

Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story



Glendale Unified School District's Smarter Lunchroom Movement Initiative

Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with Glendale Unified School District (GUSD) to work on a variety of strategies, which includes conducting nutrition education, increasing healthy food access by implementing expanded/mobile produce distributions, implementing the Smarter Lunchroom Movement, engaging youth to mobilize installing hydration stations, implementing share tables to redistribute surplus food, and improving physical activity in afterschool settings through implementation of CATCH Kids Club. GUSD is a public-school district that serves 25,000 students in preschool through 12th grade and has 32 school sites primarily in Glendale, California. Students come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and speak 48 different languages; over 50% of GUSD students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The GUSD CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) Team worked in two elementary schools in GUSD to implement the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SLM) initiative. SLM uses research-based strategies to “nudge” students to select, eat, and enjoy healthy food options in schools, without eliminating choice. GUSD’s goal was to create brighter, more colorful cafeteria spaces, encourage healthy eating, and engage students in the process. In addition to implementing environmental changes at the school sites, GUSD collaborated with another DPH CFHL funded partner, Adventist Health Glendale Foundation, to teach a series of nutrition education classes for students and families. Adventist Health Educators taught the 5-week *Let’s Eat Healthy* series for students at both schools, and 6-week *Around the Table: Nourishing Families* series for parents and caregivers.

GUSD completed the SLM pre-assessment scorecards in collaboration with nutrition services department staff at the beginning of the school year. The scorecards helped gain a better understanding of the great work that was already happening in the lunchrooms, and where there were opportunities for improvement. The pre-assessment showed that there were opportunities to enhance student involvement, school community involvement and lunchroom atmosphere at both sites, in addition to highlighting fruits and vegetables on the serving line. After discussing the results with

cafeteria managers and nutrition services leadership, GUSD chose 10 strategies to implement at each school, starting with the most feasible strategies to build buy-in and gain support for the initiative, and building upon that work throughout the year. GUSD completed SLM post-assessment scorecards towards the end of the school year. In the first year of implementation, both elementary schools increased from the Bronze to Silver award level. Mann Elementary increased 11 points and Jefferson Elementary increased 5 points.

Below are some of the strategies that were implemented during the school year:

- GUSD displayed colorful healthy eating posters and bulletin boards in the cafeteria to improve the lunchroom atmosphere and purchased cafeteria menu boards and colorful pans to display fruits and vegetables on the garden bar.
- To encourage student involvement, GUSD collaborated with teachers to have students develop fun, creative names for fruits and vegetables, such as “Spectacular Strawberries” and “Caring Carrots.” These names were printed on cards and labeled on the garden bar at the point of selection. They were also featured on the monthly menu, with a special shout out to the classes that came up with the descriptive names.
- GUSD led taste tests of fresh berries and locally grown peaches and tangerines for students. During these activities, students overwhelmingly selected “Loved It” on the interactive feedback posters.
- School Principals connected GUSD with local artists to lead a series of art workshops with students in the after-school program and Student Council. Students had the opportunity to contribute ideas towards cafeteria mural projects highlighting fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods at their school. GUSD held mural “grand opening” events attended by the GUSD Superintendent, Board Members, school staff, students and parents.
- GUSD created a video to highlight and share this work with the school community and partner stakeholders.



GUSD received positive feedback from cafeteria managers, students, principals, and teachers about the lunchroom updates. Cafeteria managers said that students read the healthy messages displayed on the posters in the cafeteria as they come through the serving line, such as “Choose a Fun Fruit” and “Try Some Tasty Veggies.” Principals have thanked the GUSD CalFresh Healthy Living team for providing their students with an opportunity to be creative. Teachers have shared that their students enjoy reading the lunch menu and seeing the fun adjectives in front of the fruits and vegetables.

After seeing the impacts of the SLM strategies in their lunchrooms, cafeteria managers have been supportive of the initiative and motivated to sustain the changes. GUSD also had support from Nutrition Services Department leadership in maintaining and expanding this initiative. The department has provided the CFHL team dedicated time at their Managers Meeting to share information about the SLM to all cafeteria staff and has even gone so far as to purchase colorful food pans and salad bar signs for the remaining schools in the district, so that students at all 32 school sites have the opportunity to participate in this experience. By creating brighter, more colorful lunchroom environments that nudge students to make healthy choices, GUSD hopes to encourage a lifetime of healthy habits for all students.

Favorite Quote

“Thanks so much for the incredible job you are doing providing breakfasts and lunches to all my students. One of their favorite parts of the day is reading the menu. They have loved all of the creative adjectives placed in front of the fruits and vegetables. Yesterday we learned all about the Rambutan fruit and they all loved it today and said it was sweeter than candy. Thanks for making my students excited about their lunches. Please be sure to thank everyone else you work with and tell them how happy it makes my class.” – Rebecca Harvey, Second Grade Elementary School Teacher

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