

Cultural Considerations in School Food



Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council
Cambridge, MA

November 19, 2012



**School Food and Neighborhood Food Shopping
Focus Groups
September, 2012**

Introduction

The Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC) strives to promote health for all Cambridge residents through the overarching goal of improving access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods and physical activity. To this end, improving cultural considerations in school meals was included in the Community Transformation Grant work plans. In coordination with School Food Service, School Health Program staff of the CPHD (School Health) partnered with the Department of Human Services Community Engagement Team (CET) and conducted two focus groups with immigrant parents. These were held on September 18 & 19, 2012. The CET conducted outreach over the summer in their communities, inviting parents to come to a meeting to talk about school food. This report is a summary of findings which will be shared with the FFPC and School Food Service staff with the goals of: 1) facilitating the addition of traditionally authentic recipes to school menus and, 2) adding to our understanding of food access and local neighborhood shopping patterns. Recipes were gathered from parents by the CET outreach workers in a separate effort, and are included in an appendix.

Background

The Cambridge Schools Food Service Department, in partnership with the School Health Program of the Cambridge Public Health Department and community partners has been working to increase fresh and healthy choices in school meals for about 10 years. A chef was hired in 2005 to develop new recipes and train staff in cooking, and a farm to school program was initiated. To create sustainable change, Food Service slowly introduced new foods and moved from the “heat and serve” model to cooking fresh whole foods. School Health staff coordinated the programs, coached food service staff, conducted cafeteria taste tests and educational activities, and over saw the farm to school initiative. Over 50 healthy recipes, and several salad bars, have been introduced to school meals in Kindergarten through High School since 2005. The transition to the new 2012 federal (and state) school nutrition standards has been accomplished, and the School Food Service Department continues to add healthier dishes to the school menus.

To build on this progress, community partners are collaborating to engage the community in conversations that will lead to the inclusion of authentic ethnic dishes on school menus so they reflect the diversity of the Cambridge community. The development of a more inclusive menu will be beneficial on a number of levels. First, many traditional cultural recipes include fresh and healthy foods. Second, families that retain traditional foodways in the home are frequently under pressure to adopt more “American” ways of eating. Children in particular are influenced by what is offered and what they see around them, and this includes school food. The inclusion of healthy traditional recipes in school menus not only will provide a healthy choice in school meals, but also demonstrates that the City of Cambridge values healthier traditional cultural foodways. This encourages children to respect traditional food, to eat it, and share it with their peers.

Summary of Findings

Over the summer of 2012, the CET staff conducted outreach in their communities, telling parents about the purpose of the meetings and inviting them to attend. Once the meeting time was set, they confirmed with interested parents. The focus groups also created an opportunity for capacity building within the CET staff. Before the two focus group meetings, the CET staff

attended a workshop where they were trained in aspects of meeting facilitation, and they made all the arrangements for the meeting space. At the focus group meetings three CET staff: 1) facilitated and translated the meeting, 2) took notes, and 3) acted as time keeper. Two other CET members provided childcare at each meeting. Staff from School Health led the discussion about school food, and also collected information for the Food and Fitness Policy Council on food shopping, including the use of convenience stores. Food was served at the beginning of each meeting, and a \$15 gift card from Market Basket was provided to participants at the end of each meeting - both food and cards were funded by the CHNA 17 grant to the FFPC.

The summary below emphasizes the areas of agreement across the two focus groups, and summarizes the discussion.

Focus Group #1, September 18, 2012

The focus group on September 18 met at 119 Windsor St., and included 12 participants, plus three CET members. Participants were Haitian, Portuguese, Bangladeshi and Spanish speaking (countries not all identified). Two staff from School Health led the discussion. A student intern from School Health also took notes.

Focus Group #2, September 19, 2012

This focus group met at 364 Rindge Ave, and included 9 participants, plus three other CET members. Participants were Somali, Bangladeshi, Ethiopian, and Moroccan. One staff from School Health led the discussion and another staff person from CPHD took notes.

What parents in both focus groups agreed upon

- Offer different “traditional” recipes on the menu at least once a month.
- Add more vegetarian dishes to menus. Because of cultural/religious differences, there was sometimes disagreement about what would be acceptable regarding meat, however, all agreed that more vegetarian dishes would be acceptable (with care for cross-contamination).
- Add more fresh hearty soups with “chunky” filling.
- Children should be served water as a beverage and less sweet drinks like juice and chocolate milk.
- A request that a microwave be made available to warm food brought from home.
- Add more fresh cooked combined dishes to the menu, such as rice, meat, fish or beans, and vegetables. Broccoli and cauliflower were generally agreed upon as vegetables liked by children (see specific suggestions below)

What parents in both focus groups would like to see changed on menus

- All agreed that the current veggie burger was hard, frequently overcooked, and too dry as served on a plain bun. They would like a veggie burger with a soft texture, and served with condiments and vegetables on the bun. Suggestions were: cooked onions & peppers, also tomato, pickles, and cucumbers.
- Clear labels for vegetarian foods, with reassurance it is vegetarian. For example, there are rumors that the brown rice is made with chicken stock - therefore, some students do not eat the vegetarian burritos.
- Train staff to prevent “cross contamination” of vegetarian options. For example, if a pizza cutter and/or spatula server (or gloves) was used to serve pepperoni pizza, and the same cutter or server was used on the cheese pizza, many students can not eat the cheese pizza.
- Many asked for halal meat for children who otherwise eat no meat on the menu (taking care with cross contamination with other meat).

- Parents requested less sandwiches on the menu, and more hot dishes.

What parents suggested for new dishes:

Parents agreed they would like to see “traditional” dishes on the menu once a month. Some parents agreed to submit recipes, and they are included in Appendix. We discussed how different cultures use certain spices or food combinations that create a unique flavor, and that we will need to experiment with the recipes to determine how dishes can be cooked in large quantities on food service equipment and still retain their authenticity. It was agreed that some changes would be acceptable.

General suggestions were:

- Rice dishes with chicken or fish, cooked with vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, garlic, onion, peppers, tomatoes, etc.
- More hearty soups such as: lentil soup, red or white bean soup with vegetables
- More hot dishes like rice and beans (savory, not sweet) both vegetarian and with chicken

Specific traditional dishes suggested were:

- Chicken Biryani, this dish was mentioned in both groups (preferably with Halal meat)
- Chicken salad and vegetables (ensalada de pollo)
- Maismoulin (there are different recipes for this from different cultures, with varying opinions about whether it is a popular dish or not). This is a Haitian dish; also served in Brazil with meat or vegetables for a meal or with milk and sugar in the evening.
- Brown rice with chicken, celery, carrots, and beans, cooked in chicken broth
- Brazilian chicken pie
- Moroccan soup
- Rice pudding (Bangladesh)
- Sheep liver or chicken soup (Bangladesh)
- Vegetable soup (Bangladesh)
- Lentils and rice with onion and fresh green chili (Bangladesh)
- Samosa (Bangladesh)
- Rice cooked with fish and lemon pepper (Bangladesh)
- Lentil and rice dish cooked with onion, tamarind, fresh green chili (Moroccan)
- The Bangladeshi parents requested Marie’s Haitian Soup be put back on the menu

Neighborhood Food Shopping

The Food and Fitness Policy Council is gathering information on food access in Cambridge neighborhoods to better understand where people shop. The following questions were asked of both groups. The CET team members were included since they also live and shop in the same local neighborhoods as the participants.

Question	Sept 18 focus group n=15	Sept 19 focus group n=12
Do you have a corner store near where you live?	9 yes	6 yes
Do you purchase fresh produce at the store?	10 yes, mostly cultural F/V not avail in regular supermarkets	9 yes, same comment
Do you purchase other groceries in a corner store (can/box)?	2 yes Emergency only	3 yes, same comment
Do you shop at farmers' markets?	11 yes	10 yes
Where do you food shop generally?	Market Basket (Somerville and Chelsea)	Market Basket, Foodland, Star Market, Well Food, Whole Foods, Alguda, Nimah Market

Conclusion

Parents were very appreciative of the opportunity to talk about food in school and their neighborhoods. They look forward to learning whether their input will have an affect on school menus, and many have been in touch with their CET staff to find out what is next. Parents unable to attend these meetings expressed to their CET staff that they would like to participate in another meeting if it was held in December or January (the beginning of the school year is busy for parents). They were also interested in further discussing food shopping, many were enthusiastic about farmers' markets, and some suggested doing a survey in their community. Because of the cultural mix at each meeting, parents agreed that the meeting was a good learning experience for them, as did the CET staff and School Health staff. Next steps are still to be determined. Parents followed up by submitting the recipes that follow.

Appendix: Recipes

1. Bangladeshi Recipes

Chicken Biryani

Ingredients

2.5 lbs raw chicken (boneless or with bone)
½ cup of yogurt
3 cups of raw basmati rice
2 onions, processed to paste
4 – 5 large onions sliced thin and fried until crisp
10 inch long piece fresh ginger, processed to paste
10 cloves of garlic, processed to paste
6 cinnamon sticks
3 teaspoons garam masala
6 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons rose water
1-2 teaspoons kewra water essence (optional)
8 pods of green cardamom
Salt to taste
Water as needed
4 cups of oil for fried onions and 2 sticks of butter

How to Prepare

1. First, combine the ginger, garlic, onion paste, yogurt, salt, 3 cinnamon sticks, 4 cardamom crushed, and garam masala in a large non-metal bowl. Stir together and add the chicken. Use a large pot for cooking. Take the chicken from the sauce and cook for 15 minutes. Cook boneless chicken for 8 to 10 minutes, with-bone 15 minutes.
2. Slice the onions thinly and fry in the oil until crispy.
3. Cook the rice part way by putting the rice in a pot with 10 cups of boiling water, 3 cinnamon sticks, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, 4 green cardamom, 2 teaspoons of salt, 1 teaspoon kewra essence (optional). Boil until 75% cooked and drain off the liquid.
4. When the chicken is done cooking get a large oven safe pot with a cover. First put in the chicken and the sauce in the bottom of the pot. Layer the fried onions on top. Add rose water and kewra essence (optional). Put the rice on top. Do not mix. Cover the pot.
5. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Turn it down to 350 when you put the biryani in the oven. Allow it to cook for 1 1/2 hours and check to see if the chicken is done. Put back in the oven if needed and check every few minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Stir up the layers and serve with salad.

Serves 12 to 15

Submitted by Rabeya Akther, Community Engagement Team 11-16-12

Rice Pudding

Ingredients

1 gallon milk

3 cups sugar
1 ½ cup basmati rice
1 teaspoon cardamom powder

How to Prepare

1. Rinse the basmati rice and soak in water for 10 minutes, then drain.
2. Add the rice and sugar to the milk and boil until the rice is tender.
3. Turn off the stove and put in the cardamom powder and allow to cool.

For more flavor, you can add fresh fruits like banana, mango, peach, grapes, or almonds and raisins.

Serves 20 – 22

Submitted by Rabeya Akther, Community Engagement Team 11-16-12

2. Brazilian Recipe

Torta De Frango – Brazilian Chicken Pie

Ingredients

Filling

2 chicken breasts
1 cup tomato sauce
1 onion
2 garlic cloves
1 teaspoon oregano
1 cup canned corn
1 tablespoon cilantro
Salt and pepper

Dough

12 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
2 tablespoons parmesan cheese*
½ teaspoon salt
3 eggs
1 ½ - 2 cups milk*
¾ - 1 cup oil
pepper

*to make the recipe non-dairy use non-dairy alternatives like soy cheese and soy milk

How to Prepare

1. Cook the chicken breast and pull apart, shredding while it cooks
2. Add the tomato sauce, onion, garlic, salt, oregano, pepper, corn, chopped cilantro.
3. Cook until chicken is cooked and sauce is thickened.
4. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
5. Mix dough ingredients in a mixer until smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste.
6. Grease and flour a 9x13 inch baking pan.

7. Pour half the dough mixture into the pan. Add the filling on top. Pour the remainder of the dough on top.
8. Bake for 45 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.
9. Let it cool, then slice and serve with a green salad.

Variations: You can also add 1 red bell pepper, chopped to the filling or use tuna instead of chicken. If you like it hot add a pinch of chili to the filling.

Serves 4 to 6

Submitted by a parent at the Let's Talk About School Food focus group, September 18, 2012

3. Dominican Recipes

Arroz Blanco

Ingredients:

3 cups long grain white rice
3 3/4 cup of water
1 1/2 teaspoon of salt
2 tablespoon of vegetable oil

How to Prepare:

1. Place the water and salt in a pan over moderate heat. Mix until the salt has dissolved completely. Add the oil to the water.
2. Rinse the rice and add to the water. Let it come to a slow boil. Stir the rice once while the water is boiling.
3. When the rice is almost dry, set the heat to low, stir the rice and cover it.
4. Let it cook for 15 minutes then stir the rice. Cover the rice again.
5. Let it cook for another 30 minutes.

Makes approximately 6 servings.

Submitted by Magaly Ayala, Community Engagement Team 11-6-12

Habichuelas

Ingredients:

1 cup of pink beans
3 teaspoons of salt
1 medium potato
2 tablespoons of sofrito (recipe follows at end of list)
1 green bell pepper
2 bay leaves
5 green olives
2 ounces of smoked ham
1 teaspoon of olive oil
6 ounces of tomato sauce
3 1/2 quarts of water

2 tablespoons white vinegar

How to Prepare:

1. Wash the beans and soak in 2 quarts of water already mixed with the white vinegar and 1 teaspoon of salt. Let the beans soak overnight.
2. Rinse the beans and place in a pan with 1 quart of water and 1 teaspoon of salt. Cook until the beans have softened. Discard water used to soften the beans. Set aside.
3. Peel and dice the potato into 1/4" size pieces. Set aside.
4. Dice the smoked ham into 1/4" size pieces. Set aside.
5. Dice the green bell pepper into 1/8" pieces. Set aside
6. In a pan add the sofrito, 1 teaspoon of salt, tomato sauce, olives, smoked ham, potato, green bell pepper, bay leaves, olive oil, and 2 cups of water. Cook at moderate heat until it starts boiling. Lower to moderate low heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Stir once while simmering.
7. Add the beans. Continue to simmer at moderate low heat for 45 minutes to 1 hour or until the beans are fully cooked. Stir every 15 minutes.

Makes approximately 8 servings.

Submitted by Magaly Ayala, Community Engagement Team 11-6-12

Pollo Guisado

Ingredients

- 4 portions of boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 2 medium potatoes
- 2 teaspoons of salt
- 3 tablespoons of sofrito (recipe follows at end of list)
- 1 8 ounce can of tomato sauce
- 5 olives
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 ounce green bell pepper
- 2 cups of water

How to Prepare:

1. Place the chicken in a pan with enough water to cover the chicken by 1/2". Add 1 teaspoon of salt. Cook at moderate high heat until the water starts to boil, then lower the heat to moderate and cook for 45 minutes. Remove from the heat and drain all the water. Let the chicken cool for approximately 15 minutes. Cut the chicken into 1/2" pieces and set aside.
2. Peel and dice the potatoes into 1/4" size pieces. Set aside.
3. Dice the green bell pepper into 1/8" pieces. Set aside
4. In a pan add the sofrito, 1 teaspoon of salt, tomato sauce, olives, potato, green bell pepper, bay leaves, olive oil, and 2 cups of water. Cook at moderate heat until it starts boiling. Lower to moderate low heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Stir once while simmering.
5. Add the chicken.
6. Continue to simmer at moderate heat for 1 hour. Stir every 15 minutes.

Makes approximately 8 servings

Submitted by Magaly Ayala, Community Engagement Team 11-6-12

4. Ethiopian Recipes

Chicken with vegetable

Ingredients

1 lb chicken breast
1 tablespoon all purpose seasoning
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 medium onion
4 teaspoons salt
1 lb broccoli
4 tablespoons tomato sauce
2 cups macaroni
1/2 cup lemon juice
2 tablespoons olive oil

How to prepare

1. Wash the chicken with water and 3 teaspoons salt, then lemon juice.
2. Chop the chicken
3. Steam the broccoli
4. Cook the macaroni
5. Chop the onion and fry with garlic, olive oil, all purpose seasoning, black pepper, tomato sauce and salt, cook the chicken
6. Mix the chicken, the broccoli and macaroni
7. Serve and enjoy!

Submitted by Tagesech Wabeto, Community Engagement Team 11-6-12

Ethiopian Doro Wat

Ingredients:

1 lb. chicken, cut into 1" chunks
1/2 lemon, juiced
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon ginger, minced
1/4 cup niter kibbeh (spiced, clarified butter: recipe follows at end of list)
1/4 cup berbere (Ethiopian spice mix: recipe follows at end of list)
1/2 cup vegetable stock
2 tablespoons red wine
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2-4 hard boiled eggs (optional), peeled

How to prepare

1. Puree onions, garlic, and ginger (with a little water if needed) in a food processor or blender. Add mixture to dry pan and simmer over medium heat until liquid evaporates, about 5-10 minutes, careful not to burn.

2. Add niter kibbeh, paprika, and berbere and simmer for 2-3 minutes, stirring frequently. Add stock, wine, salt, pepper, and chicken.
3. Cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 45 minutes. Add water as necessary to keep a sauce consistency.
4. Add hard boiled eggs and simmer for 10 more minutes. Add more salt and pepper if necessary and serve over rice and/or with injera (Ethiopian flatbread).

Submitted by Kebrewosen Densamo, CPHD, Spring 2012

Fish with rice and vegetables

Ingredients:

- 1 salmon fillet
- 1 cup rice
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2 cups mixed vegetables, cut up
- 1 teaspoon lemon pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt

How to prepare:

1. Season the fish with paprika, lemon pepper, olive oil and salt
2. Put it in the oven for 15 minutes (400 deg)
3. Steam the mixed vegetables
4. Steam the rice
5. Mix all together and serve and enjoy!

Submitted by Tagesech Wabeto, Community Engagement Team 11-6-12

5. Haitian Recipe

Haitian Squash Soup

Ingredients:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1 lb. cubed chicken breast | |
| 2 lb. pumpkin (winter squash) | 3 medium sized turnips, peeled and cubed |
| 1 lb. cabbage sliced, chopped | |
| 3 carrots peeled and sliced | 2 limes cut in half and juiced |
| 2 stalks celery, chopped | 1/4 lb vermicelli, macaroni broken short |
| 3 quarts water (more later if needed) | Spice paste: 4 garlic cloves, 2 sliced scallions, 1 teaspoon thyme, 2 teaspoon of salt, 1/4 teaspoon pepper, 1 scotch bonnet pepper, whole with stem (hot) all processed to a paste. |
| 1 large onion, cubed | |
| 6 medium potatoes | |

How to Prepare

1. Clean the meat with hot water and lemon juice and set aside in a bowl.
2. Add the spice paste and let marinated for at least an hour.
3. Bring water to boil in stockpot, add meat, cover the pot and let cook until tender (about 1

- hr)
4. Add carrots and pumpkin to the tendered meat and continue cooking for 20 minutes
 5. When pumpkin gets soft, remove and puree it in blender. Add the puree back into the pot.
 6. Add the potatoes, celery, turnips to the soup, reduce heat and simmer for about 15 minutes. Add cabbage and cook for another 20 minutes. Add water if necessary because you don't want the soup to be too thick.
 7. Continue boiling until meat is tender and vegetables are cooked (1/2 hour).
 8. Add vermicelli and macaroni or pasta and continue cooking until tender.
 9. Taste and add seasoning at will, salt or hot pepper. Pour in lime juice and stir.
 10. Turn off the heat, cover pot and let sit until ready to serve in medium size bowl.
 11. Put on the side a beautiful basket of sliced bread for 6 persons.



Submitted by Carrine Bury, Community Engagement Team 11-6-12

6. Directions for ingredients in the recipes above

Note: there are many versions of these recipes; these are representative examples from the web

Basic Sofrito (for Pollo Guisado and Habichuelas)

Ingredients:

- 2 medium green peppers, seeds removed
- 1 red sweet pepper, seeds removed
- 2 large tomatoes
- 2 medium onions, peeled
- 1 head of garlic, peeled
- 1 bunch cilantro leaves
- 1/2 bunch parsley leaves

How to Prepare:

1. Chop and blend all the ingredients in a food processor or blender.

Makes 1 quart

Niter Kibbeh (spiced, clarified butter for Doro Wat)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup ghee or clarified butter
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ginger, minced

1 tablespoon red onion, minced
1/4 cinnamon stick
1/4 teaspoon cardamom, ground
1/4 teaspoon turmeric, ground
1 clove
1/8 teaspoon fenugreek, ground
1/8 teaspoon nutmeg, ground

How to Prepare

1. Toast ground dried spices in a pan over low heat until fragrant, careful not to burn. Heat ghee over medium heat and add garlic, ginger, and onion and simmer for 1-2 minutes.
2. Add dry ingredients and lower heat to very low. Simmer for 30 minutes.
3. Strain ghee through cheesecloth (repeat until ghee is relatively free of spices). Pour into a jar and refrigerate.

Berbere (spice mix for Doro Wat)

Ingredients:

4 tablespoons dried New Mexico chilies (or cayenne, if you prefer hotter)
2 tablespoons paprika
1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
1 teaspoon ginger, ground
1/4 teaspoon garlic granules
1/4 teaspoon onion powder
1/2 teaspoon cardamom, ground
1/4 teaspoon turmeric
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg, ground
1/8 teaspoon cloves
1/8 teaspoon allspice
1/8 teaspoon cinnamon, ground

How to Prepare:

1. Toast chilies in a pan over medium heat until starting to blacken, careful not to burn.
2. Let cool and remove stems and seeds.
3. Toast fenugreek, pepper, and coriander in pan until fragrant, combine with chilies and remaining ingredients and grind to a powder.