

Focus Group Workshop
November 28th 9:00-10:15 am | 2022
Denisse Mendez: Director of Child Nutrition Services
Tina Sanders: Operations Supervisor, Child Nutrition Services
Katrina Zhang: Child Nutrition Services Coordinator

Nutrition Services Alum Rock Union School District





Ed Specifications
& Standards

Next Steps:

Incorporate content from this interview into the Ed Specs design guidelines—then schedule round two video conference meetings with the same group to review the draft chapter for input in, March 2023.

Participants were oriented to understand what a Master Plan is and what Ed Specs are. Then highlights from the Ed Specs Visioning Workshop were shown, concluding with a list of learning shifts produced by Ed Specs Workshop participants as a vision for the future on the following page. After that, participants were asked a series of questions to confirm the program and vision for the future.



Learning Shifts Focus on Student Empowerment- DRAFT

ARUSD's learning environments will support students' development of ***mind, body and spirit***. They will be empowered with the opportunity to try different ways of learning to discover how they learn best, ***find their spark*** and to ***keep the curiosity*** they were born with to become ***expert lifelong learners***. ARUSD will work to give students and families who need additional support to have an ***equal chance to thrive***, meeting all their needs.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO BECOME EXPERT LEARNERS

- Multi-sensory and multi-intelligences learning
- More control at the hands of the students
- Independent choice and/or collaborative elective periods
- Less teacher-directed time
- Students setting individual goals
- Student-driven activities
- Student-chosen schedules
- More independent work time
- Relaxation rooms
- No school uniforms

HIGHER COLLABORATION

- Team collaboration across studies, play, and extra-curricular activities
- Flexible and collaborative opportunities

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

- Spaces to support personal and basic needs (i.e. laundry services)
- Full day kindergarten

MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

- More outside and exploration time
- Play and naturalistic movement
- Bring community into the class
- Indoor and outdoor use spaces

Program Background:

- What times of day are the areas in which students eat being used? Is there any food service provided to support after school activities? If so, what is provided and when?
- Does ARUSD have a shared vision of Child Nutrition Services? Have steps been taken towards that goal?
- With the passing of Universal Free Meals, has the district faced challenges in capturing an increase in participation?
- ARUSD's website has a section called Nutrition for Parents. Are there classes for parents, or is it just tips on the website?
- Do staff buy lunch, or all bring their own? Is there a vision to change that?

Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.

Program Background:

All Alum Rock Students will continue to receive breakfast and lunch meals at “no cost” for the school year 2022-2023 through the alternative program – Community Eligibility Program (CEP) and California Universal Meals For All. Students participating in an After School program will also receive a supper meal (supper snack) at “no cost” through the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Meals are offered four times a day. Breakfast before the bell, second chance, lunch, and a supper program through a partnership with ASES. ARUSD consistently provides for students and wants to make sure they are taken care of. Currently about 70% of students participate in the free meals programs.

Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.

Program Background:

ARUSD transitioned to heat-and-serve meals within the last 15 years in an attempt to promote faster line progression at meal time. However, the district is working on transitioning MS sites to 50% scratch cooking by the end of 2022 to increase dietary variety and quality. Training is being provided for this change.

Grades K-5: 40 min per group, 20 min to get food and eat. Students go through the line in block groupings where some students eat first and play second or vice versa. Grades 6-8: 40 min periods and everyone gets released at the same time and are not required to go through the lunch line.

Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.

Program Background:

Santa Clara county health and UC Davis – provided online nutritional classes twice a year to families. There is a desire to continue promoting those classes.

Second Harvest Food Bank provides support during transitions and partners with the schools to provide summer meals to summer school programs.

ARUSD received a farm-to-school grant to fund school garden of \$142k-educational and nutritional output

Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.

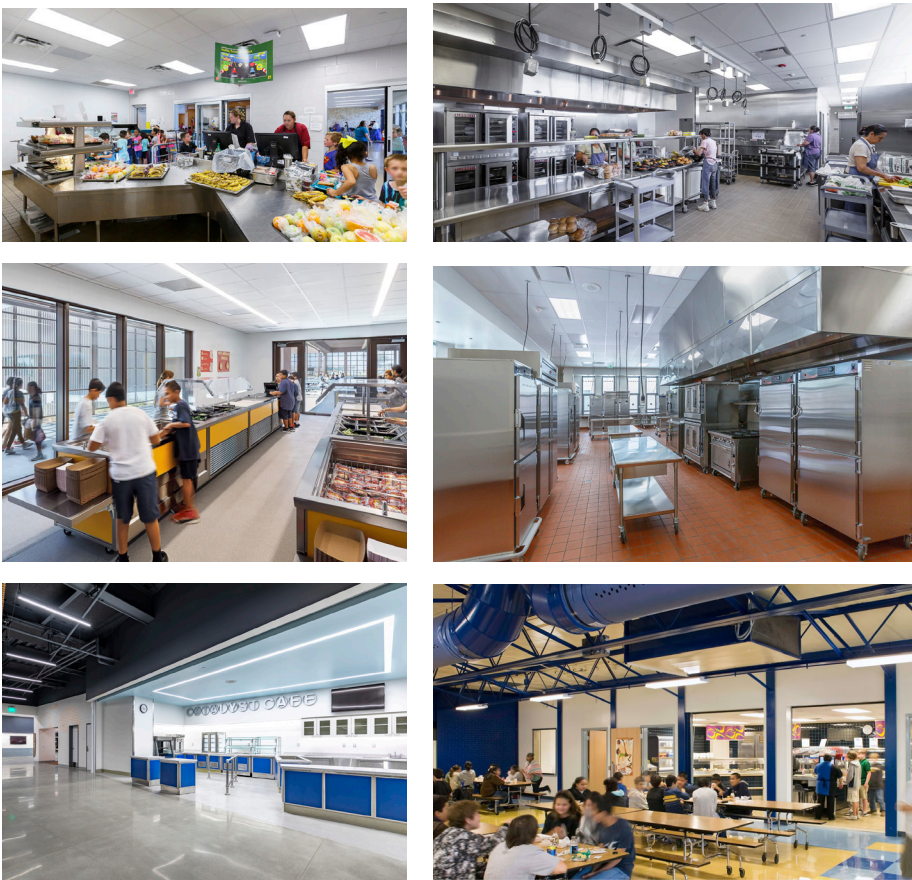
Before going into the Big Picture Questions, reference images below were shared. Participants were invited to leave comments on the photos.

[MURAL LINK](#)

Indoor and Outdoor Dining



Severy Food Pick Up and Kitchen



Big Picture Questions:

- Are there peer institutions or specific facilities you've seen that you've liked (or didn't)? What did you like (or dislike) about them?
- What makes ARUSD unique? How does it compare to other districts for nutritional services?
- Looking ahead 10-15 years, how would it be changing? What is your ideal vision?
- Could you speak to the importance of food service and why it is critical?
- How can food service really support families? What would that look like?
- What do you think of having Food Service throughout the day? (Not just snack time, lunch time and after school snack)
- What other activities can occur in spaces used for dining?

Participants were asked questions to draw out their ideas to improve the learning environments to support the mission and vision of Alum Rock USD.

Big Picture Questions:

- What variations of dining and seating should be provided as part of the student dining experience?
- What are some of the opinions shared by families and students regarding the meals served? Shared by families and teachers?
- California has consistently been on the forefront of many sustainability measures, from reducing waste with re-usable trays to enacting all electric kitchens. Have some of these practices been implemented at any of the campuses? Would the implementation be of interest?
- Is there anything else we should know about the student and staff dining experience and vision to improve it?

Participants were asked questions to draw out their ideas to improve the learning environments to support the mission and vision of Alum Rock USD.

Reference Projects Shared by Participants:

ARUSD – please clarify highlighted questions so we can find reference images

- Morgan Hill- Hydroponic and Composting system
- Santa Clara Unified School District - This District has a huge community and district garden that is managed by most teams. This is where schools purchase produce from.

The first question was intended to see if participants had reference projects to share with or felt that they were exemplary, whether it is in ARUSD or outside of the district. The following pages show the reference projects discussed.



Morgan Hill
Hydroponic and Composting Systems



Santa Clara Unified School District
Community Garden



The following pages show the participants answers placed in the sections in which they will appear in the educational specifications sections for this topic.

- Sections:
1. Activities
 2. Current Challenges
 3. Design Objectives
 4. Affordances
 5. Sizing and Adjacencies

1

Activities

- Breakfast, second chance, lunch, and supper
- School or student assemblies often take place in the cafeteria as it functions like an MPR
- Potential student cooking courses
- Potential for family nutritional courses

Shared Use:

- MPR
- Wrestling at the middle school level
- Band/Music performances
- Assemblies
- Outdoor gatherings

2

Current Challenges

Storage is a huge challenge both on the district and site level. Currently the district's warehouse storage can only hold a week's worth of food at a time, so each site only receives food for the following day.

Because of how many meal times each site offers throughout the day, the kitchens are constantly active until about 1 PM. ARUSD's switch to heat-and-serve meals was meant to accommodate this activity and less staffing. However, the transition to heat-and-serve affected the kitchen equipment available on campus over time. None of the kitchens have functioning dishwashers, most sites struggle with equipment to regulate food temperature, four sites don't have AC to counteract interior temperatures up to/over 100 degrees, and there currently aren't enough stoves/ovens for scratch cooking to be implemented. There is a staffing shortage that affects every aspect of the meal preparation and service process.

2

Current Challenges

Cafeteria space is limited and the overall environment is very cold, old and dirty. There is little desire for students and staff to spend time in the facility due to these conditions.

The switch to scratch cooking would allow an increase in meal variety, further representation of various cultures via food, the ability to implement seasonal menus, and the reduction of excessive packaging seen in meal prep today. Some challenges of this switch will include difficulty introducing new healthier foods cooked from scratch to children, staff training to balance allergy concerns with the increase of food handling, and district wide supply chain efficiencies. There is a hope that the switch to scratch cooking would also allow the district to support a more robust supper program than currently offered.

3

Design Objectives

Healthy eating and a wide variety of food should be introduced to encourage a balanced diet and lifelong healthy habits. The proper kitchen equipment to provide higher quality meals, and a **more comfortable and inviting, visually appealing environment** for students to eat in would support this goal.

The cafeteria should have a **direct connection to the outdoors** to use year round with **seating variety, adequately sized for all ages** the site serves. The use of color on finishes and furniture will help bring joy to the dining experience. Student gardens adjacent to dining areas could be used for science curriculum, and potentially support a culinary class and student recipe challenge at certain sites.

There is a desire to see 50% **fresh, scratch cooking, where adequate kitchen equipment is provided** to support activities like dough rolling, storing fresh cheese, rather than relying on pre-packaged meals. The vision is for support of seasonal, multi-cultural, and unique menus at each site, a salad bar, and an increase in the availability of nutritional information to students and parents.

3

Design Objectives

Getting parents involved in the menu development and nutritional programs would help build a positive relationship with nutritional services.

Sustainability practices should be supported by composting food waste and switch to paper trays, moving away from entirely pre-packaged meals.

3

Design Objectives

Ideas for the physical environment to support the vision for learning

- The space should be open and inviting, supporting free time and respite rather than feeling institutional.
- Longer and more accessible space for line access to the food stations to increase efficiency of the line.
- More space within the cafeteria/MPR itself to accommodate more students and tables.
- Better acoustic treatments to reduce the noise reverberations from the large number of students eating together in the space.
- Better mechanical units to make the cafeteria thermally comfortable year round.
- Outdoor shaded gathering space directly connected to the cafeteria to provide a variety of seating options

4

Affordances

Furniture & Equipment

- Tables and chairs that vary in size to adequately support various age groups of students being served.
- Functioning stoves, ovens, dish washers, etc. to support the switch to scratch cooking.

5

Sizing and Adjacencies

- Outdoor seating with protection from the weather elements should be adjacent to the indoor dining. Replacing all school gardens to be adjacent to the cafeteria will support better care for the produce.
- Indoor dining areas should be large enough to serve multiple grades of students for lunch time.

Appendix

Please follow the links to the Mural board to see artifacts from the focus group interview and the Ed Specs Visioning Workshop link to see the Artifacts from the workshop.

Mural Link: [HERE](#)

Ed Specs Visioning Workshop Link: [HERE](#)