



Dreaming about Foodservice

The Dream Kitchen Survey™ is an initiative of Y-Pulse LLC to bridge the communication gap between foodservice operators and manufacturers and help them better understand the challenges related to cafeteria design and student appeal. Recently Y-Pulse conducted an internet survey of 184 school foodservice directors in major schools districts around the country to assess operator challenges related to cafeteria design and student appeal, and to identify product, service and training initiatives to enable suppliers to capitalize on opportunities. At the recent School Nutrition Association (SNA)

Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, leading school foodservice directors gathered for a roundtable discussion to share their Dream Kitchen ideas for school foodservice operations of the future and discuss their views about how a Dream Kitchen would be flexible enough to respond to menu trends of today and in the future.

Although results of the national survey were not shared with roundtable participants until after the discussion, their insight confirmed the results of the national survey and provided greater depth of insight on key issues related to innovative cafeteria design.

Roundtable Attendees



Leading Foodservice Directors Participated in Y-Pulse Dream Kitchen Survey™ Roundtable at the recent School Nutrition Association Annual National Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Standing: Tami Cline, Betty Theide, Linda Dieleman, Patricia Courteau, Clela Long, Dorothy Taylor, Diane Schweitzer.
Seated: Sharon Olson, Beth Rice, Kathleen Gleindmeier, Rachel Angulo, Mary Kate Harrison.

Rachel Angulo

Supervisor-Procurement Warehouse
Gilbert Public Schools

Patricia Courteau

Coordinator of Food Services
Boston Public Schools

Linda Dieleman

Senior Manager, Nutrition Services
Saint Paul Public Schools

Kathleen Glindmeier

Director of Nutrition and Wellness
Paradise Valley Unified School
District

Lyman Graham

Director of Food Services
Roswell Independent Schools

Mary Kate Harrison

General Manager
Hillsborough County School
District

Clela Long

Child Nutrition Director
Bibb County School District

Beth Rice

Director of School Nutrition
Fulton County Schools

Diane Schweitzer

Food Service Director
Hammond City Schools

Dorothy Taylor

Food Service Director
Sweetwater County School District #2

Betty Thiede

Foodservice Director
Rochester Community School
District

Edith Zumwalt

Lincoln Public Schools
Director of Nutrition Services

LLeading directors at the roundtable reported running more than 50 kitchens, cook chill production facilities and serving tens of thousands of students daily. This is not a job for the timid. Many talked about taking architecture classes to better understand how to read blueprints for kitchen design and reviewing specifications for kitchens even when a consultant is involved to eliminate errors and omissions. Some even write grant proposals to get funding to better serve the nutritional needs of the students they serve.

Administrative roadblocks

Foodservice directors often struggle with school administrators, like business managers and superintendents, who have virtually no understanding of life cycle costing that enables the purchase of equipment and facilities that can last a lifetime. Proper equipment would eliminate the need for labor and maintenance as opposed to the cheapest priced products that often require more labor to maintain than a slightly more expensive choice that would literally pay for itself in labor and maintenance saving.

Some stories included a school that was designed with floor to ceiling windows not only in classrooms but even for storerooms driven by a desire to impress the local community. It was an energy use and maintenance nightmare.

Menu trends affecting equipment purchases:

- High schools moving away from a la carte to only reimbursable meals. And the opposite, focus on making a la carte profitable to gain sales from students that might otherwise go off campus
- Breakfast in the classroom requires more refrigeration. Refrigeration is expensive and one director reported going to Wal-Mart for cheap, affordable coolers that last one school year when investment money is not available for increased refrigeration that is needed
- Good to go programs require equipment that holds temperature without degrading quality on hot and cold items
- Non-service, grab-and-go and reimbursable vending allows more students to be served without the aid of a service employee
- Scratch to heat-and-serve – and back again
- Healthy vending and kiosks integrated into cafeteria design to assure speed of service when undependable staff is absent
- Increased milk consumption – facilities are not typically designed by architects who understand the limitations of coolers to serve high volume fast. Soft-sided tub servers are quasi-disposable and fill the need short term

Facility design hurdles:

- Many schools are so old that installation, often not budgeted in equipment purchases, becomes a significant expense
- Mobile equipment makes it easier to accommodate existing infrastructure like hoods and freezers
- State laws are obsolete. For example, they call for 3-compartment sinks, when today's standards require 4-compartment sinks

Architects, manufacturer reps and consultants with school foodservice savvy

Every foodservice director could name one or two of the above who “get it” and really understand the school foodservice business. No one mentioned a dealer that added value to the supply chain other than for delivery. Yet, there was universal agreement that the vast majority don't have the kind of understanding that leads to trust. A pet peeve was cookie cutter plans that are decades old and make school cafeterias inefficient and look institutional.

Green kitchen

Operators dream about having an easy way to evaluate energy efficiency of potential equipment purchases and architecture and design. There is no foodservice equivalent to the Energy Star system that is available on consumer equipment and this could be an opportunity for a trade association like NAFEM or SNA to consider a service to industry members. Recapturing recycled water is another important issue.

Schools would like to see accountability of state energy charge backs because they feel the current system does not reward their energy saving efforts.

Engineering audit

Schools want to know when value engineering of foodservice equipment results in compromised quality. Most experienced directors remember the brands and the day when the equipment outlasted the building and today directors tell stories of compressors going out before a 1-year warranty expires.

Shelf-stable products

By and large, school foodservice feels like they have to wait for the industry to offer up high quality, efficient shelf-stable foods that will help them save storage space and energy. With energy surcharges for the deliveries, any alternative that offers greater efficiency and can cut down on deliveries would be welcomed.

Buying local

Without a consolidator, buying from local farmers is nearly impossible since individual farmers cannot always be relied upon to grow the crops they promise. Availability and consistent quality are vitally important to schools. Local produce deliveries are often not “school friendly” and require extra labor to unload and unpack. For example, a huge tote like one found at a warehouse club store is not easily unpacked for foodservice use.

What do kids want

Vegetarian. There is little awareness and demand for other earth friendly monikers like organic, sustainable and local. When french fries are taken away, the culinary grieving process never ends. Schools with schools gardens reported that their kids eat more vegetables.

Ethnic

Kids request sushi. Some schools with very diverse populations have worked with parents to replicate authentic ethnic cuisines like Mung, a Laotian cuisine. The foodservice director invited parents in to tour the kitchen and understand the working dynamics of the school kitchen. Parents then worked the kitchen staff to create recipes. Not all were well received, but a vegetarian rice dish was a hit with all students, regardless of their ethnicity.

To process or not to process

As kitchens have moved away from scratch preparation to save labor, they have relied more on manufacturers to take labor out of their kitchens. This reliance has created the need for ingredient lists that have become lengthy, cumbersome and problematic, particularly in regard to allergens. Foodservice directors are collaborating with suppliers to minimize processing and extra ingredients. One example is hamburgers – meat and salt, nothing more. Condiments have come under more scrutiny than ever before.

Labor

This is the number one issue amongst foodservice directors recruiting temporary employees.

This is seen as an excellent alternative by foodservice directors who typically pay the same or less for these workers to supplement their staff and they are significantly more hassle-free.

Foodservice typically takes a back seat when it comes to hiring employees by the school's human resources department because educators are of primary importance and the school cafeteria is often an after-thought.

One size does not fit all

Flexibility is a key characteristic that foodservice directors look for in foodservice equipment. Mobility to accommodate changing needs and HAACCP compliance are crucial. Foodservice equipment manufacturers have not changed many of their equipment specifications in decades and they don't work for the kitchen staff of today. Height requirements are a good example. Shelving was designed when there were a lot of male employees in the kitchen who could reach top shelves. Today, there are large numbers of women, Asian and Latino employees who tend to be shorter and cannot even get near a top shelf reach that might have been common 30 years ago.

Foodservice directors also want equipment that is as undemanding physically as possible. It is far more practical for today's workforce that is not as skilled as in years past.

Harvesting used equipment

Many foodservice directors reported continuously moving equipment from site to site to avoid auction and make sure schools had the right types of equipment available for their needs.

One large district reported having a full time driver who was just responsible for moving equipment.

Equipment operators are using less:

- Fryers
- Mixers
- Kettles

Equipment operators are using more:

- Combi-ovens
- Microwaves
- Milk Coolers
- Table top steamers
- Multi-function equipment
- Refrigerators and Freezers

Top features foodservice directors want in dream kitchen equipment:

- Practical – sized for today's workforce in terms of height, weight and complexity
- Efficient – both in functionality and energy use
- Easy to clean or self-cleaning
- Mobile
- Waste water recycling
- Equipment that lasts – not value engineered equipment that meets a price point and becomes almost disposable after a year
- Equipment that meets airlines specs for speedy and efficient delivery to classrooms across bumping sidewalks

Dream pieces of equipment

- Instant hot water – no more bringing in an employee early to put pots of boiling water on the stove
- Power soak
- Travel conveyor
- Seamless real time temperature measurement from storage to serving line that is affordable for schools
- A breakfast in the classroom cart with a lip to make service efficient and safe from spills
- Floors that can be machine cleaned and don't require an employee with toothbrush

- Servery that has contemporary signage and “markets” the food in a way that is commercially competitive
- Décor, lighting and signage that is on trend

What kinds of kitchens school foodservice directors dream about:

- Training kitchen
- Catering kitchen
- Small Test kitchen
- Completely mobile kitchen
- The roach coach alternative – bringing breakfast, meals and snacks to kids anywhere they are on a school campus

- Room service kitchen – expanding breakfast in the classroom to lunch in the classroom
- Media savvy cafeteria – some are experimenting with projected television like CNN to eliminate line fatigue and be less expensive than flat screens. Ways to execute the Disney concept of educating and/or entertaining while waiting in line
- The ‘cafeteria as a desirable third place’ – wi-fi enabled, contemporary design of furnishings and signage
- Designs of the future – having the latitude to project 5 to 10 years into the future and design for that rather than today. Forward thinking design is a lot less expensive in the long run than continuous retro-fits

**For more information on Y-Pulse,
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