



Virginia Beach City Public Schools selected Old Donation School (ODS) to work with Beyond Green Sustainable Food Partners (BGP) to develop a pilot scratch cooking program for the district. ODS is the merger of Kemps Landing Magnet School and Old Donation Center. Nearly 1500 intellectually gifted students in grades two through eight attend ODS.

#### WHERE TO START?

BGP met with the different groups at the school including the principal and assistant principals, students, teachers, cafeteria staff, and parents. In these meetings we discussed what everyone liked and didn't like about the foodservices. Many of the students stated they were vegetarians and wanted more healthy options without meat. The students either never ate at the cafeteria or ate there very seldom. They wanted to help with menu development and to volunteer in the kitchen. The principal wanted to have all aspects of the cafeteria incorporated into the curriculum and wanted to involve the parents and the community as much as possible.



#### IDENTIFY PRIORITIES

BGP guided the foodservice team and school representatives in setting measurable goals to strengthen their cafeteria program, specifically by serving more nutritious, better quality food, and thereby improving the physical and mental capabilities of the students, their families and the community. Goals included:

- Increase participation
- Increase student interest
- Increase staff moral/self-esteem
- Provide healthier food
- Decrease food waste
- Involve students in the cafeteria program
- Maintain cost neutrality

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

BGP worked with various departments at the school to bring the goals from dream to reality. Throughout the semester, the activity in the cafeteria integrated into the school through a number of programs including art projects using food-based dyes, the Newspaper Club interviewing café staff and BGP consultants to write articles, and they began a school garden with herb containers in the café.

In the most comprehensive program of the semester, BGP guided 7th Grade physical education and nutrition class students through a "Top Chef" style of competition. The students teamed up in groups of three to five and followed USDA requirements for school lunches to come up with an entrée (protein, grain, veggie and fruit) for school lunch. The school district's dietitian instructed students about USDA meal components and food handling safety. The entire student body selected three entrées that were then prepared by the students (with the café staff) and served to the school. Students voted for their favorite of the three meals. The winning lunch was also served at an event called the "Dining Experience" which featured the dance class and the music classes putting on performances and different styles of art work presented in the cafeteria.

#### GETTING RESULTS

The project achieved success towards the established goals and began to see implementation spread to other schools in the district. Some highlights include:

- New scratch-cooked breakfast (13) and lunch (21) items were served in the 1st semester
- Participation increased by 8%
- Fresh, unprocessed foods increased by 11%
- Short kitchen videos produced to generated excitement for the school meals
- Revenues increased, and expenses decreased
- Sourced local food from new farms
- Stronger leadership by the cafeteria manager
- In one semester BGP created a model farm to school program for the district that could be replicated at their other 84 cafeterias.



#### TRAINING FOR SUCCESS

During the first month, BGP staff were on site weekly to train the cafeteria staff on how to safely and efficiently prepare scratch cooked meals. Simultaneously, BGP worked with the staff to develop and prepare new recipes, and then conduct taste tests with the students seeking feedback through written surveys. Favorite items such as macaroni & cheese with home-made sauce, pizza (with homemade dough and marinara sauce), and French toast and apple bread were later introduced on the menu. Additional training focus areas included teamwork to cook from scratch and serve food on time, budgeting to better understand the cafeteria profit and loss, and waste reduction both for labor and products.



Is your organization looking to green things up?

**WE CAN HELP!**