

APPLICATION: Everett Middle School

Describe the critical challenge you would like to tackle in a different way.

At X School we have 534 students who eat lunch and have recess for 51 minutes each day. Historically this was managed with a strict regimen where students accessed the cafeteria for 25 minutes and the yard or library for 25 minutes. During the 2014-2015 school year we discovered that many students began to opt out of the dining hall portion of their lunch period to preference the free time on the yard or in the library. The unintended consequence of this choice was that many students stopped eating anything for lunch which negatively impacted resilience, focus, health, and students' moods. In an effort to encourage more students to eat, we no longer hold students in the cafeteria for the entire 25 minutes. Instead we allow students to grab food and leave immediately if they'd prefer to eat on our schoolyard. This presents a lot more authentic choice time for students in the 51 minute lunch block and we want to capitalize on this so that lunch becomes an anchor of positive school culture and climate.

Currently our lunch period presents a variety of challenges that make this a perfect dilemma for the design thinking process. On a good day, we have 15 adults supervising five spaces that 534 students can access with relative flexibility. In classrooms, our most structured spaces, our student to adult ratio is 27:1 whereas with lunch, our most unstructured time, our least trained professionals are supervising at least 36 students each. Adults are often late to their posts or absent so the ratio can quickly soar to 50 or 75 students for each adult. With so many students to watch, and students with free reign of the space, more issues of bullying and physical violence erupt during lunch than any other time during the school day. Our lunch period is only 11% of our school day, but 64% of our office referrals arise from this time. When lunch is over, many students return to class distracted by drama or even need to be pulled from classes into restorative conversations to address harms that occur during the lunch period. This also puts a significant strain on our support staff who spend time during and after lunch de-escalating students, running restorative conversations, collecting witness statements, and making parent calls to follow up.

The bullying and physical altercations may be enabled by the sparse supervision on our schoolyard, but it may also be due in part to students not feeling engaged in the lunch experience. Our schoolyard features a few impromptu games and many students standing around talking. Our library space is open for students and has a mix of students playing, talking, and reading. About 30 students line up to go back to class with 15 minutes left during the lunch break because they are bored and this line tends to get playful and noisy.

There is no obvious answer to this challenge. We can't simply have more adults on lunch duty or running lunch time activities because we don't have the personnel for that. We can't open up different spaces in our building because it would stretch our adult coverage even more thin. We believe that the design thinking process could illuminate some clever ideas that will help us reallocate resources that we already have on campus to maximize our service to students.

What outcome(s) or change(s) would you like your design to achieve at your

school site?AtX School we are trying to raise the next generation of civil rights activists. In order to do so we need to empower the voices of our young people and cultivate empathy for the life experiences of others by helping our students build relationships across difference. Because lunch is a time of day that offers students maximum choice, we think that it is uniquely situated to be a positive driver towards our realization of this vision.

For the 2015-2016 school year we are trying to reimagine the lunch period. Our ideal lunch period would be a time when student leadership and student voice saturate the dining and recess experiences. We are piloting a student council this year and I imagine that the design thinking process will help us uncover ways to leverage our student leaders in service of a more engaging lunch experience. We want to explore new and different ways of offering controlled choice to our students in the service of empowering them and nurturing our community. My working theory is that with increased engagement our students will be less inclined to bully, litter, or engage in

unsafe behavior. They will return to their classes in the afternoon rejuvenated, focused, and joyful.

We believe that if we can zoom out and think differently about lunch, we could transform the time and our students' experience of school. This could be a time where students work on projects along their own passions, start groups that advocate for change in the community, work with community members, or engage in activities that help them feel happy and healthy. Our solution is unknown at this point but could involve increasing parent and community involvement and giving our students more opportunities to practice leadership and advocacy. This process will also positively impact the sense of community and ownership that our adults feel to provide a safe and engaging lunch experience for students because they will be involved with the user research, prototyping, and piloting. I believe we will all regard lunch differently as a result of this work.

What solutions have you tried or considered to address this challenge so far?

There are a few ways that our work to transform lunch has already been supported and will continue to be supported. First, the design thinking lunch group from the spring of 2015 is still actively engaged in conversations about lunch. We regularly discuss successes and opportunities for improvement with each other. We are piloting some of our prototypes from the last process which is the increased choice at lunch time and also having microwaves in the cafeteria to entice students into the space and to encourage them to eat something instead of nothing at all.

The current work of the lunch supervision team involves a clear schedule and posts. This team regularly checks in to discuss our strengths and struggles in the work. The group is a united team and enjoys discussing the work of improving lunch culture. The team approaches the lunch dilemma from a variety of backgrounds, experiences,

and goals for the students which I think makes this team an optimal design thinking team.

How have you engaged your school to identify your critical challenge?

In the spring of 2015 our staff assembled a group of seven staff members to undergo a truncated version of the design thinking process in order to explore how we might encourage more students to eat lunch. This felt like the most urgent element of the lunch experience to tinker with since so many of our students were no longer visiting the dining hall at all. In this process we discovered the need to decrease the rigidity of the lunch schedule and allow students to leave the cafeteria after eating.

This past summer our cafeteria was remodeled as part of the future dining project. With a fresh coat of paint and design principles that our students weighed in on, we excited our students in the first days of school with the new space. We've piloted offering students more choice in both when and where they eat and many more students are visiting the dining hall. We want to build on the momentum and create more pride of ownership over the space.

The increase in choice during lunch has certainly given students more time and created more joy in our lunch time, but it has also highlighted the lack of options students feel they have during their free time. Students are eager to return to class, and students who aren't drawn to the yard or the library are starting to sneak around in the building or play in the courtyard which is intended to be a dining space. Without structured activities many students self-segregate and our vision for cultivating relationships across difference becomes more distant. This makes us ponder more ways to fill the time so that students will want to stay in one of the designated spaces instead of creating destructive or dangerous activities out of boredom.

How is this challenge an equity dilemma, one that is interfering with your school's ability to ensure that all of your students will thrive?

Unfortunately our issues with bullying, referrals, and physical altercations on our school yard during lunch have the tendency to follow along the same lines of racial disproportionality as much of SFUSD discipline data. Our African American and Latino male students are most often the students who are being disciplined in our current lunch model. The theory is that with more engaging activities or structured choice that appeals and empower our least reached students, we will replace rough housing with leadership and action.

Additionally there are groups of students who feel more naturally empowered in our school setting. This is due to myriad cultural and socio-economic factors. These students already have an engaging lunch period because they advocate for what they want and need whether it be time in their teacher's classroom, the library, or different clubs. Since all of our students deserve to have lunchtime activities that authentically engage them, we owe our least reached students more options during lunch that fit their interests and desires.

The process of exploring our students' experience of lunch in the search for their interests and needs will be an affirming process for our underserved students. As we learn from their experiences and begin to make changes that reflect those learnings, our marginalized students may begin to feel considered, engaged, and invested in our community. This will help with our work in the classrooms and with restorative practices as well because students will start to feel more invested in maintaining good standing with the community. As students also take on positions of leadership during lunch their self-image and reputation may begin to shift as well.

Who is on your design team? (the more diverse the better)

There are many people on the X School staff who want to be a part of the work to continue the transformation of our lunch experience. The following colleagues have committed, but we can decrease if necessary:

Athletic director: 30 year veteran of X School staff, daily lunch duty participant
8th grade counselor: daily lunch duty participant, member of spring lunch design team

School librarian: daily lunch duty participant, member of spring design team

School security guard: coaches soccer team, daily lunch duty participant

PE teacher: morning or lunch duty participant

8th grade teacher: in charge of student council

6th grade teacher: known for exemplary classroom culture and one of the most popular classrooms for students to spend their lunch in

Acceleration coordinator: daily lunch duty participant

Assistant Principal: in charge of lunch and cultivating student voice

How will you make sure your team will commit the time needed to succeed?

This team is so engaged in the success and well-being of X School students that committing to this work was easy for them. I believe that participants will stay engaged by rolling out prototypes and doing the problem solving that design thinking cultivates. All of the members of this team are troubled by the distance that we feel between our current state and our vision for student leadership and choice at lunch. We're looking forward to the opportunity to think about the problem big picture. I believe that feeling like we're making progress on a large item that impacts our school culture and community will keep this team engaged. As the leader, I will also make time for regular check ins with the team to ensure that all are able to continue to do the work and meet the commitments made to the design thinking process.