EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Scratch Cooking in Schools Solution

A Policy Roadmap for Boosting Children's Health, Learning Outcomes, Environmental Sustainability, and Local Economies

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Today, nearly 70% of a typical child's diet is made up of ultra-processed foods, which are associated with more than 30 health conditions.[1-2] Many of these foods come from K–12 schools, which serve more than 30 million children breakfast and lunch every school day through the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program.[3]

To protect and improve children's health — and to access cascading academic, environmental, and economic benefits — schools must serve students more minimally processed meals cooked from scratch.

While most schools want to serve their students more scratch-made meals, their ability to do so is significantly limited by systemic labor, financial, and infrastructure barriers, as well as public perceptions that devalue the critical role school food professionals play in supporting the well-being of our nation's children.[4]

Chef Ann Foundation's report, *The Scratch Cooking in Schools Solution*, outlines the organization's policy priorities for increasing scratch cooking in schools; expanding access to healthy school meals; and unlocking the academic, environmental, economic, and social benefits scratch cooking offers children and communities.

Find the full report here or scan the QR code.

About the Chef Ann Foundation

The Chef Ann Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to promoting scratch cooking in K-12 schools. Scratch cooking lets schools serve the healthiest, tastiest meals so kids are well-nourished and ready to learn. Founded in 2009 by Chef Ann Cooper, we've supported more than 16,000 schools and helped 4.4 million kids eat healthier, fresher school meals in all 50 states.

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1. Wang, L., Martínez Steele, E., Du, M., Pomeranz, J. L., O'Connor, L. E., Herrick, K. A., Luo, H., Zhang, X., Mozaffarian, D., & Zhang, F. F. (2021). Trends in consumption of ultraprocessed foods among US youths aged 2-19 years, 1999-2018. *JAMA, 326*(6), 519-530.
2. MacMillan, C. (2024, July 10). *Ultraprocessed foods: Are they bad for you?* Yale Medicine.
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2022). *The National School Lunch Program*.
4. Creel, K. (2024, May 3). *2024 National School Nutrition Association survey highlights the growing farm to school trend, importance of school meals for all.* National Farm to School Network.

Chef Ann Foundation's Policy Priorities for Increasing Scratch Cooking in K-12 Schools

Our policy priorities are organized according to the five key areas of school food operations: **food, facilities, finances, human resources, and marketing.** Policies should support school food programs in all of these five key areas to achieve lasting solutions toward improving the quality of school food.

Food	**Procure more local, regional, & values-aligned ingredients**	• Increase farm-to-school and local food for schools funding • Establish a permanent USDA local procurement program • Prioritize purchasing U.S.-sourced protein and produce • Remove requirements for awarding contracts to the lowest bidder • Pass the following federal bills: Farm to School Act; Local School Foods Expansion Act; and Local Procurement Act
	Use cleaner ingredients	• Better regulate additives in school foods • Pass the federal Safe School Meals Act
	Reduce ultra-processed foods	• Develop a formal definition for ultra-processed foods • Pass the Scratch Cooked Meals for Students Act
	Serve more plant-forward meals	• Create a grant program that helps schools serve more plant-forward meals • Pass the federal Healthy Future Students and Earth Pilot Program Act
	Diversify & demystify federal school food purchasing	Accurately track and publicly disclose comprehensive food supply chain data for USDA Foods and DoD Fresh
	Reduce food & packaging waste	• Create a USDA grant program that helps schools implement food waste measurement, prevention, education, and reduction projects • Pass the School Food Recovery Act
Facilities	**Update kitchen infrastructure & equipment**	• Offer more kitchen infrastructure and equipment grants to schools • Pass the School Food Modernization Act
Finances	**Provide free meals to all students**	Pass state and federal universal free school meals legislation (Healthy School Meals for All)
	Remove a barrier to participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)	Increase the CEP multiplier from 1.6 to 2.5
	Increase school meal reimbursement rates	• Increase school breakfast reimbursement by 28 cents • Increase school lunch reimbursement by 45 cents • Review and, if needed, adjust meal reimbursement rates annually
Human Resources	**Expand federally registered healthy school food apprenticeship programs**	• Expand the federally registered Healthy School Food Pathway apprenticeship program to all states • Invest in school food workforce training
	Fairly compensate school food professionals	• Increase wages and benefits for school food professionals through a portion of proposed increases for federal meal reimbursement rates • Provide affordable health coverage for school food professionals • Offer stipends to school food professionals for completing comprehensive training programs and remaining in the school food workforce • Pass the federal SCHOOL Professionals Act
	Recognize the lunchroom as a space for learning	• Designate meal time as curriculum time for learning positive eating habits for a healthy life • Recognize that school food professionals can be an integral part of the education system
Marketing	**Rebrand school food jobs**	Execute campaigns that seek to positively shift perceptions about the school food workforce and demonstrate the inherent value of these roles in shaping the health of our children and nation

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Find the full report here.