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# K-12 School Food Recovery Roadmap



Authors detail their journeys to implementing surplus food reduction and recovery programs at their K-12 school districts.

**Nancy Deming and Janet Whited**

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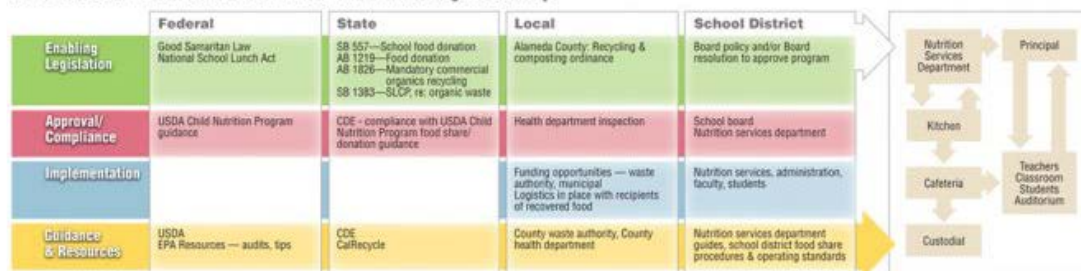


The Oakland Unified School District (USD) in northern California, and the San Diego USD in southern California, recognize the high value of the surplus food resource inherent in school meal programs and the influence of that value to guide wasted food reduction and using surplus food to help feed the community while keeping good food out of landfills. A variety of surplus food reduction and recovery initiatives have been implemented at Oakland USD and San Diego USD, including food share tables and food donation programs.

Starting these types of programs can seem daunting at first, since there are a number of steps to consider before initiating surplus food reduction and recovery programs. Don't be discouraged! This article is a guide to the steps and initiatives taken at Oakland USD and San Diego USD to reduce and recover school meal leftovers. It focuses on best practices and includes a customized roadmap (see flow chart) on how to save surplus food at school, as well as resources for school waste reduction and sorting. New California mandates and legislation can be a catalyst for school meal recovery and may be referenced for assistance and support — as well as replication in other states, localities and school districts.

The image of served but not consumed school food in a dumpster can be used to illustrate the opportunities presented by a K-12 reduction and recovery program. Photo by Nancy Deming

**K-12 Wasted Food Reduction And Food Recovery Roadmap**



K-12 Wasted Food Reduction And Food Recovery Roadmap

## Enabling Legislation

Links to legislation in Guidance & Resources box below

### Federal

Good Samaritan Law

USDA – National School Lunch Act

### State

SB 557—School Food Donation: Reinforces and lists food items possible for schools to donate. Covers items specifically left on cafeteria food share tables that can be donated and calls for California Dept. of Education (CDE) to update its guidelines to match.

AB 1219—Food Donation: Allows school districts to consider offering surplus to students and families by being an end recipient that is now acceptable vs. a nonprofit. Also allows a school to donate items that are past expiration date but still edible, e.g., milk that is a day past date.

SB 1383—Short-lived Climate Pollutants: Organic Waste Methane Emissions: Establishes targets to achieve 50% reduction in level of statewide disposal of organic waste from 2014 level by 2020 and a 75% reduction by 2025.

AB 1826—Commercial organics diversion requirements

### Local

Alameda County mandatory recycling and composting ordinance

San Diego City/County complies with State organics diversion laws (no Local mandates)

## Approval/Compliance

Links to approvals/compliance in Guidance & Resources box below

### State

CDE food share and donation requirements for compliance with USDA Child Nutrition Program

### Local

Health Department approval of food share, food donation and re-serving procedures

### School District

School Board: Determination of what is needed for Board approval for surplus food recovery

Nutrition Services Director: Determination of what is needed for Nutrition Services approval for surplus food reduction and recovery

## Implementation

Links to implementation tools in Guidance & Resources box below

### Local

Research funding opportunities, e.g., from waste authority, County/Municipal departments

### School District

Oakland USD and San Diego USD resources links provide access to tools listed

Nutrition Services Department

- Director informed and on board, review, customize, approval. Review procedures and customize as needed

- Develop initiatives listed for each category below, that also include:

- Food share table

- Staff training, e.g., back to school, monthly meetings

- Plate waste tracking

- Food Share and Take it to Go poster

- Breakfast after the Bell monitoring and adjusting

- Menu planner involvement

Principal's Office

- Principal informed and on board

- Home flyer emphasizing school program and initiatives happening to reinforce at home

- Teacher/faculty do meal poster review

- Food donation

- Recess before lunch

- Saving Food backpack

Kitchen

- Kitchen staff informed and onboard

- Knowledge of meal components and serving requirements
- Correctly preparing food
- Break after the Bell monitoring, and adjusting what is sent compared to what comes back
- Menu Production Worksheets
- Staff training
- Plate waste tracking
- Food donation

#### Cafeteria

- Meal Poster at entrance; teachers review with students
- Food share
- Take it to go
- Smarter Lunchroom Initiatives

#### Custodial Department

- Establish procedures to assist

## Guidance & Resources

### Federal

[Good Samaritan Law](#)

[National School Lunch Act](#)

### U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Resources

[USDA Child Nutrition Program \(CNP\) Guidance](#)

[USDA Food Waste Reduction Goal](#)

[USDA Lunch Act](#)

[USDA School Food Waste Infographic](#)

[USDA Share Tables & Re-Serving Items](#)

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(U.S. EPA\) Resources](#)

[EPA Guide to conducting student food waste audits](#)

### State (California)

Laws:

[SB 557](#)

[AB 1219](#)

[SB 1383](#)

[AB 1826](#)

[California Department of Education \(CDE\) Resources<sup>1</sup>](#)

[CDE bulletin – Food Consumption Outside the Foodservice Area](#)

[CDE bulletin – Guidance on Donation of Leftover Food in CNPs](#)

[CDE bulletin – Use of Share Tables](#)

[Plate Waste Prevention in Child Nutrition Programs](#)

[CalRecycle<sup>1</sup>](#)

<sup>1</sup>Resources shown for California; each state will vary and need to determine what is in place

### Local

[Alameda County Waste Authority](#), StopWaste school resources

County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health (DEH): [Share Tables at Schools](#)

[County of San Diego Guidance](#) (Compliance with State laws)

County of San Diego: [Too Good to Waste](#)

[High school video highlighting a student initiative on food share and food donation](#)

[StopWaste big picture food waste issues](#)

[Backpack Program](#)

### School District

[Oakland Unified School District resources](#)

[San Diego Unified School District Resources](#)

[Creative Solutions to Ending School Food Waste](#)

[K-12 School Food Waste Audit](#)

[K-12 School Food Waste Reduction Strategies](#)

[Offer vs Serve: Addresses milk serving options](#)  
[Smarter Lunchroom Strategies](#)  
[WWF Cafeteria Food Waste Warrior Toolkit](#)

#### **Additional Resources**

[Food Rescue](#)  
[Further with Food](#)  
[Smarter Lunchrooms \(National\)](#)  
[Wasted Food Solutions](#)

## Roadmap

The K-12 Wasted Food Reduction and Food Recovery Roadmap is designed as a flow chart and can be customized for a state, local region, and school district. There are three primary levels to create food waste reduction and food recovery programs: Enabling Legislation; Approval/Compliance; and Implementation. All of the steps are informed and assisted by Guidance & Resources, the fourth level in the Roadmap.

There are four primary “entities” in a food waste reduction and recovery program — Federal, State and Local Governments, and the School District. Using the Approval level as an example, Local Government and the School District are the entities that generally issue Approvals. The School District is the primary interface between the Nutrition Services Department (i.e. food services provided to schools) and the administrators at the schools. Once a food share program is implemented in a school, the primary interface between the food services provided and faculty/students, shifts to the cafeteria. A secondary interface is between the school kitchen and cafeteria in determining the re-serving potential of items remaining on food share tables.

The color-coded boxes correspond, color-wise, to their activity on the Roadmap. Information in the color-coded boxes will assist all stakeholders in K-12 wasted food reduction and food recovery program implementation.

## Engaging Stakeholders

Informing decision makers on the laws and regulations surrounding food donation, share tables, food waste, and landfill diversion requirements helps make the case for investigating surplus food reduction and recovery options at the school district level. Many regulations are supportive of these initiatives specifically, while others are restrictive, i.e., providing strict parameters and guidance on acceptable practices.

Identifying key stakeholders, especially the Nutrition Services Director, is paramount. The majority of all food recovery initiatives need to be vetted through the school districts’ Nutrition Services Department to address any high level areas of concern, including capacity to accomplish the program’s goals and priorities. Consider incorporating food waste reduction as part of the scope of the overall program to minimize the amount of leftover food that must be managed. Just getting the conversation started and reviewing options with staff along the way helps increase focus and awareness on wasted food and keeps the program moving forward.

As a best practice, review and discuss plans and documents with a few nutrition services department staff and school site kitchen managers for feedback. Piloting is advised to work out details and make adjustments before a project expands districtwide. Approvals to implement food share programs may be needed from the district’s school board and the local health department. One option for the school board is to adopt a “saving food resolution” that provides both board approval and support for the program. With the health department, review food share and food donation procedures, as well as the process and details for re-serving items remaining on food share tables, to obtain their feedback and approval. Once all approvals and program customization are in place, food share and donation programs can typically be finalized and implemented by nutrition services staff.

Ten key steps (and “substeps”) to creation of K-12 school food recovery programs, such as food share, are described in the “Action Steps” sidebar.

## Funding

Many of these initiatives cost very little to implement. Internal costs to the District/Nutrition Services Department can include the procedural step of adding food share item counts and reasons for the



Food share table and 3-bin sorting station at school in the Oakland Unified School District. Photos by Nancy Deming

leftovers to the Menu Production Worksheets (kitchen forms that log all required serving details for each meal); food share table set up procedures; staff training, including development of training materials; and any development or printing of signage, banners, or other program education and outreach items. Additional funding will most likely be needed for “infrastructure,” including any needed cafeteria and kitchen improvements, additional refrigeration, and transport logistics for a food donation program.

Investigate local, regional and national funding that may be available. In California, for example,

CalRecycle recently funded a grant program specifically for food recovery implementation. A local waste authority may have suggestions and/or support. For example, Alameda County’s waste authority, StopWaste, provides support to deal with school food waste issues with its “Food Too Good To Waste” student action projects and grant funding. Oakland USD was able to tap into these resources and received a \$25,000 food reduction and recovery grant to help jump-start its program. Publicizing the program and outreach to the wider community may attract financial support. Many waste haulers are becoming more involved in food waste recovery and may offer support. Local food banks and hunger relief organizations may also be able to assist.

**Nancy Deming** is a K-12 Sustainability Specialist who works with Custodial and Nutrition Services at the Oakland Unified School District, the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority’s Recycle Smart Schools Program, and Alameda County Schools and District. **Janet Whited** is Interim Energy/Utilities Program Coordinator, Operations Division, at the San Diego Unified School District.

## Action Steps

1. Inform decision makers on applicable Federal, State and local laws and regulations. Note some are supportive and others are restrictive.
2. Identify key stakeholders
  - a. District level includes Nutrition Services, Sustainability Office, Custodial, Principals, Student Green Teams, etc.
  - b. County waste authority
  - c. Local health department
  - d. Hunger relief organization(s)/food banks
3. Ensure Nutrition Services Director, a major stakeholder, is on board, especially when approvals are needed.
  - a. Identify priorities, e.g., consider incorporating both food waste reduction and food recovery as part of scope. Example initiatives:
    - i. Offer vs. Serve
    - ii. Salad bar pan size
    - iii. Food share
    - iv. Smarter Lunchrooms
  - b. Identify projects, implementation and collection strategies. An example for food donation:
    - i. Agency pickup at each school
    - ii. Agency pickup at collection hub (i.e. District transport to hub)
    - c. Identify staff resources/involvement.
      - i. May need to evaluate procedures and time required for nutrition services department and staff
      - ii. Determine if there are union issues to be resolved
4. Develop draft policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs)
  - a. Review pilot procedures with local health department
5. Pilot at a few school sites
  - a. Principal informed and on board
  - b. Train kitchen staff at pilot sites
6. Adjust policies based on pilot

7. Get approval of procedures from school district board (if needed)
8. Get final approval of procedures from local health department
  - a. Update and/or develop specific Nutrition Services HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) procedures
9. Develop program expansion plan/timeline
  - a. Train kitchen staff
10. Provide resources to schools
  - a. Meal poster for cafeteria
  - b. Meal poster for classrooms
  - c. Information for teachers
  - d. Host assemblies for students to increase knowledge/teach respect of food

**You might also like:**



School District  
Rolls Out Food  
Waste Reduction



The Time Is Ripe  
For Food Recovery



Food Scraps  
Diversion Goes To  
School



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