

SCALE - Scratch Cooking Assessment & Learning Evaluation

Supporting school districts with free customized assessments and recommendations

Announcing the newest resource for K-12 school food programs: the Scratch Cooking Assessment & Learning Evaluation (SCALE). After 12+ years of school food operational support, the Chef Ann Foundation has built a free-access digital platform that offers the first comprehensive self-assessment focused on improving nutrition, enhancing school meal programs, and increasing scratch cooking.

Why SCALE?

American kids start their lifepath in K-12 schools, where they learn the skills necessary to thrive and meet their potential. The passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010 was a great first step in creating stronger nutrition standards for school food. Although school meals have become healthier since 2010, school food programs across the nation are still facing limitations that inevitably lead to the incorporation of more highly processed food items into school meal programs. Furthermore, the development of highly processed food items has increasingly contributed to [nutrition-related chronic conditions](#). With 31 million children eating school lunch every day and health issues like [obesity](#) continuing to affect our nation's youth, this is a national issue that needs to be addressed.

Scratch cooking uses real food with real ingredients, and has the potential to catalyze [multiple benefits](#) across the school food system. Many school districts want to improve their meal programs, but don't have the bandwidth to assess their current operations or determine where to start.

What is SCALE?

SCALE is the very first platform that processes data to generate a customized recommendation report, to give districts a clear direction on how to improve their programs. SCALE is **free for schools nationwide** and is hosted on [The Lunch Box website](#).

Chef Ann Cooper started assessing school food programs over 20 years ago, providing recommendations to school districts in their journey to move to scratch cooking and improve the quality of school meals. The Chef Ann Foundation (CAF) has supported districts in implementing scratch cooking operations in schools across the country, working closely with districts with on-the-ground assessments, trainings, and operational resources. For the last two years, CAF has been building this software to allow districts to assess their own programs and increase scratch cooking.





School food professionals can generate a customized assessment of their program, which includes linked resources, section scores, recommendations, and supporting research. Users take the assessment at their own pace and have immediate access to the generated report. As SCALE evolves, users will also receive recommendations of peer/mentor districts based on scores and proximity. SCALE is free to all school districts thanks to generous gifts from our donors including Whole Kids Foundation and Life Time Foundation.

SCALE Content Areas

The assessment is based on Chef Ann Foundation's 5 Key Areas, plus a special focus on scratch cooking components:

- Food - menu cycles, procurement, reporting
- Scratch Cooking - ingredients, processed elements
- Finances - budgets, revenue/deficit, labor cost
- Facilities - equipment, production, storage
- Human Resources - personnel, professional development
- Marketing - communication channels, lunchroom education activities

SCALE allows food service directors to have tangible, data-driven strategies to enhance our programs, and to articulate our needs to district counterparts who want to support us in the healthy food effort.

- Erin Primer, Food Service Director at San Luis Coastal Unified School District

How to use SCALE Results

Assessment reports provide a comprehensive, high-level review of all major food program elements and range from 10-15 pages. Districts can use reports to develop strategic plans or guide program development. These reports can also help guide decisions around procurement, menuing, professional development, and hiring. Additionally, results can be shared with internal and external stakeholders to garner support for improvements in school nutrition programs. The assessment can be taken annually and will allow users to compare their program's progress to previous years. Future assessments will focus on more specific categories, like salad bars or local procurement.

Learn more at www.thelunchbox.org/scale

The Chef Ann Foundation is a 501c(3) non-profit dedicated to promoting whole-ingredient, scratch cooking in schools. Scratch cooking enables schools to serve the healthiest, tastiest meals so that kids are well-nourished and ready to learn. To date, we've reached more than 13,500 schools and 3.3 million kids with healthy school programming.