

VANCOUVER SCHOOL BOARD CAFETERIA OPERATIONS REVIEW – 2016

FINAL REPORT

October 2016

PROJECT: BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Vancouver School Board has 18 Cafeterias, 17 in schools and one at the School Board Office. Eight of the School cafeterias are contracted out to a Food Services provider. Eight of the District run cafeterias have student educational programs in them. There are eight Culinary Arts Programs and two of the eight schools also have an Ace It program.

The teaching kitchen/cafeterias have undergone changes for the last few years. These changes have come about as financial accountability and budgets restrictions increased.

A consulting company was hired in 2012 to make recommendations to increase efficiencies and decrease costs in VSB run cafeterias, including the cafeterias offering Culinary Arts and Ace It programs. Some of the recommendations were acted upon immediately and some, for a variety of reasons, were not.

Some of the major changes acted upon included obtaining a point of sale (POS) system for the cafeterias, site production kitchens (SPK), uniform pricing of food, consolidating purchasing to fewer vendors, district supervision of cafeteria staff and regulations around catering operations.

During the school year of 2015-2016, issues with some of these changes were brought to the District's attention by IUOE, VSTA and Administrators. The District felt it necessary to re look at teaching kitchen operations to try and resolve issues that had surfaced, keeping in mind student learning and budget restrictions.

The objective was to come to consensus on what was working and what needed to be altered slightly or changed altogether.

APPROACH

Conversations were arranged with stakeholder groups, including the Food Services Supervisor, IUOE president, cafeteria support staff representatives, VSTA president, Culinary Arts teacher representatives and Secondary School Administrators.

Participants were encouraged to voice their concerns and to also offer suggestions for improvement. They were also asked if they could give other suggestions that might assist with a reduction of costs in the teaching cafeterias.

Culinary Arts curriculum, budget documents, Cafeteria Teacher Assistant job descriptions, communications from Food Services, memos from District Office, as well as the consultant's report from 2012 and their follow up report from 2014 were examined.

OVERVIEW OF ISSUES/CONCERNS

The majority of the concerns brought up have been put into the following table for ease of viewing. The X indicates if it was a concern with that group. An explanation of each concern is outlined below the chart.

CONCERN	IUOE	VSTA	ADMINISTRATORS
1 -Supervision Model	X	X	X
2 -Consultation	X	X	X
3 -Communication	X	X	X
4 -Purchasing	X	X	
5 -Point of Sales (POS)	X	X	
6 -Student Learning Focus		X	X
7 -Staff Morale	X	X	X
8 -'Free Food'	X	X	X
9 -Site Production Kitchens (SPK)	X	X	X
10 -Conflict between VSTA and IUOE	X	X	X
11 -Student Enrolment	X	X	X
12 -Pricing	X	X	X
13 -Catering	X	X	X
14 -Role of Food Services	X	X	X
15 -Student Meal Cards	X	X	X
16 -Round Table/Group Meetings	X	X	X
17 -Learning Outcomes	X	X	
18 -Teacher Professional Autonomy	X	X	X
19 -Student Error Costs	X	X	
20 -Equity (with other food sales & contracted sites)	X		
21 -Community Food Programs		X	
22 -Replacement Staff	X	X	

CONCERNS OUTLINED

1 – Supervision Model

The cafeteria support workers, titled Cafeteria Teacher Assistant (CTA) in their job descriptions, had the building principal as their supervisor prior to September 2015. That supervision model was changed at the district level and in September 2015 the Food Services Supervisor became their direct supervisor. A document titled *Changes to Food Services and Cafeteria Services November 2, 2015*, under the section Reporting and Supervision states "The IUOE cafeteria staff report to the Food Services Supervisor, who is responsible for all Employee Services supervisory related requirements including approving hours of work, training, performance reviews, etc." All three groups voiced concern with this change and for very similar reasons. The supervisor was not usually in the building so could not diffuse any issues or clarify directions in the moment, allowing some situations to escalate to a difficult place before they were dealt with. A few employees used the fact that the teacher, lead hand, principal were not their supervisor and therefore did not have to do what they told them or listen to their advice. Some participants felt that there was not a consistent enforcement by the Food Services Supervisor of the new rules. Some cafeterias stated that they had not heard of the changes and were continuing business as usual, others felt as though they were being micro-managed and that their professionalism was being called into question. The principals felt that although they were in charge of the building, they could not supervise all the staff in it.

2 – Consultation

All three groups felt that all the changes in the cafeterias just happened with no consultation on anything even though it directly affected them and the work they do. They did not think that the district consulted on process, SPK, purchasing, pricing, supervision models, catering etc. One administrator said it felt as though they were being dictated to. The principals felt as though the cafeterias have been run a certain way for a very long time and that the changes were made without knowledge of what actually happens in them and that there were too many changes too fast to allow for proper adoption of the changes. The teachers thought that the district has taken on a very different focus for the cafeterias and that student learning is left out of the picture. IUOE was concerned that all the changes would reduce revenues and further reduce their hours of work.

3 – Communication

All three groups thought that communication to the teaching kitchens by senior management and Food Services was and continues to be inconsistent and ineffective. The changes in procedure usually came as announcements or directions from Food Services, but not all affected employees are notified and often did not get accurate, if any information. It was left up to the lead hand to communicate the new directions to teachers and others working in the cafeteria. This caused conflict. Whose job is it to communicate with staff, those in the teaching kitchen and the rest of the staff in the building? Teachers

felt as though they were the bearer of bad news as most staff still thought they were the go to person in the teaching Cafeteria. Teachers and principals felt as though they were left in the dark.

4 – Purchasing

The district made the decision, for financial reasons to reduce the number of suppliers in cafeterias. Schools were notified that they must purchase through a specific supplier. No consultation happened. The teachers and the IUOE employees now realize that there are savings to be made through purchasing consolidation, and as they work with the food and directly with the suppliers, they feel that they could have assisted with the decision and the RFP process. They are not happy with many of the products (both quantity and quality) from the mandatory supplier but are willing to work at developing a much shorter list of suppliers.

5 – Point of Sale (POS)

The District chose to go with a Point of Sale system called Bullfrog to better track food sales and thereby keep track of costs. None of the groups disagreed with the decision to have a point of sale product. Their concern lies with the system itself. The system is wireless internet based and as most of the Secondary Schools are quite old, the wireless internet is not overly reliable. When the internet goes down the POS system also goes down and they have to rely on writing things on paper. Student meal cards cannot be swiped and debit transactions cannot be accepted. The employees who work with the system (both teachers and CTAs) are concerned that every school is open for lunch at a similar time and there is only one person from the supplier who they can call for assistance. One of the CTAs said that she has noticed simple math errors with the system so no longer relies on it to calculate accurate change. Both groups voiced concern that they cannot easily monitor their daily sales as it is now done at the district level.

6 – Student Learning Focus

Teachers feel that the student learning focus has been lost in the teaching kitchens as the district shifted its focus to food production and cost saving. A document from the board office titled *Changes to Food Services and Cafeteria Services* stated that Secondary Schools were selected as SPK based on certain criteria including "culinary arts enrollment". This appears to agree with teachers concerns that students are expected to be "free labour" for food production. There is limited learning value in bagging a large number of lunches every day. One teacher refused to allow her students to participate and this caused conflict with the employees working in the SPK. Is the teaching kitchen still a classroom or has it been turned over to a food production facility? Teachers feel as though they are no longer welcome in their own classroom.

7 – Staff Morale

The staff in the teaching kitchens, both teachers and CTAs commented on the challenges in the cafeterias, with some saying that it was a toxic work environment and that the Chef and the teacher

often compete for leadership. Some support staff have said that they only have to listen to the Food Services Supervisor. Teachers and Chefs no longer work as a team in many of the kitchens with an 'us and them' mentality. Decisions that used to be either a joint decision or a teacher decision have become that of the lead hand.

8 – 'Free Food'

The decision was made at the District level through the budget process that beginning in 2016/17 "that staff pursue changes to the Cafeteria operating standards to eliminate any free or discounted food being provided to staff and students, in order to maximize the potential revenues generated by this program" (Revised Preliminary Budget Proposal 2016/2017 F3 page 34) The budget impact is listed as a saving of \$100,000. The amount of the saving was made without consultation with any staff working in teaching kitchens. The teachers and IUOE do not feel that this is a reasonable estimate as it assumes that each school can save \$1000 per month on free food given out. Teachers, IUOE and administrators stated that 'back in the old days' cafeterias were run like the 'wild wild west' with little to no accountability but that has changed in recent years. Cafeteria Teachers and CTAs working there both separately said that they and the students enrolled in the course do not get meals made specifically for them but that they only consume leftovers that cannot be re-utilized. This means, and students are told up front, that you might get to eat something, but you might not. IUOE staff was most concerned about the students who sign up for the program and are also vulnerable students. Both teachers and the CTAs said that teenagers, especially vulnerable ones are very private and want to maintain their dignity in public. The students feel that they are giving back or 'earning' the food rather than getting a hand out. Teachers are concerned that students learning in both foods and culinary arts have to be able to taste the food they make in order to learn. They wonder why the Culinary Arts students are no longer allowed to eat anything that they make but students who sign up for a regular foods class can.

9 - Site Production Kitchens (SPK)

All three groups felt that Site Production Kitchens were imposed on them with no consultation or warning. Teachers as outlined in #17 are concerned that student learning is being compromised by the expectation that Culinary Arts students are expected to participate in the production. There was also a concern raised that at some sites IUOE staff were given extra time to accommodate the increase in work but other sites were not.

10 – Conflict between VSTA and IUOE

Two different people who are both professionals but have to collaborate can present a challenge in many circumstances. With the new centralized model, the teachers feel as though this is no longer their classroom and the chefs feel as though this is now their space. This has been reinforced by some of the decisions and communications from Food Services. The Principals feel as though their hands are tied when conflict arises as they now only supervise the teachers.

11 – Student Enrollment

As the district faces declining enrolment both teachers and CTAs were concerned about what this means for the Culinary Arts program. They are concerned that as the numbers drop, some schools will continue placing teachers in the program to fill their schedules. It appears to those interviewed that these teachers have neither training nor passion for working in this environment with this group of students. Both groups interviewed were very obviously passionate about working with the students in this type of setting. The CTAs understood that their role is to work with students. Both CTAs and teachers voiced their concern for student learning as well as their commitment to assisting students with their sense of belonging and personal success.

12 – Pricing

All three groups agreed that prices in the teaching cafeterias needed to be increased. Once again no consultation happened and the new prices were a shock to many. Questions were asked around how were the new prices determined? Who made the decision as to what the new prices would be? Was anyone consulted? Schools that have external competition for the food dollars were especially concerned with the significant drop in revenue and the long term loss this might encourage. They stated that we cannot sell the food, made by students, if it costs more than what they can buy across the street. Then what will we teach the students with?

13 – Catering

Catering used to be entirely a school based decision and all groups agree that some schools used to take advantage of the loose accountability. No group agreed with the new directives around catering. In a memo from the District dated November 3, 2015, titled *Changes to Food Services and Cafeteria Services* states on page two under the heading of Priorities for Cafeteria Services, number one is Educational Supports including Culinary Teaching Programs. Number three is Catering Events, “where time and resources permit”. It also states that “Food Services has final responsibility for approval for determining whether there is capacity for internal catering services”. Teachers wonder why Food Services now limits how they get to meet learning outcomes? They state that this is a significant change and infringes on the professional autonomy of the Culinary teacher. Many schools have developed long term relationships with various community organizations through catering and teachers feel that those relationships are now gone because of the severe restrictions on catering. Teachers were also concerned that the Lead Hand now makes the decision about catering opportunities in isolation.

14 – Role of Food Services

Teachers, CTAs and administrators all commented that they are not sure what the role of the Food Services Staff is. They also wonder what the job descriptions of the employees in that department are. Are they there to help and assist schools to be better or are they there to police? What are the boundaries of their decisions?

15 – Student Meal Cards

All three groups like the idea of the student meal cards. Students and their family can choose to pay the full amount of the program on a monthly basis thereby not needing lunch money each day. School get to decide who should be partially or fully subsidized on the program. Teaching kitchen like having the cards as it's faster at checkout and they know how many meals they need to produce. No one knows if a student is subsidized so that stigma is reduced. The challenge is the monitoring of the cards. Not all students use the card every day, so the card does not get swiped and the money is not allocated to the program, but the meal was made. Some students, who are supposed to pay, forget to pay but the card is not deactivated so essentially they get free food. Some subsidized students share their cards. Who has the job of deactivating the cards? Who has the job of monitoring the cards and ensuring the money is submitted? Do students who are fully subsidized still have to submit an empty envelope or is their card activated for the year? The teachers and the CTAs were quite concerned about this and the fraud that they feel is quite widespread.

16 – Round Table/Group Meetings

All three groups voiced concern that there is not an organized opportunity for the teaching cafeteria staffs to get together, share successes and problem solve as well as potentially work collaboratively on projects. They all feel as though they are flying solo. It was pointed out that these meetings were a recommendation from a previous report but that it has not been acted on.

17 – Learning Outcomes

The teachers stated and the consultant confirmed, by examining the Learning Outcomes (LO) for Culinary Arts 10, 11 and 12, that the LOs cannot be met through a cafeteria lunch program only. Students must be involved in more than just lunch food production. Teachers felt that the students' learning has been compromised by the changes. The CTAs while not talking directly about the Learning outcomes felt that students are not learning as much without any catering opportunities.

18 – Teacher Professional Autonomy

Teachers no longer feel that they have control over how to provide the learning for the Culinary Arts program. They no longer get to decide if they can cater or what they can make and what food products they can use.

19 – Student Error Costs

The teachers and the CTAs both voiced concerned that now that teaching kitchens have been so centralized, how will the student errors be costed out/ who will be 'blamed' for food that cannot be served?

20 – Equity (with other food sales & contracted sites)

There is a perception with the IUOE members interviewed that the teaching cafeterias are at a disadvantage when it comes to what can be offered for sale by them. They believe that the contracted cafeterias and Student School stores do not have to follow the same Healthy Eating Guidelines when it comes to what can be sold. They feel the same when it comes to vending machines. This has not been investigated by the consultant.

21- Community Food Programs

Teachers feel that there is no flexibility from Food Services when it comes to many of the food programs that are in the community and that schools can choose to participate in. An example is the Bite of BC program. Teachers have to go through quite a lengthy application process and have to report out on what they do. Essentially the program provides free BC food to Culinary Arts programs to enhance the learning about BC products. As an example they were given salmon. Not enough to mass produce for the cafeteria but enough to learn new skills including preparation, new cooking techniques and presentation skills. They were told by Food Services that they could not sell the salmon meal at a discount to the staff at a luncheon even though the meal was produced during the regular day, the food was free and the students would be serving. The teachers saw this as an attempt to shut down this partnership and that it was just too much work to also have to get Food Services approval. It had to go through the POS system and they were told that there was no way to put the change into the system.

22 – Replacement Staff

IUOE said that they are concerned as there is often no replacement for absent CTAs. This causes a challenge as no matter what, the food has to be made on time. They also voiced concern about the qualifications of the replacements, stating that they did not think that they all had FoodSafe certification. They also brought up the issue of an on call certified chef, being called in to cover a dishwasher shift. The chefs will not accept those callouts as they do not get paid as well and most of them have a second job that they can go to. It was mentioned that many of the on call employees are filling long term temporary positions so there are very few available for the short term absences. Teachers also stated that they have to step in to do the work of the absent employee as the work has to be done. This takes away from their ability to work with students. Both groups felt that this can cause animosity between those left to work extra to cover for the absent employee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall recommendation from the consultant after all the reading and listening happened, is that school cafeterias be decentralized as much as possible to allow schools to deal with them in a way that works for them. This would include student programs, supervision, catering, pricing etc. The

accountability for the cafeteria budgets should be the responsibility of the principal. If they feel that they can afford to do something and it's within their budget, they should be able to do it. The district will have to determine if this is possible and what it would look like from a financial perspective. The consultant realizes that this is a change in procedure, but feels that like all of the other educational departments in the school it should be overseen by the principal.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO CONCERNS RAISED

1 – Supervision Model

All groups interviewed felt that the supervision of the IUOE staff in the cafeterias should go back to the principal. There was some concern about the knowledge level and the commitment level of some administrators when it comes to the cafeteria but all still felt that the principal should, as the agent of the Board, be in the supervisor. Some principals may need some professional assistance to become knowledgeable about this educational department.

2 – Consultation

The concern raised by all was a valid one. It is difficult for changes to be accepted if those directly affected do not feel as though they have any value. Many of the issues here could have been avoided had the consultation happened before the changes were instituted. The recommendation is that the District develops a consultation plan for future changes in the Cafeteria and that all employee groups be involved.

3 – Communication

This appears to be a continuing problem. Communication is a tricky thing to get right. These three groups of employees felt as though they were being dictated to from above and that their professionalism was being questioned. Communication has to be inclusive, helpful and professional. Employees cannot be expected to pass information on to other employees as a regular way of communication. Unless all employees have easy access to computers and are comfortable using them, electronic messaging will be problematic. Regularly scheduled weekly brief cafeteria staff meetings, as is done at one school, may be a more effective way of ensuring all get the same information and will allow employees to bring forward issues and suggestions. They will also feel as though they are a valued part of the team.

4 – Purchasing

There was some initial hostility and confusion around why the district consolidated the vendors for the cafeterias. Consultation could have prevented that, or at least an explanation as to why it needed to happen would have assisted. Once the consultant explained, all were in agreement that there was the

potential to save money both on the food and on the processing of invoices. The recommendation is that teaching kitchen cafeteria lead hands and teachers be brought together to come to agreement on which suppliers can be used for what products. As an example teachers and chefs prefer to work with fresh not frozen protein. This is not an option with the present supplier whom they have been told they must purchase their protein from. The protein comes frozen, so cannot be easily inspected nor can they refreeze it if they do not need to use it. They must cook it and then can freeze it cooked, not ideal at all for teaching kitchens.

5 – Point of Sales

The present system appears to have some challenges. It is recommended that the district work with the supplier (Bullfrog) to address the challenges that schools are having so that it's a more consistent tool. The program has to be flexible enough to deal with a variety of circumstances that enhance student learning, or a different system has to be implemented. Student learning cannot revolve around a point of sale system.

6 - Student Learning Focus

It is recommended that the district immediately shift the focus of the teaching kitchens back to a focus on student learning. Student learning must be ahead of any food production (ie SPK) and that the teachers have to be given back the decision making capabilities necessary to ensure student learning is a priority.

7 – Staff Morale

This will be a challenge to repair. If the recommended changes are followed, the chef may feel as though his authority has been stripped. It is recommended that there be a meeting with each cafeteria staff to explain what the expectations around collaboration are and why the changes are happening. Teachers and chefs both have a very important role to play. It is recommended that the principal be the one conducting the meeting and that the administration then monitor closely for the next while. Some principals may need a script of sorts if they are not familiar with how teaching kitchens work. Schools may want to look at team building activities, but each school will be unique.

8 – 'Free Food'

It is recommended that the district direction on no free food for staff or students be amended to exclude the students who are enrolled and participating in a Culinary Arts or Ace It program. CTAs, while they claim that they do not get free meals, just leftovers that cannot be re-utilized, need to pay for any meals. The teachers of the Culinary programs do need to taste the food the students make at time to assist the students with their learning. The teachers, however, should not have free meals. Some discretion has to be used as schools should not be throwing away food just because it will not keep over night or over the weekend. Schools should be able to decide individually what that looks like. Schools

need to be given the freedom to be creative around what happens with the food not sold that cannot be re-utilized.

9 - Site Production Kitchens (SPK)

It is recommended that the District look at all SPKs to ensure equity of staffing based on volume of food being produced. The SPKs must be able to produce the food without relying on student labour. Some schools may need more time, and other may need less.

10 – Conflict between VSTA and IUOE

This recommendation is covered in #7 staff morale. It will always be a potential issue when two professionals with individual personalities have to work collaboratively. If supervision is given back to the principal they may be able to mediate the situation or ask for the respective unions to assist.

11 – Student Enrollment

It is recommended that where possible the teacher assigned to the Teaching cafeteria be fully qualified and if that is not possible, then a teacher who is passionate about the program and the students involved. Elective courses are by nature, quite teacher driven. This is a valuable program that is no more expensive when fully subscribed than partially subscribed, in fact is probably less expensive per student when a full program is running. If the program is seen to be valuable, it will have to be promoted as such by administrators, counsellors and teacher involved in the program.

12 – Pricing

All groups recommended that the pricing of the food sold in the cafeterias needs to be looked at again. It was suggested that raising the prices a bit at a time might have less detrimental effect on the sales in the cafeteria. If the cafeterias are decentralized, there should be some flexibility with pricing. The challenge might be the POS product. Can it be flexible, or altered to be so?

13 – Catering

Catering is a necessary part of the Curriculum for both the Culinary Arts and Ace It programs. The decisions about catering need to go back to the teacher in consultation with the chef or lead hand. Catering at cafeterias without students serves no purpose other than goodwill and should be discontinued where extra staff time is required to make it work.

14 – Role of Food Services

It is recommended that the roles/job descriptions of the Food Services Department be shared with all schools. The Principal, the cafeteria teacher and the CTAs all need to know who they can contact for assistance, if that is determined to be the role of Food Services.

15 – Student Meal Cards

It is recommended that the student meal cards program be evaluated. There should be a specific process for them, from how many students at each school are fully subsidized, how many are to be partially subsidized to how the card is monitored on a monthly basis. There should be a sharing of information with the person in the cafeteria who is given responsibility to oversee them. It does appear that there is the potential for significant savings if the process is set so that monitoring happens and money is collected regularly.

16 – Round Table/Group Meetings

It is recommended that the District convene regularly scheduled meetings for the cafeterias so that they can look to problem solve and collaborate on a variety of things, including purchasing, costing, menu selection and student enhancement activities.

17 – Learning Outcomes

This has been dealt with in #6 and #13.

18 – Teacher Professional Autonomy

It is recommended that teachers be assured that the teaching cafeteria is their classroom and they are welcome there any time. It is also recommended that the teacher be allowed to determine, in collaboration with the chef or lead hand what the students will make and whether or not they will do catering. The teacher is expected to teach and evaluate the students and to do so effectively they must have control over the teaching of the curriculum.

19 – Student Error Costs

It is recommended that IUOE staff is assured that they will not be held financially accountable for student errors that cause food to be thrown away.

20 – Equity (with other food sales and contracted sites)

It is recommended that someone at the district level look into the concerns of the IOUE if for no other reason than to assure them that it is a level playing field. The consultant is not sure this is the case, but it has not been investigated for this report.

21 - Community Food Program

It is recommended that the District support and encourage schools applications for a variety of food programs that enhance student learning and that the teachers be allowed to sell the foods at costs that reflect the cost of the food. The POS system has to be flexible enough to do this or another system will have to be used.

22 - Replacement staff

It is recommended that Human Resources look at its recruitment process in the area of IUOE cafeteria employees. It was suggested by the IUOE president that if an absence is known to be for a number of days and there is no replacement found, that existing employees at the site be given overtime at the beginning of their shift when the need is greatest. This will take some coordination at the dispatch desk.

SUGGESTIONS

When employees were asked for areas in the cafeteria that they thought could produce savings without interfering with student learning opportunities they had a few. Some have been included in the recommendations with the largest opportunities as outlined by employees being:

- Student Meal Card processes and monitoring
- Joint food ordering based on specs determined jointly by the cafeteria lead hands in a meeting or meetings.

Submitted by:

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Starthrower Consulting