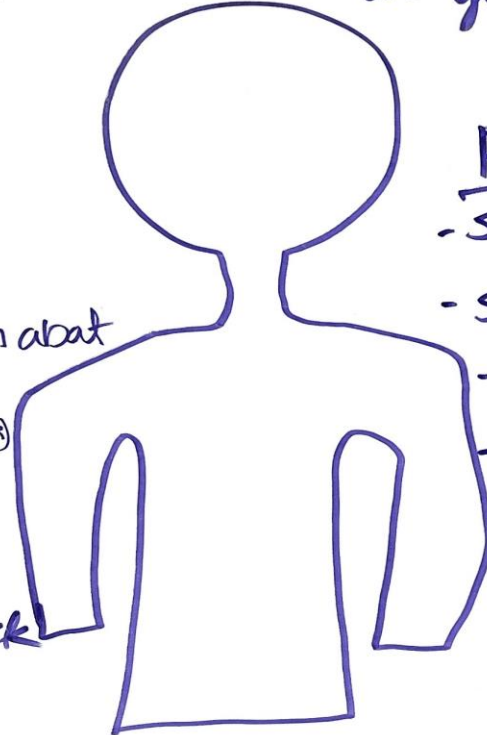
Seeing
Ideas from Students
- Re-model
- Student Passion about food/service
- We know how to design (design thinking)
- we are organized

Doing
taking feedback

Hearing
- School wants a change
- Students want engagement
- Students want cultural food
- we don't like food
- feedback
- Sodexo listening

Saying
- we will be a pilot
- they will change
- Interested in hearing
- Want to help + respond to our design.
- they will respond!

Feeling
- Empathy
- motivated
- Pressured to change $
- Constrained by rules/regs.

Latent need
maintain contract
follow Regs.

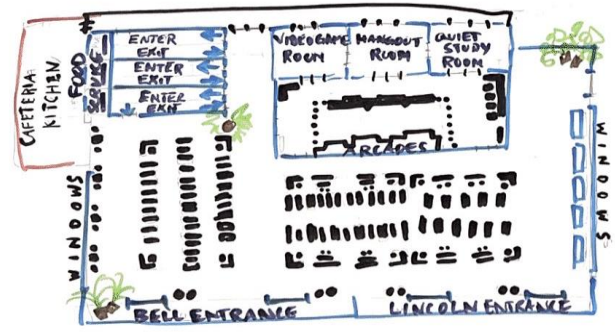## Partnership" With Sodexo Magic

STUDENTS AS DESIGNERS

NEED FOR AN IMPROVED CAFETERIA EXPERIENCE

COOPERATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS TO IMPROVE FOOD SERVICES

STUDENT GIVE FEEDBACK ON MENU DESIGN

PROPOSED CAFETERIA LAYOUT

Possibilities...!

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SODEXO & CHEC BLOSSOMS FOR OUR STUDE[NTS]

Why these solutions?

Creating an interdisciplinary class and working with the food supplier to make changes to the food and environment would:

- Give students choices about learning.

- Teach students about other cultures.

- Increase student participation in school meals by responding to their feedback about what they want to eat.

- Make the cafeteria a more inviting place for students to eat.

- Make the school a place where students are empowered. Students identified the opportunities and designed the solutions. Adults are there to <u>support</u> students during the design process, <u>advocate</u> for the solutions they proposed, and <u>enact</u> the changes.

Execution

- Design App for use to communicate both Kids
- Follow guidelines AND get what we want.
- Make an M.O.U./contract to guide our process and guide their process.
- Give School community a heads up on changes and happenings
  ▷ Partner w/ Culturally Rel. restaurants
- Communicate w/us/them: Regularly revise Contract
- Regularly Poll students about entertainment
- Sinage for Norms for Care of Cafeteria
- Have different trash places for Compost, Recycle...
- Use Sinage, IG, etc... ticker tape to announce menu + Entertainment

Organization Needs / Benefit

- Higher Visibility
- Students on Task
- Healthy Happy Students/staff
- Student Empathy
- Student Youth Voice & choice
- Student socialization

What was the impact of the solutions we proposed? Interdisciplinary learning.

What actions were taken?

- We hope that the interdisciplinary learning course will be available to students in the next school year.

What changed?

- We will study whether students in the course felt they had more choices in what and how they learned, and whether they were interested in the class
- We will study whether the course met its goals to teach students about other cultures and societies
- We will study whether students feel that the school is more culturally inclusive

What was the impact of the solutions we proposed? Food equity.

What actions were taken?

- We negotiated with the food supplier and, in response to student feedback, they launched the program THRIVE on February 20, 2023. The program:
- Included more options on the menus
- Brought back the salad bar
- Used better quality ingredients
- Started to prepare more culturally relevant dishes
- Enhanced the dining experience with wall art, banners, and sign holders that promote a positive and welcoming environment
- Started to provide trainings for the Food Service Staff on food preparation and food presentation
- Published weekly breakfast and lunch menus

What changed?

- After THRIVE, lunch participation rose from a low of 43% to consistently over 60%.
- More students are eating in the cafeteria and fewer are wandering in the hallways during lunch. Even students who bring their lunch from home are eating in the cafeteria
- We will continue to gather participation data and feedback from students

MOU

ongoing c.s. training
unannounced visits...

- Training of Kitchen Staff — cook food
                                on site

- Reduce Food Waste — Better food
                        Reduces food
  Look into Composting   Waste!!

I day a week of culturally
relevant food from a outside vendor

Input into Menu —
cultually relevant

Transparency —
        timelines for initiative — communication w/
as →   DCPS
            Data   Food description
                        - calories
                        - ingridients
will create
later — Student Advisory Board to
marketing meet monthly & Finance Class

Survey
Box — Monthly Survey — will show improvemt
to provide feedback Beginning of Month for Previous, Make a Call to action
   — Use Buy our garden produce

Block Party

FEATURES

M Pulled Chicken with Stewed Chickpeas & Zucchini
Served with Steamed Brown Rice

T Jerk Chicken Quesadilla

W Pork & Red Chili Sauce
Served with Steamed Brown Rice

TH Bean & Chicken Chilaquiles

F Chimichurri Citrus Tuna Salad Sandwich

SIDES

Citrus Glazed Carrots

Frijoles ala Charro

Yucca Fries

Elote Corn

Garlic Roasted Summer Squash and Red Peppers

Corner Market
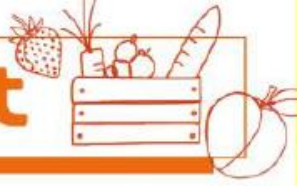
FEATURES

M Hearty Garden Salad
Served with Tortilla Chips
Tuna Salad Sandwich

T Classic Chef Salad
Served with Dinner Roll
Sunbutter & Jelly Sandwich

W Chicken Salad Sandwich
Hummus Box, Tortilla Chips

TH Chicken Caesar Wrap
Hearty Garden Salad
Served with Dinner Roll

F Jalapeño Lime Chicken Wrap
Sunbutter & Jelly Sandwich

From the Garden

OFFERED DAILY
Lactaid Milk • Lowfat 1% White Milk • Skim Milk • Soy Milk

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	DRESSINGS
Tuna Salad Filling	Hard Boiled Egg	Chicken Salad Filling	Pulled Chicken	Jalapeño Lime Chicken	Italian
Dinner Roll	Dinner Roll	Dinner Roll	Dinner Roll	Dinner Roll	Ranch
Apple Slices	Fresh Banana	Orange Wedges	Apple Slices	Orange Slices	
Orange Slices	Diced Peaches	Frozen Blueberries	Diced Pears	Diced Pears	
Broccoli Slaw	Caesar Salad	Slices Cucumber	Tomato, Cucumber & Cilantro Salad	Carolina Slaw	
Baby Carrots	Chilled Peas	Red Bell Pepper Strips	Roasted Chickpeas	Celery Sticks	
Super Side Salad	Super Side Salad	Super Side Salad	Super Side Salad	Super Side Salad	

THIS INSTITUTION IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER.

How we made change

- After looking at our data, we realized that we couldn't just say what changes we wanted. We had to work with the food supplier to make changes that also fit within the nutritional requirements and budget. We met with the supplier and told them what students wanted. The supplier proposed new menus, asked for student feedback, and came on-site to see how students responded.

What's happening and what's next?

For the food equity project, we are:

- Continuing research on students' reactions to the new food
- Continuing collaboration with the food supplier and the district to keep making the food options better
- Exploring opportunities for having CHEC become a self-operated kitchen that is independent from the food supplier
- Meeting with the district to improve the setting of the cafeteria (e.g. painting the cafeteria walls, adding activities)
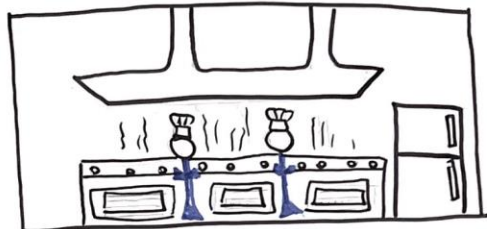- Working to increase options for students

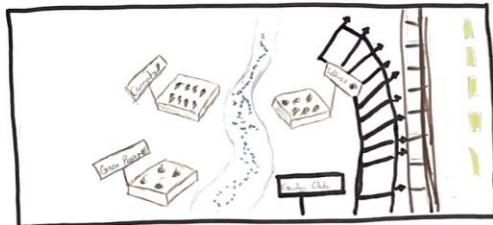# Self-Operated Kitchen
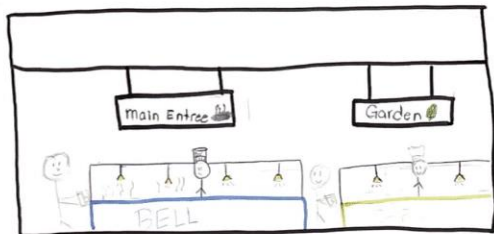
HEALTHY FOOD CHOSEN BY THE CHEC COMMUNITY	**OUR COOKING TEAM ARE TRAINED TO EXECUTE ON OUR MENU**
STUDENTS DESIGN MENUS THAT APPEAL TO THEM. MENUS ARE TRANSPARENT.	**WE GROW FRESH HERBS & VEGETA[BLES] TO USE IN OUR FRESHLY COOKED FOOD**
OUR FOOD PARTNERS MAKE THEIR HEALTHY CUISINE AVAILABLE ON CAMPUS	**OUR MENUS ADHERE TO NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

Big Idea Self-Op 10

CHEC Become a Self-operated Kitchen and we can cook on site
- Culturally relevant Food
- Work with Local vendors

User Needs/[...]

Set a Positive proactive Example.

Students can obtain healthier nutrients in their meals.

- Students can have soy milk
- We could pivot faster to respond to stakeholder feedback
- accommodate allergies
- We could create the ideal eating experience (food & Environment)
- Sustainable/Local/organic...
- More engagement
— Garden use

Execution

- Hire staff & pay well
- transform Cafeteria
  Kitchens - equipment
  Modernize
  Long-lasting
  feasible
- Coordinate of vendors
  Coordinator for the whole thing
  Stable meal Plan
  Nutrition approval from DCPS
  Streamline Service Production

Use our garden

Organization Needs/Benefits (Budget)

- Money — create wealth
- Know how to manage budget
- Sustainable
- Need Sponsors & Collaborators
- Training in Kitchen, front of house
  Planning
- Student engagement
- equipment
- Long-range plan
- Get Fresh Lettuce

Career Partnerships

6

🐷 Cost

📊

3

Opportunities

🌐

$

3

Logistics

★ We are in the process of establishing a Restaurant Advisory Board!

★ Both fresh farms and the WNDC Ed. foundation are non profit organization willing to help our school develop sources of food.

★ We need to define The "who" in implementation and consider cost, staff training

★ How to use current funds?

★ How to locate funds?

STUDENT FOOD IDEAS

Hot pockets

Salad bar

STEAK non-Pre heded

- Salad bowls
- Nachos
- PB & Ji
- Burritos
- Lemonade

More cultural based foods
Better chicken, more real fish
More choice of fruits
More beverage choices

① curuthiney
② Jufu
engsen
shob
rice

Tamales
Pupusas
Tacos
A variety of juices
Water bottles

Hot coffee
Hot Chocolate
Better salads
All cultures food

Salads
Chicken Ceaser
Chicken Tenders
Real Meat

Chicken Salads
- Anything other than milk.

Actual Mexican Tacos
Sushi · Juice
Salad bar · Chocolate Milk
Alfredo pasta
Cheese burgers with pickles
Dessert

Fruit
Pizza
Chicken

Salad
- Traditional breakfast
- Orange Juice
- Apple Juice
- More International Food
- No frozen fruits or food

What's happening and what's next? Design thinking at CHEC is continuing.

CHEC students are currently designing solutions for other opportunities too:

- Trauma-Responsive Wellness Program
- Career Pathways and Course Selection
- Student Learning Communities
- Professional Development
- Dual Language Program
- CHEC Renewed Mission Statement
- CHEC Core Competencies
- Community Assessment of Needs
- Master Schedule Development and Flexible Scheduling
- Individual Learning Plan and Mentoring
- Advisory Curriculum

What's happening and what's next? Studying the impact of design thinking at the school level.

We will study the impact of design thinking to see if CHEC is making true progress on the third opportunity: creating a school where adults listen to students, where students' cultures are valued, and where students are heard, cared for, and can make decisions for themselves.

We believe design thinking would be successful if:
- Students can give feedback on academic classes, and those changes would be implemented next year.
- CHEC adults advocate on behalf of what the students have expressed.
- Students have the ability and opportunity to express opinions that are different from adult opinions, and those opinions are prioritized and seriously considered.
- More classes and school offered activities and clubs get designed around student interests.
- Students have more control over their course enrollments.
- Students drive choices about events and how they spend their time, and adults support their choices.
- All adults who affect students (not just educators but also food vendors, city leaders, etc.) prioritize what they hear from students.

Contact information

If you have any further questions, please contact:

- Maria Tukeva, Principal of the Columbia Heights Educational Campus, at maria.tukeva@k12.dc.gov

- Dara Zeehandelaar Shaw, Research Director of the DC Education Research Collaborative (Urban Institute), at dshaw@urban.org

More information

- This work was part of CHEC's participation in the DC + XQ Design Journey sponsored by XQ. DC + XQ is a partnership across DC Public Schools to redesign high schools to better serve students and ensure that all students are prepared for college, careers, and life. As part of the program, CHEC has the opportunity to reimagine its learning environment, elevate student voices, and encourage youth engagement. The school completed equity audits where they examined inequities in their current school design, engaged with students and communities, and studied other XQ school models. CHEC was introduced to design thinking and equitable design practices and developed a core design concept to identify their students' greatest needs, their community assets, and ideas to rethink high school for students. XQ will continue to provide support as CHEC implements its redesign model.

- The DC Education Research Collaborative brings together the area's top research organizations to provide the evidence and answers that inform and empower families and caregivers, educators, policymakers, and community members to meet those urgent needs. The Collaborative is a critical support for the DC public education community that seeks new approaches to the city's long-standing educational challenges and comes together to mitigate the pandemic's effects on student learning, student well-being, and equity. The Collaborative's Advisory Committee is a group of approximately two dozen members, including community members initially appointed by the DC mayor and the DC Council and representatives from DC's many education institutions, as laid out in the Collaborative's authorizing legislation. The Research Council is composed of 15 organizations who make up the research arm of the research-practice partnership and will, along with practitioner partners, conduct the projects. The results of the research conducted by the Collaborative will inform the DC education community as decisions are made about policies, programs, and processes. These decisions can then guide and support practitioners in their work. The Collaborative is managed by the Urban Institute.

- The DC Education Research Collaborative supported the team of students from CHEC in preparing their research presentation for AERA. The team was accepted to participate in the highly-selective inaugural Youth Teams in Education Research program.