

The Ultimate Guide For
**Modern School
Foodservice**

Finding New Opportunities to Transform
K-12 Kitchens and Cafeterias



OVERVIEW

Feeding your students nutritious meals every day is not easy.

The stakes are high: the more students get from the cafeteria, the more they get from their classrooms. That's why running a successful K-12 foodservice requires informed decision-making on a limited budget.

Some of the most critical questions to answer include:

- Should we prepare more items from scratch or rely more on pre-prepared products?
- What's the best way to upgrade our existing equipment?
- What should we consider when building a new kitchen?
- How can we get more value for our labor costs?
- How can we combat escalating food costs?

Nutrition directors, key kitchen staff and K-12 foodservice consultants make decisions that make work-life easier, budget dollars impactful, and culinary programs sustainable.

No matter your obstacle or opportunity, this guide will help you make the right choice for your school's kitchen.



CHEF LOGAN'S TAKE

In K-12 foodservice, every dollar matters. Equipment that's flexible and efficient can make a real difference day to day.



Chef Logan McCoy

SEEING THE **WHOLE** PICTURE

Complementary equipment and a cohesive workflow make a kitchen more efficient, which goes a long way toward helping schools tackle these big challenges. When you look at the workflow stages in a successful food program, you see the whole picture of how transformative a thoughtfully designed kitchen can be.

For example, here are common workflow stages to consider when researching your school kitchen environment:



Preparation

This stage can be a major opportunity to save time, especially for kitchens that still rely on manual prep. Finding better ways to perform tasks such as slicing, dicing, shredding, and cutting helps school nutrition teams achieve more in less time.

Examples:

- Vegetable Slicers & Food Processors
- Handheld Immersion Blenders
- Produce Washing System
- Spin Dryers



Cooking

Versatile cooking equipment that consistently performs will make work-life easier for staff and dishes better for students. Cooking equipment that creates a more flexible, reliable kitchen helps bring a school's aspiring meal program to life.

Examples:

- Combi Ovens & Steamers
- High-Speed Sandwich Press
- Pressurized & Non-Pressurized Braising Pans
- Steam Jacketed Kettles



Refrigeration

Food safety is critical when you're feeding students, but the right refrigeration does more than simply keep food at the right temperature. It can also be a key factor in extending shelf life and minimizing food waste.

Examples:

- Prep Stations & Undercounter Worktops
- Reach-Ins
- Blast Chillers & Thawing Cabinets
- Milk Coolers



Serving

Efficient counters help your staff serve quickly, so students can spend less time in line and more time eating and socializing with friends. Plus, mobile serving carts and grab-and-go options expand your food program beyond the cafeteria walls.

Examples:

- Serving Counters
- Mobile Serving Carts



Cleaning

Proper sanitation of pots and pans is obviously critical in school foodservice, but continuous motion warewashing systems help staff safely accelerate the cleaning process and are much less physically demanding than manual scrubbing.

Examples:

- Continuous Motion Warewashing System
- Pre-Warewashing System

Finding the Right Partner

Working with a manufacturer that has a full suite of high-quality kitchen equipment under one roof simplifies everything from purchasing to training and maintenance for K-12 schools.



Ready for a Deep Dive?

The following pages are a detailed look at some common challenges and opportunities that school foodservice programs face, starting with *from-scratch vs. pre-prepared cooking*.



FROM SCRATCH COOKING CHALLENGES

Nearly **77% of schools reported offering scratch-prepared entrees** on a daily or weekly basis, according to the School Nutrition Association. While kitchens mix varying levels of scratch cooking into their menus (ex: buying fresh tomatoes instead of canned options), there are some factors to consider.



Food Costs

Sourcing fresh ingredients can be more expensive, especially for smaller districts. These ingredients also have a shorter shelf life, which requires meticulous menu planning to avoid food waste.



Training & Labor

Scratch cooking generally requires more time to prepare and cook than heat-and-serve methods, which can increase labor costs. Learning how to make meals from scratch can also require additional training.



Food Safety

Working with raw ingredients requires staff to spend more time following strict guidelines. Meals prepared with these raw ingredients could increase food safety risks.



Chef Josh Eells

CHEF JOSH'S TAKE

Ditch the processed meals without the extra stress. Our automatic cooking cycles and high-speed food prep equipment make scratch cooking faster, simpler, and more intuitive for every member of your team.

FROM SCRATCH COOKING OPPORTUNITIES

While there are challenges to scratch cooking, it also offers massive benefits for schools. Schools are [seeing favorable results](#) switching to freshly cooked meals, which are more appetizing for students than reheated options.



Food Waste Reduction

More appealing food can result in less plate waste, less pre-packaging waste, and less disposal costs.



Job Satisfaction

Providing staff with the skills and autonomy to prepare meals from scratch can lead to increased job satisfaction, resulting in greater pride in their work and lower turnover rates.



Menu Variation

A flexible and diverse menu of fresh meals is more exciting to hungry students, which helps boost participation rates.



Integration with Curriculum

Schools can expand educational opportunities and support their scratch cooking. Imagine a garden in the courtyard, students learning how to cook, and other food-focused programs.



CHEF BRANISLAV'S TAKE

Scratch cooking shows students that their meals are crafted with care, and that builds excitement and trust in the cafeteria.



Chef Branislav Nikolic



IDEAL KITCHEN EQUIPMENT FROM SCRATCH COOKING

Preparation

Randell Precise Temp FX Series

Consistently keep your fresh ingredients at precise temperatures, even in demanding kitchen environments.



Cooking

Groen Braising Pans

Braise, roast, boil, simmer, poach, bain-maries, pan-fry, grill, sautés, and steam all from one versatile piece of equipment that offers precise temperature for maximum scratch cooking consistency.



Refrigeration

Randell Blast Chiller

Rapidly cool cooked meals while preserving quality and flavor, and extend shelf life without compromising food safety.



PRE-PREPARED COOKING CHALLENGES

While a common approach for schools, often because of budgetary reasons, non-scratch cooking may not be the most effective method. Nearly **75% of schools reported a moderate or significant challenge procuring pre-prepared and convenience items** such as pizza, chicken, cereals, and biscuits, according to the School Nutrition Association.



Menu Fatigue

A lack of variety in meals can lead to students and staff skipping the lunch line or tossing away uneaten food.



Nutritional Quality

Pre-packaged and processed foods typically contain higher levels of sodium and may be lower in essential nutrients, which could impact performance in the classroom.



Packaging Waste

Significantly more packaging (plastics, cardboard, and individual wrappers) per meal can increase disposal costs and prevent your school from achieving its sustainability goals.



Supply Chain

Relying heavily on food manufacturers and suppliers can make you more susceptible to disruptions, discontinuation, and price increases.



Chef Logan McCoy



CHEF LOGAN'S TAKE

Pre-prepared foods are still a vital part of K-12 menus. They help schools manage labor, maintain consistency, and serve large numbers of students efficiently when staffing is tight and lunch periods are short.



PRE-PREPARED COOKING OPPORTUNITIES

Depending on the size of the school and staff, leaning more on non-scratch cooking may be a reasonable approach. According to the SNA, nearly **90% of schools continue to rely on non-scratch cooking methods**. Here's why:



Lower Labor Costs

Pre-prepared foods require minimal preparation time, which is appealing for schools with staff shortages.



Less Equipment

Pre-packaged food means less need to invest in specialized equipment, such as large mixers and slicers.



Faster Prep

Less time spent preparing food means faster service, which is great for schools with a large student body or short lunch periods.



Food Safety & Shelf Life

With processed and pre-packaged foods, staff can lower scratch-related contamination risks and significantly reduce food waste.



Chef Branislav Nikolic



CHEF BRANISLAV'S TAKE

With limited staff, the right equipment can turn pre-prepared items into high-quality meals that still feel fresh and intentional.



IDEAL KITCHEN EQUIPMENT FOR PRE-PREPARED COOKING

Cooking

Groen SmartSteam® Pro Steamers

Available in both boilerless and connectionless models, this easy-to-use touchscreen with programmable pan timers makes it easy to steam pre-prepared dishes to perfection.



Groen Braising Pans

Combine a skillet and a kettle into a single, versatile, space-saving machine that offers precise temperature control for consistently-cooked large batches of non-scratch dishes.



Groen Steam Jacketed Kettle

Consistent and repeatable results are possible with an advanced cooking probe and up to 9 programmable recipes. Heavy-duty reinforced rim allows for long-lasting operation and easy cleaning.



Refrigeration

Randell Blast Chiller

If your district uses a centralized kitchen, save time by quickly lowering the temperature of hot food to store, and then school-site kitchen staff can easily thaw and serve.



SUCCESS STORIES FROM REAL CHEFS



It heats up quickly and steams evenly—the convection fan is really nice. It fulfills every use you want from a steamer.

Chef Taylor Maxwell
Rolling Road Golf Club



NEW KITCHEN BUILD CHALLENGES

Whether it's for a new school or a complete renovation of an existing campus, building a new kitchen has no shortage of challenges that can complicate the project.



Competing for Capital

The kitchen can face competition for funds against other essential school facilities, such as classrooms, labs, and athletic complexes.



Utilities

Renovating kitchens (especially in older buildings) can require upgrades to existing plumbing, electrical, and gas lines to support new equipment.



Coordination Complexity

Maintaining consistent communication and alignment on the kitchen's vision throughout the project lifecycle can be challenging.



Chef Josh Eells

CHEF JOSH'S TAKE

Upgrading your kitchen is a challenge; using it shouldn't be. Our equipment bridges the gap with certified ergonomics and intuitive design, making it easy to learn, physically supportive, and mentally effortless for K-12 teams to deliver excellence every day.

EQUIPMENT TO BUILD A NEW EFFICIENT KITCHEN



Cooking

Groen SmartSteam® Pro Steamers

User-friendly touchscreen makes work-life easier for staff and the SmartSteam Pro uses significantly less water compared to traditional steamers.

Avtec Hoods

Remove pollutants, moisture, and grease-laden vapors that can damage kitchen infrastructure and improve air circulation to create a healthier work environment for kitchen staff.

Serving

Randell Mobile Serving

Make a splash in the cafeteria with a beautiful serving line that maximizes workflow for staff and keeps food at the proper temperature for your students.

Cleaning

Power Soak

The continuous motion ware-washing system maximizes cleaning power on pots and pans, making life easier for staff by eliminating the need for time-consuming manual scrubbing.

Avtec Conveyors

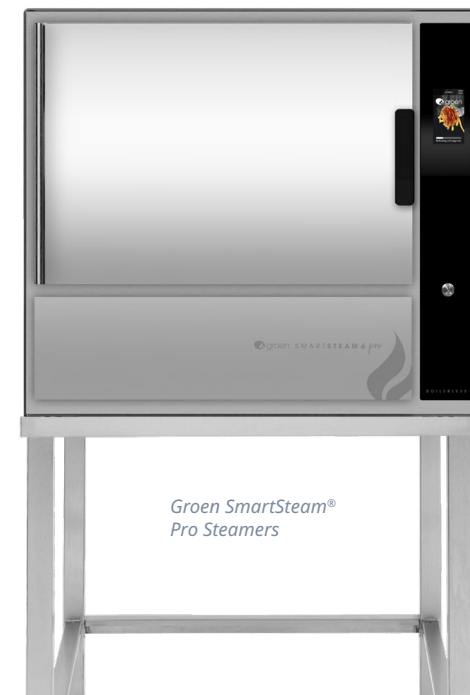
Conveyor systems provide seamless, flexible, and automated scrapping and accumulation solutions to simplify tasks and maximize efficiencies.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM REAL CHEFS



There's no comparison for other steamers I've ever used. Hands-down, Groen is the best.

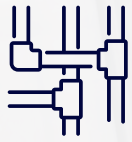
Chef Billy Barrett
Piney Branch Golf Club



Groen SmartSteam® Pro Steamers

UPDATING CURRENT EQUIPMENT: CHALLENGES

Trying to fit new equipment into existing kitchen floor plans can force foodservice professionals to get really creative. And for good reason.



Outdated Infrastructure

Older schools may require upgrades for plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems.



Limited Footprint

Kitchens may be too small or poorly laid out to easily accommodate equipment.



Procurement Processes & Lead Times

Bidding and approval can be lengthy, and delivery of equipment can be difficult to time for when school is out.



Learning New Technology

Modern equipment can require training for staff who are accustomed to older equipment.



CHEF BRANISLAV'S TAKE

You don't need a full remodel to modernize a kitchen. The right piece of equipment can transform how a team works in the space they already have.



Chef Branislav Nikolic

FLEXIBLE KITCHEN EQUIPMENT FOR AN EASY UPGRADE

Refrigeration

Randell Chef Bases

Design your kitchen with refrigerated chef bases, which are custom built to support heavy food service equipment.

Cooking

Groen SmartSteam® Pro Steamers

These powerful and stackable steamers are ideal for bulk cooking healthy food for students, especially since they offer major water savings compared to traditional steamers.

Groen Braising Pans

Merge a skillet and kettle into a single space-saving unit that provides precise temperature control for consistently cooking large batches.

Serving

Randell Mobile Carts

Serve meals anywhere, whether in hallways, classrooms, or sporting events. Plus, you can reduce cafeteria crowding with a strategically placed lunch-time cart.



Randell Mobile Carts



Groen Braising Pans

SUCCESS STORIES FROM REAL CHEFS



It's been an absolute pleasure to use the SmartSteam® Pro. My team and I absolutely love it.

Chef Billy Barrett
Piney Branch Golf Club



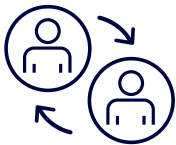
LABOR COST CHALLENGES

If labor costs are an issue for your kitchen, you're not the only one. Nearly **95% of school nutrition directors reported that labor costs are a moderate or significant challenge** for them, according to the SNA. Those labor issues can cause headaches for K-12 foodservice leaders, including:



Fixed Reimbursement Rates

Federal reimbursement rates for meals may not increase at the same pace as labor costs, creating a gap between revenue and expenditures.



Short-Staffed & High Turnover

Schools often have a small staff, which can cause stress and lead to a revolving door of employees quitting and new hires being trained only to leave.



Shift to Convenience

To control labor or manage with fewer staff, schools may rely on a pre-prepared, heat-and-serve menu instead of serving students better food.



Long Lines

Staff shortages can lead to longer wait times for students, reducing the time they have to eat and socialize with friends, or even causing some students to skip meals altogether.



CHEF LOGAN'S TAKE

Most school kitchens are doing more with fewer staff. When equipment is intuitive and the workflows are simple, teams can stay focused on serving good food.



Chef Logan McCoy

LABOR SAVING OPPORTUNITIES

Thinking outside the box can transform your kitchen into a place where your staff does their best work in less time, resulting in better food quality, faster service, and a happier foodservice team. This is especially good for the **57% of schools nationwide that reported staffing shortages in recent years**, according to the SNA.



“Speed-Scratch” Cooking

Blend scratch-quality cooking with the efficiency of non-scratch foods. (ex: pre-cooked chicken with fresh veggies).



Cross-Utilization of Ingredients

Design menus that can use one ingredient in multiple dishes throughout the week instead of starting over every day.



Standardized Recipes

Use clear, concise recipes with visual guides. This reduces errors, ensures consistency, and helps less experienced staff.



Digital Records

Transition from paper-based to digital production records to save significant administrative time needed for federal compliance.



KITCHEN EQUIPMENT TO COMBAT LABOR COSTS

Refrigeration

Randell Precise Temp FX Series

Keep ingredients fresh and easily accessible, minimize the need for frequent trips to walk-in coolers, speed up meal preparation, and streamline workflow to save valuable time for your team.

Randell Precise Temp FX Series



Cooking

Groen Braising Pans

Easy for both new and experienced operators, Groen Braising Pans unlock limitless menu possibilities with programmable recipes. This makes them one of the most versatile and time-saving products in the industry.

Cleaning

Power Soak

Reduce time-draining manual scrubbing of pots and pans and speed up kitchen cleanup, which helps your staff focus on other tasks around the kitchen.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM REAL KITCHENS

Chef Gary LeBlanc and his Mercy Chefs team use 40-gallon Groen Braising Pans to feed **more than 26,000 people** a day.

Especially for schools, Groen offers flexibility with several different size options for its Braising Pan. No matter how many mouths you have to feed, Groen has a Braising Pan for your application.



FOOD COST CHALLENGES

Food costs make up a significant portion of a foodservice budget. In fact, nearly **98% of school nutrition directors said that food costs were a moderate or significant challenge** for their programs, according to the SNA.



Reduced Purchasing Power

Nutrition directors can be forced to switch to lower-cost alternatives that are less appealing to students.



Risk of Food Waste

With less appealing ingredients, students may not eat their whole meal, which results in more food waste.



Chef Josh Eells

CHEF JOSH'S TAKE

“ Combatting rising food costs requires a return to scratch cooking, and we provide the technology to make it profitable. Let the TrinityPro handle the bulk prep, while our SkyLine Combi and Pressure Braising Pans simplify large-scale production of raw ingredients. With Speedelight making the final service more efficient than ever, you can serve student favorites that are both budget-friendly and delicious. ”

FOOD SAVING OPPORTUNITIES

The good news is that it's possible to serve students quality meals while navigating the rising cost of food. Here are a few things determined foodservice leaders with a knack for problem-solving can do:



Invest in Efficient Equipment

Energy- and labor-saving equipment, such as combi ovens, blast chillers, or slicers, helps kitchens get more out of their ingredients. By improving consistency, portioning, and shelf life, schools can reduce waste and stretch their food dollars further.



Balance Scratch and Non-Scratch

Kitchens can combine scratch and pre-made items (ex: pre-made sauces with fresh produce) to save on costs.



Repurpose Ingredients into New Recipes

Instead of discarding leftover or surplus items, schools can transform them into new dishes, like soups, grain bowls, or baked goods. This keeps menus fresh while minimizing waste.



Scan the QR code to learn more about our [Zero Waste](#) program and how it can help you get the most out of your ingredients.



Chef Logan McCoy



CHEF LOGAN'S TAKE

Cutting food costs doesn't have to mean cutting quality. With the right menu and equipment, schools can stretch ingredients further while still serving meals students want to eat.



KITCHEN EQUIPMENT TO HELP ADDRESS RISING FOOD COSTS

Preparation

Power Soak Power Prep

Remove harmful bacteria and debris from produce to keep it fresh for longer and prevent costly spoilage of your fruits and vegetables.



Cooking

Groen Braising Pans

You can make the same ingredients go a long way with a versatile Groen Braising Pan. Use several different cooking methods to get the most out of your ingredients.



Refrigeration

Randell Blast Chiller

Rapidly chill large batches of cooked foods to safe temperatures, extend shelf life, reduce spoilage, and minimize waste.



CONCLUSION

When you get more from your equipment, you can get more from your school's foodservice budget.

Whether you're fully or partially scratch cooking, aiming to reduce food and labor expenses, or undertaking a new build or equipment upgrade, you can increase your savings by making the right investments.

The end result is a foodservice program that helps feed hungry students and gives them the energy they need to succeed in (and out) of the classroom.

What challenge would you like to turn into an opportunity?

Our team is passionate about using our experience to help schools fulfill the potential of their foodservice programs. What's on your wish-list? We can help you find what's right for your school's kitchen.

Speak with our school foodservice experts.

Scan the QR Code below or visit

electroluxprofessionalgroup-americas.com/k-12



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Professional
Group**

