RETHINKING SCHOOL LUNCH OAKLAND

CENTRAL KITCHEN, URBAN FARM, AND EDUCATION CENTER

THE HUB OF A NEW DISTRICT-WIDE SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEM NETWORK
We are committed to building a school district that provides quality education and equitable outcomes for all children—and to make this goal a reality, we have to create conditions that allow children to grow and learn at high levels. This starts with taking care of our students’ most basic needs, such as nutrition, so they can develop and reach their full potential.

—Tony Smith, Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District

While OUSD has made great improvements in the meals served to students ... more must be done. However, we have reached a point where we can’t continue without drastic change in our facilities.

—Jennifer LeBarre, Director, Nutrition Services, Oakland Unified School District

School food provides one of the best occasions we know for simultaneously supporting student well-being, building healthy lifelong habits, and promoting our economy and environment—all while offering the pleasure of delicious, appealing meals that celebrate our agricultural abundance and rich cultures.

—Zenobia Barlow, Executive Director, Center for Ecoliteracy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. 4

**THE RETHINKING SCHOOL LUNCH OAKLAND INITIATIVE** ............... 6

**A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO HEALTH AND LEARNING** .................... 8

WELLNESS, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND LIFELONG SUCCESS ........ 8

**CONSTRUCTING GREEN FACILITIES** .......................................... 10

GREEN DESIGN ...................................................................... 10

NUTRITION SERVICES HUB ....................................................... 10

URBAN AGRICULTURE .............................................................. 10

THE BUILDING AS TEACHER ..................................................... 10

**ENCOURAGING EDUCATION INNOVATION** ................................. 11

INTEGRATING FOOD, HEALTH, CULTURE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT ...... 11

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER .................................... 11

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ...................................................... 12

  The Central Kitchen: A State-of-the-Art Destination ........................... 12
  The Urban Farm and Greenhouse: An Experiential Learning Lab ............ 12
  The Teaching Kitchen: A Place to Learn Culinary Arts .......................... 12

**PLANNING AND TIMELINE** .................................................... 13

DEVELOPING THE TIMELINE .................................................. 13

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY .................................................. 13

PARTNERING WITH THE CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY ....................... 13

**ABOUT OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT** ......................... 15

**ABOUT THE CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY** ................................. 15
THE HUB OF A NEW DISTRICT-WIDE SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEM NETWORK

This concept paper was prepared by Center for Ecoliteracy (CEL) based on research and interviews with Oakland School District (OUSD) Superintendent Tony Smith, Associate Superintendent, Curtiss Sarikey, and Nutrition Services Director Jennifer LeBarre.

INTRODUCTION

The Oakland Unified School District Central Kitchen, Urban Farm, and Education Center (“the Center”) is the centerpiece of Rethinking School Lunch Oakland, a district-wide initiative integrating school food and education innovations. The Center will be a state-of-the-art green facility and a model for the nation.

The current Marcus Foster School in West Oakland is the site of the Center conversion. The completed complex will include:

• a 44,000 square-foot central kitchen and commissary,
• teaching kitchen and culinary classroom,
• meeting rooms and offices,
• 1.5 acre urban production farm and greenhouse, and
• food storage space and transportation bays.

The Center will be the hub of a new district-wide school food system network. This network connects nutrition, education, and community programs at OUSD’s satellite kitchens, school-community kitchens, school gardens, and
produce market stands. The road map for this comprehensive reform is detailed in the *Rethinking School Lunch Oakland Feasibility Study*. The facilities recommendations in the study were incorporated in the *OUSD Facilities Master Plan 2012*.

The Center is an expression of the district’s five-year strategic plan, “Community Schools, Thriving Students”. This strategic plan focuses on the OUSD mission of becoming a full service community district that serves the whole child, addresses systemic inequalities, and provides each child with excellent teachers every day.

Funds for the site conversion and food system facility innovations throughout the district were secured through Measure J, a bond measure approved by nearly 84% of Oakland voters in November 2012.

This concept paper is intended to help align and inspire the many varied stakeholders for this innovative program.
THE RETHINKING SCHOOL LUNCH OAKLAND INITIATIVE

Rethinking School Lunch Oakland is a comprehensive initiative designed to address health, environmental, and social issues by bringing OUSD students into a new relationship with food as part of their daily educational experience.

During the 2010–2011 school year, OUSD and the Center for Ecoliteracy launched the Rethinking School Lunch Oakland initiative with a comprehensive review of the OUSD Nutrition Services program. The resulting *Rethinking School Lunch Oakland Feasibility Study* created a road map for district-wide school food innovation to dramatically improve the quality of school meals. The study noted the importance of nutrition in academic achievement and student well-being and made recommendations for significant changes in facilities, including the:

- conversion of an existing site into a green central kitchen,
- development of an urban farm,
- installation of fourteen school-community kitchens, and
- upgrade of additional satellite kitchens to create a nutrition services network throughout the district.

These changes were incorporated into the *OUSD Facilities Master Plan 2012*, which was unanimously adopted by the OUSD Board of Education.

Rethinking School Lunch Oakland has received multi-year funding from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, TomKat Charitable Trust, and the trustees of the Center for Ecoliteracy, with additional support provided by The California Endowment, The Safeway Foundation/Children’s Hospital Oakland Research Institute, and The San Francisco Foundation.
Above are two perspectives of the Central Kitchen, Urban Farm, and Education Center conversion of the Marcus Foster School site. Concept renderings were created by Richard Feldman / EHDD based on specifications from Steve Marshall / The Marshall Associates, Inc., and commissioned by the Center for Ecoliteracy as part of the *Rethinking School Lunch Oakland Feasibility Study*. 
A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO HEALTH AND LEARNING

Student wellness and learning are inextricably linked. The school food innovations envisioned for the Center reflect whole systems change throughout the district and fulfill the OUSD “Community Schools, Thriving Students” strategy, touching students, their families, surrounding communities, and the City of Oakland itself.

WELLNESS, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND LIFELONG SUCCESS

The goal of the Center is to support the district’s commitment to providing a quality education and equitable outcomes for all children. This includes a fresher, healthier diet that helps to address serious health disparities and food justice issues while contributing to student well-being and readiness to learn. It also includes opportunities for learning and entrepreneurship that help prepare students for college and careers.

In pursuit of this goal, the Center will:

• Create a state-of-the-art school food service facility and program that serves as a model for the nation. The facility will prepare fresh, nutritious, tasty meals that emphasize regionally sourced ingredients;

• Increase student engagement and academic performance through learning opportunities linking food, culture, health, and the environment;

• Provide internships and youth enterprise opportunities that help prepare students for careers in the culinary arts, urban agriculture, teaching, and small business management;

• Advance a model of green practices in the building and food service program that offers teaching and learning opportunities; and

• Establish a regular produce market and community kitchen that embody OUSD’s commitment to full service community schools.
ABOUT OAKLAND UNIFIED

38,099
Number of students enrolled

84
Number of schools

6,633,777
Number of meals served per year

70%
Percent free and reduced meals

$15,229,601
Annual cost of serving nearly 7 million meals
CONSTRUCTING GREEN FACILITIES

Rethinking School Lunch Oakland’s innovations begin with the Center site, which will serve as the hub of OUSD’s network of programs that connect nutrition, health, education, and community.

GREEN DESIGN

Green building practices and processes will be critical features of the building, operations, and the education program. There is a growing body of evidence that links sustainable building design to improved academic performance. OUSD is committed to incorporating sustainable building technologies in new and renovated facilities whenever possible. These technologies save energy and provide a comfortable and healthy learning environment.

NUTRITION SERVICES HUB

The central kitchen will feature state-of-the-art equipment housed in an efficiently designed space. The conversion will incorporate modern innovations in sustainable materials, food warehousing, and waste management. Equipment will be selected to facilitate large-batch preparation and preserve food integrity and nutrition. Recommendations for the facilities conversion, including estimated project costs and timeline, are detailed in the Rethinking School Lunch Oakland Feasibility Study.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

A 1.5 acre urban farm with greenhouse will be sited adjacent to the central kitchen as a key component of its operations and program. The farm will be a living expression of the district’s connection to seasonal, fresh food for students and the local community. The farm and greenhouse will also serve as a learning lab where students will experience urban agriculture firsthand.

THE BUILDING AS TEACHER

A green building enriches education because its design includes built in teaching and learning opportunities. For example, students can learn about the building’s
energy conservation as a model of sustainable construction. Additionally, the site is designed to provide internship and career development training opportunities in farming, food preparation, and small food-related business development.

**ENCOURAGING EDUCATION INNOVATION**

The Center provides a rare opportunity to create integrated facilities and programs for teaching and learning. OUSD will develop a scope and sequence that identifies specific grade level understandings and skills for grades pre-K through 12 that are compatible with the national Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and other curriculum guidelines used by the school district. This scope and sequence will serve as a framework for the Center’s educational programs.

**INTEGRATING FOOD, CULTURE, HEALTH, AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

The education program will provide students an understanding of the ecology of the natural world and their connection to it, revealing the interrelationships of food, culture, health, and the environment.

Students become capable of making informed choices about what they eat when they understand where their food comes from and how it is produced; how culture shapes our choices and behavior; the relationship between food and health; and the links between food and the environment. California’s rich and diverse cultural heritage and its vibrant contemporary culinary influences will be woven into teaching and learning across all grade clusters.

**PREPARING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER**

The Center will become the home of an Academy for Culinary Arts and Sciences. It will also provide on-the-job internship and youth entrepreneurship opportunities for OUSD high school students. The Center will enable the district—which employs more than 300 Nutrition Services Department staff members—to train students for jobs in school districts, hospitals, and other large service agencies, as well as providing guidance for students who seek entrepreneurial opportunities.
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

There are three key learning environments at the Center:

The Central Kitchen: A State-of-the-Art Destination

The Center will provide an example for school districts and other large agencies across the nation on how to transition from meals made of processed, heat-and-serve items to meals that are freshly prepared, healthy, and regionally sourced. At the Center, students and guests will observe professionally trained cooks at work and see how to prepare approximately seven million meals each year for 40,000 school children while operating on a limited budget. Students and guests will learn about OUSD’s relationships with farmers and community organizations, the historical significance of Oakland and its place in California’s agricultural landscape, and the role that food production and access play in the resiliency of a community.

The Urban Farm and Greenhouse: An Experiential Learning Lab

The farm and greenhouse will serve as a learning laboratory where students will experience urban agriculture firsthand. OUSD students from grades pre-K through 12 will visit the farm to learn concepts and skills that are identified in the Common Core State Standards and other curriculum guidelines used by the school district. The farm’s crops, small farm animals, and greenhouse will provide living examples of daily and seasonal growth cycles, the effects of weather and agricultural strategies on the resiliency of plants and animals, and the web of relationships that support the health of a cultivated ecosystem.

The Teaching Kitchen: A Place to Learn Culinary Arts

A complementary component of the Center will be a teaching kitchen, where students at different grade levels will receive hands-on instruction. Culinary arts and sciences is a growing and popular career pathway among high school students across the nation. OUSD students will have an opportunity to link academic learning to on-site culinary training where they learn nutrition, the chemistry of cooking, hospitality, and business management skills. The teaching kitchen will also be a facet of student internship and youth enterprise programs.
As the district transitions to serving more fresh foods in school meals, it recognizes the importance of supporting Nutrition Services staff in successfully preparing the new menus. An on-site teaching kitchen will greatly enhance staff expertise. Serving as one of fourteen school-community kitchen sites identified in the OUSD Facilities Master Plan, the Center and its teaching kitchen can also be used for neighborhood meal preparation classes, as a business incubator for small commercial food production enterprises, and as a space for fundraisers in which local chefs offer workshops and demonstrations.

**PLANNING AND TIMELINE**

**DEVELOPING THE TIMELINE**

OUSD Superintendent Tony Smith has committed to a rapid timeline for focusing the district’s attention on the Center conversion, which is targeted to open during the 2015–2016 school year. Detailed timelines for the design, approval, and conversion of the site and for designing the standards-based education program are currently being developed.

**ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY**

The positive, visionary, and practical whole systems change occurring in Oakland has clear news value that will interest national and local media and the general public. Integrated communications and community engagement efforts for the Center and Rethinking School Lunch Oakland innovations will leverage public support for school food reform, evidenced in the passage of Measure J in November 2012 by 84% of Oakland voters. As planning and construction for the Center begin, the new site will become the centerpiece of many stories that allow the community to recognize the impact of their shared investment. The OUSD full service community school mission and the goal of serving more fresh, healthy food will be core messages of the communications strategy.

**PARTNERING WITH THE CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY**

As a nonprofit organization and trusted ally from the Center’s inception, the Center for Ecoliteracy is uniquely positioned and qualified to participate as
a development partner of the Center. OUSD will partner with the Center for Ecoliteracy as the lead agency in:

• facilitating the design process for the Central Kitchen, Urban Farm, and Education Center facilities and related programs,

• fundraising to support the Center’s program design and implementation,

• developing integrated, standards-based experiential education and career development programs in alignment with the OUSD full service community schools mission, and

• developing communications and media strategies.
ABOUT OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Oakland Unified School District is a public education system composed of 84 schools that are attended by 46,377 students. OUSD boasts one of the most diverse student populations in California and the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of its community is one of OUSD’s greatest assets. In 2011, the district adopted “Community Schools, Thriving Students”: A Five Year Strategic Plan (2011-2016). The Strategic Plan was created to help enable OUSD to fulfill the ambitious mission of becoming a full service community district that serves the whole child, ameliorates systemic inequalities, and provides each child with excellent teachers every day. To realize this objective, the Strategic Plan calls for developing each Oakland public school into a “full service community school” modeled on the Children’s Aid Society’s “developmental triangle.” One side of this triangle is “developing social, emotional, and physical health.” A second side is “ensuring a high quality instructional core.” The third side is “creating equitable opportunities for learning.” School food relates to and is foundational to all three of these.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR ECOLITERACY

The Center for Ecoliteracy is dedicated to education for sustainable living. A leader in K-12 school food reform and school gardens for more than a decade, CEL was an early recipient of the USDA’s Community Food Security competitive grants for the Food Systems Project, which was named among the USDA’s “top ten” projects. CEL partnered with the Berkeley Unified School District and Chez Panisse Foundation in the School Lunch Initiative, and developed the Rethinking School Lunch framework used by school districts across the nation. CEL has published books and publications, including the discussion guide for Food Inc. for Participant Media; produced conferences and seminars; facilitated professional development programs; and served as a strategic consultant to schools and businesses, including Annie’s Naturals.
Rethinking School Lunch Oakland is supported with major funding from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, The California Endowment, and TomKat Charitable Trust.