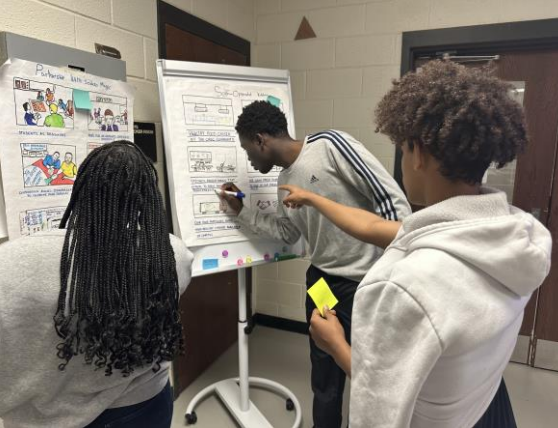


A New Beginning: The Journey to Student Voice at a DC High School

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



AERA Youth Teams in Education Research 2023



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

Seeing

1. Bones in Burgers - Ugly Plate
2. Hearing - 'Food Making People Sick' - 'Don't eat the lunch'
3. Washing food - Throwing food away - Buying off-campus food - Going hungry
4. Bleed on Chicks - Telling others to not eat - They don't know - What they are being served/ration
5. - Disgusted - Hungry - Unwelcomed - Not cared for

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 STUDENT



CHEC Design Charette



Scoping Our Project
Interdisciplinary Projects Design Sprint



Making Prototypes
Interdisciplinary Projects Design Sprint



Identifying Areas of Opportunity
Food Equity Design Sprint

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



Running our Learning Launches

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

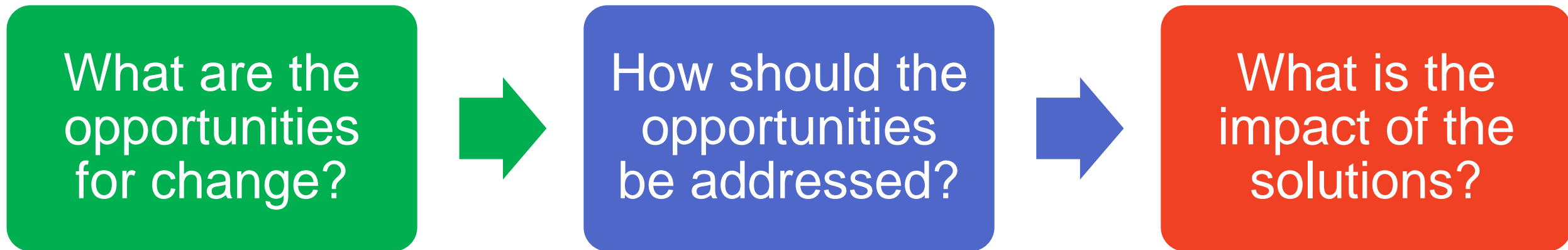
OUR MENUS ADHERE TO NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

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

Design thinking at CHEC

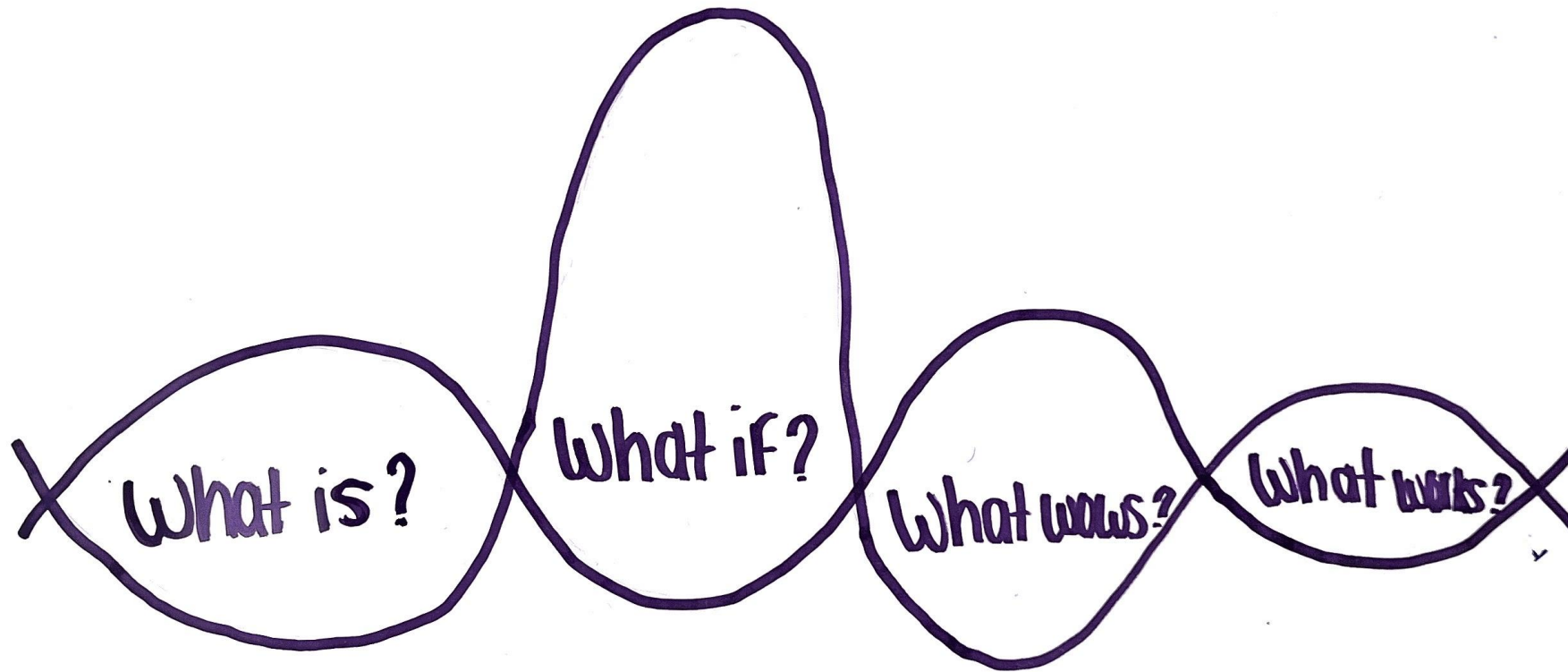
Columbia Heights Educational Campus (CHEC) is a large public high school in Washington DC. In 2022-23, CHEC wanted to increase student voice, engagement and empowerment. CHEC adopted a student-centered design thinking and research process:



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.



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

- 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

Secondary Research

- 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

Methods

- **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
 - Students want to eat the food
4. Menu & Food Design
 - Culturally Relevant
5. Advocacy
 - Respond to Student Feedback
6. Environment
 - Welcoming + Attractive Physical Setting

Level 2
Food Equity

1

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

Seeing
Food waste

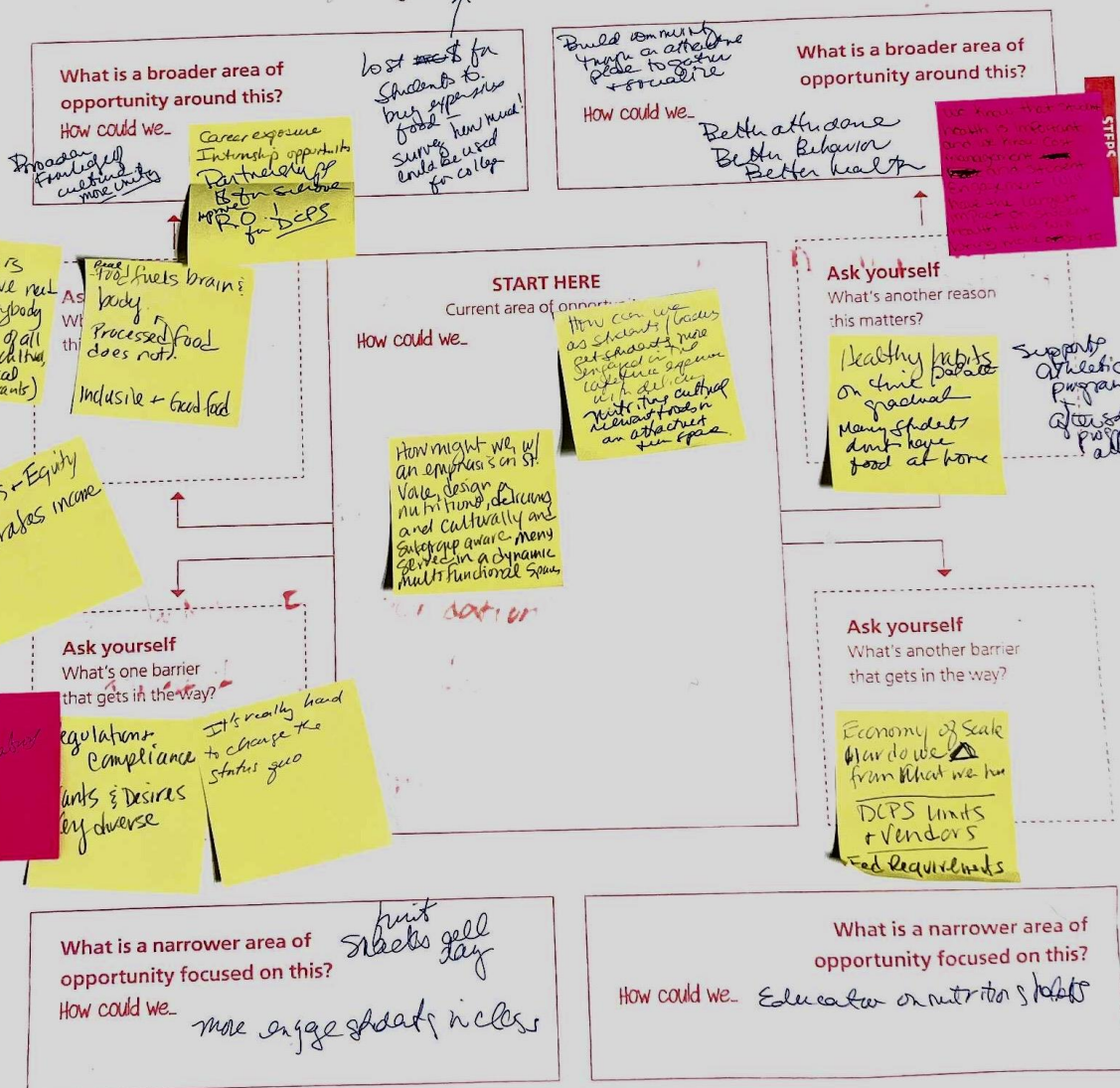
Saying
Excited to get the ball rolling
- Maybe cut connection w/ school

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:

- 61% 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

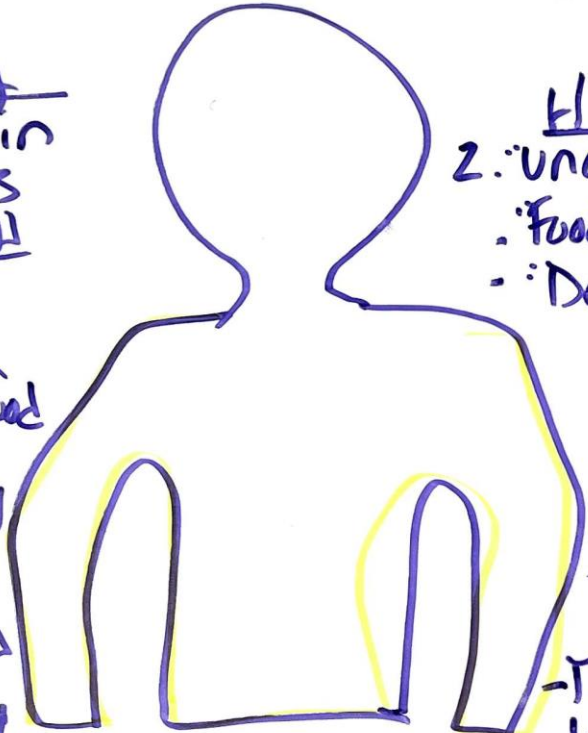
The solution we designed:

- 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.**

~~Students~~ 4
Area of opportunity: Getting feedback on meals at school to create a more delicious and nutritious menu.

Seeing
1. - Bones in Burgers
- Ugly food

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



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

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

Research

2b

Student social/emotional health

Student engagement

Food program participation rate

feel
• 76% challenged
feeling loved
49%

• Don't feel welcome 8%

No change since last survey

• Students want snacks/beverages all day

• Shift student activities to lunchtime (music, movies, games)

• Incentives students like

• Longer lunch period

• Projects that include culinary arts.

• Plan projects w/ teachers + students (prioritize student decision-making)

• Cleaner environment.

• Flexible scheduling for personal learning gains.

• Mealtime should be about nutrition + socialization.

• Students deserve good, nutritious food.
Not enough inventory of what students want to eat.

• Students say re: food:
28% soggy (breakfast)
20% rubbery (breakfast)
11% overcooked (breakfast)
28% undercooked (breakfast)
22% nothing wrong w/ the food

47% food looks unappetizing (breakfast)

58% lunch unappetizing
42% undercooked (lunch)

19% overcooked (lunch)

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 DLPS/Vendors 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

Feeling

Latent need

- Empathy
- motivated
- pressured to change
- Constrained by rules/regs.

maintain contact
Follow Regs.

Hearing

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

Saying

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

Partnership With Sodexo Magic



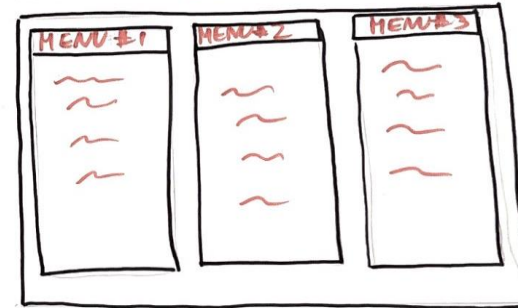
STUDENTS AS DESIGNERS



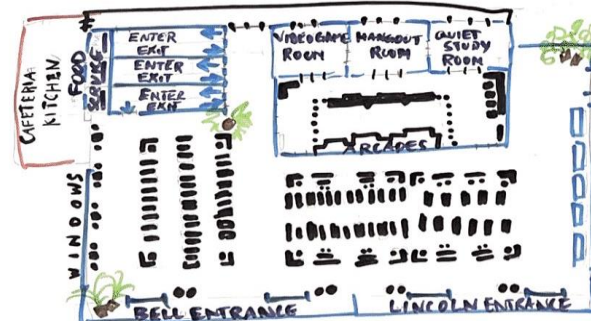
NEED FOR AN IMPROVED CAFETERIA EXPERIENCE



COOPERATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS TO IMPROVE FOOD SERVICES



STUDENT GIVE FEEDBACK ON MENU DESIGN



PROPOSED CAFETERIA LAYOUT

Possibilities...!

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SODEXO & CHEC BLOSSOMS FOR OUR STUDENTS

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 support students during the design process, advocate for the solutions they proposed, and enact the changes.

Execution

- Design App for use to communicate both kits
- Follow guidelines AND get what we want.
- Make an MOU/contract to guide our process and guide their process.
- Give ^{School} Community a heads up on changes and happening
- Partner w/culturally Rel. Restaurants
- Communicate w/us/them: Regularly revise Contract
- Regularly Poll students about entertainment
- Signage for Norms for Care of Cafeteria
- Have different trash places for Compost, Recycle...
- Use Signage, 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 as a result?

- 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

- Training of Kitchen Staff ^{ongoing c.s. training}
^{unannounced visits...}
 - Cook Food on site
 - Better food Reduces food waste !!
- Reduce Food Waste ^{Look into Composting}
 - 1 day a week of culturally relevant food from a outside vendor

Input into Menu -
culturally relevant

Transparency -
as → timelines for initiative - communication / DCPS
Data ^{Food description}
^{- calories}
^{- ingredients}

^{will create later} - Student Advisory Board to ^{Marketing} meet monthly Finance Class

^{Survey Box to provide feedback} - Monthly Survey - will show up next
^{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 Penners



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

Tuna Salad Filling
Dinner Roll
Apple Slices
Orange Slices
Broccoli Slaw
Baby Carrots
Super Side Salad

TUES

Hard Boiled Egg
Dinner Roll
Fresh Banana
Diced Peaches
Caesar Salad
Chilled Peas
Super Side Salad

WED

Chicken Salad
Filling
Dinner Roll
Orange Wedges
Frozen Blueberries
Slices Cucumber
Red Bell Pepper
Strips
Super Side Salad

THURS

Pulled Chicken
Dinner Roll
Apple Slices
Diced Pears
Tomato, Cucumber
& Cilantro Salad
Roasted Chickpeas
Super Side Salad

FRI

Jalapeño Lime
Chicken
Dinner Roll
Orange Slices
Diced Pears
Carolina Slaw
Celery Sticks
Super Side Salad

DRESSINGS

Italian
Ranch

THIS INSTITUTION IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER.

How we made change

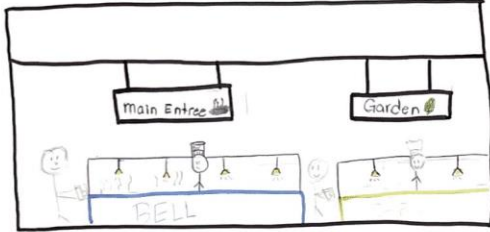
- After looking at our data, we realized that we couldn't just say what changes we wanted. We had to work with the food supplier to make changes that also fit within the nutritional requirements and budget. We met with the supplier and told them what students wanted. The supplier proposed new menus,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



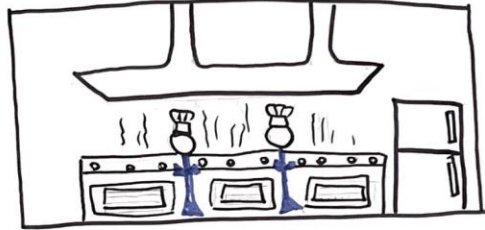
HEALTHY FOOD CHOSEN
BY THE CHEC COMMUNITY



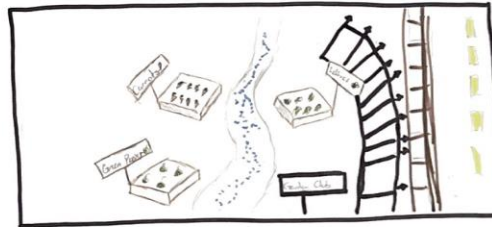
STUDENTS DESIGN MENUS THAT
APPEAL TO THEM. MENUS ARE
TRANSPARENT.



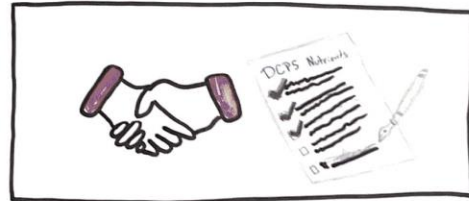
OUR FOOD PARTNERS MAKE
THEIR HEALTHY CUISINE AVAILABLE
ON CAMPUS



OUR COOKING TEAM ARE
TRAINED TO EXECUTE ON OUR MENU



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



OUR MENUS ADHERE TO
NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Brig Idea Self-op¹⁰ User Needs/

CHEC Become a Self-Operated Kitchen and we can cook on site

- Culturally relevant Food
- Work with local vendors

Set a Positive Productive 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

~~transform~~ Hire staff & pay well

transform Cafeteria
Kitchen - equipment
Modernizing
Long-lasting
feasible

Coordinate all vendors
Coordinator for the whole thing
Stable meal plan
Nutrition approval from DCPS
Streamline service production

Use our garden

Organization Needs/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



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

★ Both fresh farms and the WNDCEd. 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 Potatoes

Salad bar

STEAK
non-pre
heat

Saled bowls
• Nachos
• PB & J
• Biscuits
• Lemonade

More cultural, fusion foods
Better chicken, meat and fish
More choice of fruits
More healthy choices

On the way
• Soft
• Cheese
• Shrimp
• Fries

Tamale
Pupusas
Tacos
Assort of
pizzas
Water bottles

Salads
Chicken Caesar
Chicken Tenders
Real Meat
Beef

Chicken Salads
• Anything other than
milk.

Traditional Mexican Tacos
Sushi
Salad bar - Cheesecake
Arroz pasta
Chili burgers with pickles
Dessert

Fruit
Pizza
Chicken

Salad
Traditional Breakfast
Orange juice
Apple juice
Pineapple
Fruit
All frozen fruits

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 do not hesitate to contact:

- Maria Tukeva, Principal of the Columbia Heights Educational Campus, at maria.tukeva@k12.dc.gov
- Dara Shaw, Research Director of the DC Education Research Collaborative, at dshaw@urban.org