



STRATEGIC PLAN: 2024 – 2029

The Evolution of Food and Nutrition Services

BPS EATS



Boston Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Strategic Plan presents a comprehensive blueprint to advance its operations and build the best school food service. FNS embraces its critical role to nourish students, be responsible fiscal stewards, foster a positive staff environment, and be a strength for Boston.

MISSION

To create delicious meals that our diverse students enjoy

VISION

To be a leader in creating life-long healthy eaters, supporting proud, skilled staff and building a strong local food system

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Boston Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), the largest school meal program in New England, offers breakfast and lunch at 125 schools to more than 49,000 diverse students. We also offer after school meals, summer meals and participate in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. Our staff totals about 500 at school sites, a central office, and a distribution center.

We have made great strides to move away from purchasing and serving primarily vendor-prepared student meals to preparing our own freshly made meals onsite. The food that we offer is fresh, local, and healthy. Students and cafeteria staff have a voice in menu development and meals, and cultural diversity is recognized on menus to assure that students know they are seen, visible, and valued. Procurement is grounded in a transparent and equitable values-based food system. Business practices are increasingly disciplined centrally and at schools.

We guide our ambitious intentions in alignment with our mission and vision, and in collaboration with the City of Boston and the community. We see a future in which we

are a model for school meals nationwide and have the capacity to provide meals for other City institutions.

Our mission and vision emerged from focus groups conducted in 2024 with students, school leaders, parents, vendors, and the community, as well as with our field and central office staff. The most compelling and repeated themes were integrated with advances identified in food systems, food service operations, and nutrition. These ideas put students first.

From the focus groups, FNS established three Strategic Priority Areas to guide us. For each Area, we identified approaches to move forward. Further, FNS will implement best practices in each priority area.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1** | Prepare and serve healthy, scratch-cooked, locally sourced, culturally relevant meals that provide students with a welcoming dining experience.
- 2** | Operate a financially stable program aligned with our aspirations.
- 3** | Manage a team where employees have opportunities and feel valued.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Prepare and serve scratch-cooked, locally sourced, culturally relevant meals that provide students a welcoming dining experience.

We aim to develop menus and offer scratch cooked, healthy, culturally relevant meals that communicate respect for our diverse student population. We are creating an inviting, exciting environment for school dining in which students feel cared for and valued. To assure freshness and support an equitable, sustainable, resilient, and connected local food system, we are actively procuring ingredients within New England and supporting the development of the supply chain.



APPROACHES

1 Produce all meals in house

To serve scratch-cooked, locally sourced and culturally relevant meals — breakfast, lunch, after school and during the summer — BPS must have autonomy over all aspects of its food service. In the last few years, FNS has upgraded most school kitchens with combi ovens for convection and steam cooking, upgraded hot and cold serving lines, and added salad bars. FNS will continue toward its objective of all in-house food production.

For the few schools that haven't space or capacity for a fully operating kitchen, FNS will renovate the facilities that can be, and operationalize central food preparation to make and deliver our own meals to these schools. This advance will bring substantial cost savings, create a single standard across all Boston school meals, and give FNS full management oversight.

Building out the central food preparation facility lays the foundation for FNS to scratch-make ingredients or components of meals for all schools. We will be undertaking a feasibility study to review our current capability and to set direction.

2 Create inclusive menus and programs influenced by students and stakeholders

In winter 2024, FNS launched a program to offer halal and kosher meals districtwide. We turned to the community for input in the selection of foods and how to communicate

these options. Potential halal and kosher foods were sampled, and operational protocols were developed.

FNS will build upon this model to actively engage stakeholders in menu planning by soliciting their input through ongoing engagement, including student choice menu days, menu sampling, and surveys. FNS will create special event menus and recognize heritage months and holidays.

3 Values-based model procurement

FNS will develop menu goals to drive the choices it offers and measure progress.

FNS procurement is guided by a City of Boston initiative to align with the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP). The program framework uses five core values to guide public purchasing behavior: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition.

BPS is currently conducting an assessment for its procurement in the 2023-2024 year. The results will be measured against the 2019 baseline assessment and direction set for achievement of the GFPP Gold tier level of performance by the end of SY2026. FNS intends to increase its local procurement relationships, including BIPOC sources, and will drive toward growth of regional supply chain capacity.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Operate a financially stable program aligned with our aspirations.

Within the framework of the federal government funded meals programs, with state support, we endeavor to maximize every dollar. We work to balance our ambitions with financial prudence. We are working hard to reduce the deficit supported by the City of Boston so that our costs match the meal reimbursement rate.

As the largest buyer of food in New England, we use our procurement power for the City and in the region, and look for opportunities to collaborate with colleagues at large school districts, nationally. We exercise discipline in our expenditures while pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

APPROACHES

1 Expand food access and maximize revenue

Boston Public Schools, through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for high need schools, is funded by each meal served. These meals are free to students. We make breakfasts and lunches accessible for all enrolled students, and work to maximize this program revenue to invest in food quality and skilled staff.

FNS will develop strategies to attract more student participation in breakfast — including Breakfast After the Bell and Breakfast in the Classroom — and lunch. Also, we will build the after school meals program and explore summer meal growth opportunities, shifting towards self-preparation. We will promote adult participation in the school meal program and explore kitchen space use for food production by local producers.

2 Have controls in place that lead to predictable financial outcomes

FNS is increasing its discipline in ordering, production records, inventory, and meal counting and claiming. These practices, including monthly P&L's by site and establishment of food and labor cost goals, will give FNS greater accuracy in forecasting and control of operations.

3 Operate zero waste kitchens

To build on Boston's recognition as a Green Ribbon School District, FNS is striving to reduce the waste it generates, with the long term goal of zero waste. We are focused on ordering controls and inventory management, implementing a food recovery program, reducing single-use and disposable items, and composting and recycling programs. In fall 2024, 22 FNS schools are composting in their kitchens.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Manage a team where employees have opportunities and feel valued.

Our employees are the front line to our customers: the students. It is critical that these team members feel supported, valued, and confident in their skills to prepare and serve healthy, delicious meals. Their presence strongly influences a positive student dining experience. FNS management will support this direction with collaborative environments at schools, across the department, and with school leaders.



APPROACHES

1 Staff effectively to support efficient operations

FNS will staff school cafeterias by balancing the staff needed with the number of meals served. The objective is to be fully staffed with trained standby staff available, based on a robust recruiting strategy.

2 Professionalize staff roles and formalize a program to support career advancement

FNS intends to align staff titles and position descriptions with industry standards for culinary professionals. FNS will continuously develop and launch impactful programs for onboarding, skill development, and establish a career ladder for all team members.

3 Nurture a culture of value and inclusion

We appreciate the power of each individual team member and intend to foster an environment in which all feel valued, acknowledged, appreciated, and thrive. We need to assure shared expectations and accountability. We will establish an employee recognition program to express gratitude to individuals, provide language support through translation and ESL courses, and weave diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging into daily operations.



This FNS Strategic Plan provides a broad overview of Food and Nutrition Services' intentions. It is supported in more detail through an Action Plan, a companion document that outlines specific steps the department will take to embody the approaches and make progress in the strategic areas.



FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES

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