

Q&A with SVA

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1. How widespread is the student feedback form and how can we work to expand it, like putting it throughout schools or in emails? Is it possible to make students aware of how they can give feedback? Maybe by adding a QR code on a poster near the lunch line or register?

A: In general, students aren't giving us much direct feedback. This is exactly why we started with the menu feedback form. There's a lot to be explored on how to fine tune feedback collection, but this is a start. We generally have relied on taste test results and participation data (so if we serve it, do students take it? How many do we serve each time it is on the menu?) - but this is restricted to small sample sizes. Or in the case of participation data, means we have to put some sort of commitment in with our vendor, which limits our flexibility if it doesn't work out or we want to go a different direction. This is exactly why we want to get ahead and proactively get ideas and feedback and think of ways to get more widespread feedback with larger sample sizes.

I think the QR code is a great suggestion near the lunch line or register and I will definitely dive into that solution. Thank you for the suggestion.

2. Are there any state requirements that you have to comply with when it comes to food?

A: School lunches are guided by rules from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to make sure meals help students grow, learn, and stay healthy. Schools don't pick foods at random—but they also don't ignore student preferences.

Menus are built by balancing several things at the same time, including:

- USDA nutrition requirements based on science and kids' needs
- Student ideas, feedback, trends, and popular foods

- Food safety and dietary needs
- What school kitchens can realistically prepare
- And a very limited budget
- Here's what the USDA guidelines require:
- Balanced meals with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and milk
- Fruits and vegetables offered every day, with variety across the week
- Mostly whole grains
- Healthy protein options
- Milk choices that meet nutrition standards
- Limits on sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar
- Age-appropriate portion sizes that provide enough energy without excess

So when schools introduce new foods, student favorites, or trending items, they're thoughtfully adjusted to fit within nutrition rules and budget limits—while still aiming to serve meals students will enjoy. We are most certainly not perfect, and this is ever changing based on new laws and varying student preferences. This is why it's so important for students to keep in touch with us, thoughtfully and collaboratively, so that we can get it right. Otherwise we are doing the best we can with the information we have!

3. How can you increase student participation for this form? Could you ask students opinions on lunch or how they view the lunches in the panorama survey? Is this possible?

A: I gained a lot of great insight while joining you all at the SVA meeting - thank you for that conversation! I am happy to say that I am working with the data team to help me integrate feedback into the Panorama Survey and I hope for it to be included in the Spring! We also will be looking at ways to get it on flyers or posters in the cafeterias and posted on the website. Please follow our social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook where the survey is currently posted!

4. How do you take student feedback into account if price is a factor?

A: Student feedback drives what we look for and explore. When students ask

for something new—like more vegetarian options or a specific item such as chickpea masala—we start by seeing what’s available through our vendors that could be implemented quickly, with reasonable cost and labor.

If price is a challenge, we don’t stop there. We look at whether we can make the item ourselves for less, or adjust the approach using methods like “speed scratch,” where part of the recipe (such as a sauce) is pre-made, but the rest is prepared in our kitchens. This helps balance quality, cost, and labor.

Once we have an option—or a few options—we bring them into schools for student taste tests. Sometimes vendors also share higher-cost products with us, and we still test them to see if there’s real interest before making a decision. A good example is the beef hot dog we tested recently. It costs almost twice as much as the turkey hot dog, but if significantly more students enjoy it, that higher cost can be worth the investment.

In short, price is not the end-all be-all. There are items that truly aren’t feasible, but our mindset is usually, “How can we make this work?” We try to balance student preferences, nutrition requirements, kitchen realities, and a very limited budget to make the best decisions possible.

5. Could you please make all of this information more accessible? Maybe through email or posted somewhere easy for everyone to find?

A: I think you are saying the presentation is specifically more accessible - to which I say, yes. I think that I could easily put this on the district website on our department page. I am thinking I could do a “Presentations and Resources” section where you can find informational items such as the slide deck there! Thank you for the idea.

6. Why do each of our schools have different equipment?

A: Each school has different kitchen equipment because buildings were constructed at different times and designed for different levels of food preparation. Some kitchens were built to cook more food from scratch, while others were designed mainly for heating and assembling meals. Equipment is also replaced over time as it wears out, and because of cost and budget limits, not all schools can be upgraded at once.

That said, a major goal moving forward is to get to a place where recipes, capabilities, and quality are consistent across the district. Right now, some kitchens are more ready for scratch cooking than others, and we are working within our resources to bring all kitchens up to the same level.

We are very intentional about not rolling out something in one building but not others, because that wouldn't be fair to students, staff, or the community. Instead, we plan proactively and budget carefully so we can make changes in a thoughtful, equitable way.

Our long-term vision is that any student or staff member could walk into any cafeteria in the district and receive the same level of service and quality. Our staff put a lot of heart into what they do, and while they aren't all on the same playing field yet when it comes to resources, we are committed to continuing the work to make things better and more equitable for everyone.

7. Could you present this to larger audiences at schools?

A: I would love to present this to larger audiences. I will explore with principals and level leaders how to make this happen. Thank you for the idea! Also feel free to invite us or recommend us to any opportunities you know of!

8. How do you ensure dietary restrictions are supported every day?

A: I want to be honest—we're not perfect, but there's a big misconception that we aren't doing anything. We actually do a lot to support dietary needs, even if it's not always obvious.

Every day, we intentionally plan menus so students with different allergies, cultural practices, religious observances, and food preferences have real options they can eat. We always consider the Top 9 food allergens, and when an item can't work for everyone, we try to offer a similar alternative so students can still have a comparable meal.

Students with documented medical allergies or dietary needs are supported through individual plans, and each cafeteria team has a list of students who need accommodations. If something ever isn't working, families can reach out to us at healthy.meals@pccsk12.com, and we'll help make it right.

We also support religious observances. For example, this is the second year we're offering fish on Fridays for Lent, and the second year we're providing take-home meals during Ramadan for students who are fasting. We also work hard to support halal needs, while listening to student feedback about whether they prefer inclusive options or requesting a specialized item.

We can't make meals to order or be short-order cooks, but we are constantly thinking creatively about how to meet as many needs as possible within our time, budget, and nutrition requirements.

Most importantly, we rely on student feedback to know if we're getting it right. Knowing what foods you like, how often you want to see them, and what culturally meaningful foods would make you more excited to eat with us helps us improve.

Our goal is to work with students—not against them—and keep getting better.

9. Does it have to be Michigan grown/local in order to get government funding for the food?

A: No. Food does not have to be Michigan-grown or local in order for schools to receive government funding. In reality, many of the most readily available foods are not grown in Michigan—which is a bit of a bummer.

That said, we strongly believe in supporting local agriculture whenever possible. Buying locally helps strengthen our community and often means food that is fresher and higher in nutrient quality, since it hasn't traveled thousands of miles from the field, vine, or tree to your tray.

Until recently, we were able to do more of this because we had a grant that

provided extra funding specifically to purchase local fruits, vegetables, and legumes. Unfortunately, that funding was cut at the federal level in September.

Even without that grant, we are actively working to find ways to continue supporting local farmers and producers while staying financially responsible. One area we know we can improve is marketing and visibility—sometimes we are using local products, but we don't always do a great job of highlighting it. Consistent marketing is a challenge, but it's something we're actively working on.

And if any students are interested in helping us tell that story—through signs, announcements, social media ideas, or other creative ways—I'd love to chat. Your ideas matter, and this is a great place to get involved.

10. Everything always comes in small portions, how can we make them larger without decreasing quality? Instead of multiple small portion sides with less quality, why not focus on better main courses and have a more minimal amount of sides?

A: Portion sizes are carefully planned. They aren't just about calories—they also help manage sodium (salt), fat, and added sugar so meals stay healthy overall. Portions are set at age-appropriate amounts based on average nutrition needs, but it's important to know that individual hunger and calorie needs can vary.

Coming from other food industries, I know how important plate coverage is to a positive eating experience, and I really appreciate you bringing this up. It's something we actively consider when reviewing and introducing new menu items.

Schools also use standard portion sizes to:

- Keep meals consistent for all students
- Manage costs responsibly
- Reduce food waste (think about how very large restaurant portions often go uneaten)

If a specific item feels too small or unsatisfying, sharing feedback is important. That feedback helps us review the item and see if adjustments are possible within nutrition guidelines.

And if you're still hungry, you have options. You can take unlimited fruits and vegetables—pile that tray high with those power-packed foods. If you'd like seconds of an entrée or side, additional servings are available for purchase at à la carte prices.

If you're an athlete, in a growth spurt, or just having a really active day, needing more food than the average portion is completely normal—and we want you to have options to meet those needs.

11. How long does it take for a food to make it into a menu after it is given out as an idea?

A: It varies, but it's important to be honest: it can take several months, a full school year, or sometimes even longer for a food idea to make it onto the menu.

When an idea is shared, we hope to move quickly... but in most cases, a new item won't fully roll out until the next school year. That's because menus are planned far in advance and have to balance nutrition rules, budget, vendor availability, kitchen capacity, and dietary access for all students.

That said, ideas don't just disappear while they wait. Before something becomes a regular menu item, we may:

- Run student taste tests
- Offer it as a limited-time item
- Pilot it at a few schools
- Use it to shape future menu planning

With our new feedback pipeline, one of our biggest goals is communication and transparency. We want students to know their idea was received and is being thoughtfully considered. If we determine that an idea isn't feasible for this year or even next year, we've committed to reaching back out to the person who shared it and explaining what the barriers are—whether that's cost, nutrition requirements, equipment, or sourcing.

I truly believe that when we're open about challenges, someone often has a solution we haven't thought of yet. That's why this process is built on trust and collaboration.

This system is still new, and because it's fresh—and because we're receiving a lot of great ideas—things may move a bit more slowly right now. As we refine the process and get more efficient, our goal is to move ideas through the pipeline faster in future years.

Even if an idea doesn't show up right away, it absolutely helps shape where we're going and we're committed to getting better at showing you how.

12. Do you think the lunch tray is well balanced with veggies?

A: Overall, yes — by USDA standards, our lunch trays are balanced with vegetables. Every meal is required to include vegetables, and across the week we have to offer a variety of different types, not just the same ones over and over.

That said, balance on paper doesn't always mean it *feels* balanced to students, and that's where we know there's room to improve.

One of the biggest barriers we're working to overcome is vegetable availability, especially here in Michigan. We don't grow fresh produce year-round, and we also have a Buy American requirement, which means the foods we purchase have to come from within the United States. At certain times of the year, that limits which vegetables are available to us and how consistent the quality is.

A good example is cucumbers, which come up often in student surveys. I'm happy to say that I do see all of our schools ordering cucumbers — but they may be showing up mostly in salads instead of being offered as a standalone side. That's something I plan to collaborate with our cafeteria teams on.

Availability and quality also matter. Cucumbers grow best in warm soil and summer conditions, so during colder months in Michigan they have to be shipped from warmer states. When produce travels long distances, we sometimes see lower quality or less usable product, which can limit how

often or how widely we can offer it.

This is why we're excited about continuing to improve local procurement, especially with farms that use alternative growing practices and can produce food more consistently throughout the year. As we strengthen those partnerships, we'll have more opportunities to increase both the variety and quality of vegetables on the tray.

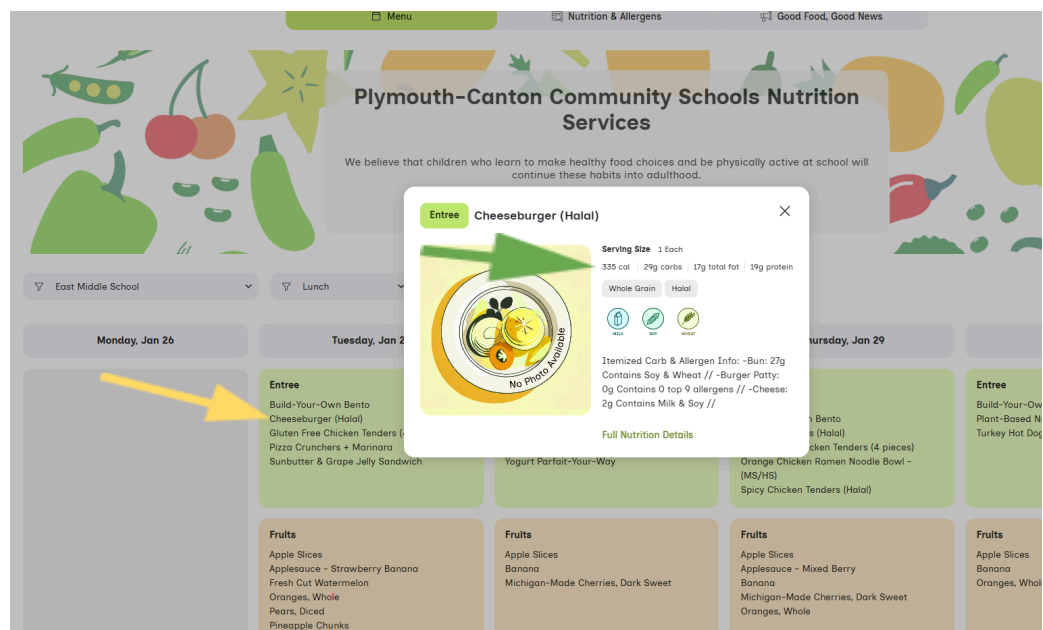
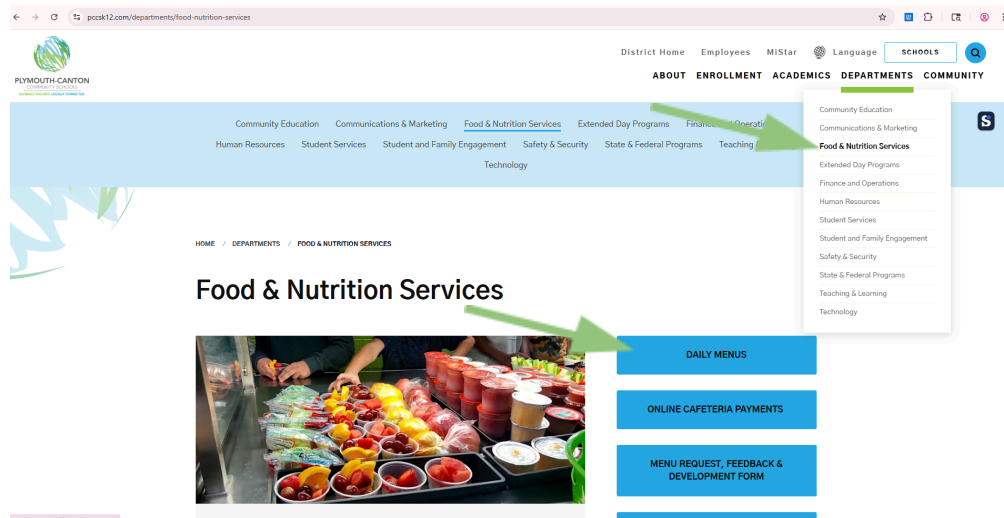
So yes — the trays meet nutrition requirements, but we're always working to make the vegetable options more appealing, more visible, and more aligned with what students actually want to eat. Your feedback plays a big role in helping us get there.

13. Why can't they show the calories for the non-packaged items

A: Our calories are listed online and this is the most up to date way to get that information. Below are some images to help navigate our website to our menu and to that information:

1. From the main district page, hover on "DEPARTMENTS" and select "Food & Nutrition Services"
2. Find the top blue rectangular button labeled "DAILY MENUS" and click.
3. Once on the menu site, select your school from the drop down menu and the meal you want to view. In the image below I have East Middle School and Lunch Selected.
4. To view more information, including nutrition information, about an item, click on the item to open a pop up. You will find the calories, carbohydrates, fat and total protein along with some descriptive information. There is a link at the bottom of this pop up that says "Full Nutrition Detail." Click that to see more information about nutrition and allergens.
5. Clicking Full Nutrition Detail will actually navigate you to the Nutrition and Allergens tab - but you can go directly there by selecting that tab at the top of the menu screen.
6. When you are in the Nutrition and Allergens tab, you will notice that you can filter the items by tags, allergens, categories (like entrees, fruits, etc.) OR you can just search what you are looking for in the

search bar. This is the option I like to use the most rather than scrolling to find what I'm looking for.



Survey Results:



How do you like to receive information? (ex. how would we tell you about new items or limited time offerings?)

Multiple Choice Poll 31 votes 31 participants

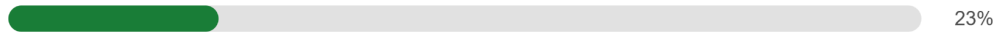
Social Media - 11 votes



Text Messages - 7 votes



Flyers/posters - 7 votes



Website - 3 votes



Other - 3 votes



slido



What item(s) do you wish we served in our meals?

Open text poll 30 responses 30 participants



Anonymous

A water instead of paying 1.25 for it A piece of candy Halal beef jerky Different fruit like cut up banana, strawberries, and cantaloupe.



Anonymous

In the morning, I liked the pre-made burritos from last year more than the ones being distributed this year. For lunch, I would like if there was a white cheddar mac and cheese.



Anonymous

I wish they had cucumbers and more fresh fruit



Anonymous

I wish we had more vegetarian options, as for the options, I only saw salad as a vegetarian option (mainly).



Anonymous

pasta bar



Anonymous

There isn't anything I wish was added



Anonymous

I remember there used to be an item called Mac and Cheetos, which was something a lot of people liked, so I am wondering if we could bring it back.



Anonymous

I wish higher quality salads were served because our garden salads are low quality and my friends never eat the salad at school. I also wish the pizza was higher quality because my friends also avoid the pizza and found some hair in the pizza today.



Anonymous

More garlic bread/ Alfredo



Anonymous

Deserts



Anonymous

Sushi, rice and bean burritos



Anonymous

I wish there was a stronger variety of salads or other healthier foods like salads.



Anonymous

I feel like I never see cucumbers at school lunch and would like to see them more.



Anonymous

More vegetarian entrees, not the standard every day ones like the boxes or cheese pizza. This could be like the pasta with Alfredo sauce which is great and I wish pasta would be served more often.



Anonymous

grilled cheese and burrito bowls



Anonymous

More vegetarian options that aren't bosco sticks and pizza. Something like a sub?



Anonymous

Healthy snack bars, more choices to personalize our plates to where I could get some of the hot food along side the other food choices.



Anonymous

N/A



Anonymous

Me and my friend loved the cedar salads so much and we're all sad when I was removed



Anonymous

Alfredo pasta, bring back the apple ice and blueberry ice cups they were amazing, the ones filled with fruit can be a little fermented or just not as great.