



How to Manage a Food Revolution in Your School

**Note for School Superintendents
and Principals**



Message from Jamie Oliver

When I first went to Huntington in West Virginia I had to explain to the people in charge that I believed the levels of processed foods being served to kids were too high and that children were eating too many snacks instead of a freshly made, nutritious meal. I was told that this kind of food meets the federal guidelines and that this is the way it happens all over the United States. But I question this and I think: how can this be right for the health of your children?

So it's up to you guys who run the school districts to take the lead and re-interpret the rules. You can stop the obesity epidemic in its tracks and make sure the children in America's schools get the nutrition they need to feed their minds and bodies.

I believe school food should be based on simple dishes cooked from scratch with fresh ingredients. If you believe this too, you can change things in your school. It's not easy and you will need the support from everyone in your school community, from the board of education, to the nutrition team, local healthcare providers, suppliers and the USDA, teachers, parents, janitors – and of course the cooks and kids. But if you can pull everyone together, within one term you will see wonderful changes: children eating food they have never tasted before, teachers coming in for lunch (that's always a sign the food is good!), fridges full of fresh food and freezers empty of processed meals.



In case anyone needs convincing, here are three good reasons to start a Food Revolution:

- 1 – **To radically improve the health prospects of the children in your care.** Overnight, you can get rid of the long list of additives, preservatives, colors, flavorings and excess fat and sugar which feature on the ingredients lists of processed food and contribute very little to a child's nutrition.
- 2 – **To improve behaviour and contribute to better grades.** After two months the principal in Huntington's elementary school was reporting that kids were calmer in class after lunch.
- 3 – **Cost does not have to be a barrier.** Work with your suppliers, buy seasonal, make sure your commodity food allowance comes in unprocessed, therefore free, and be strict about managing portion size by age. You should find that you can make the changes on budget.

You can do it!

OK, now you've committed to do this. Keep reminding yourself that it is important, that you can make a difference, and that you are now a critical part of the food revolution which is changing the health of America, child by child.

Thank you, you are amazing!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jamie O'.



This pack tells you about the things we have learned and will help you start your own school food revolution. Use it with the catering recipes on www.jamiesfoodrevolution.com. They are for the two week menu cycle which is being used in schools in Huntington, WV. Additional dishes are being developed and will be added to the website, so keep going back to look for new ideas. You can also look at Chef Ann Cooper's site, which has many more, www.thelunchbox.org.

The website also has a section with advice for school kitchens and a list of other organisations across America, which can help you with training, food sourcing, farm-to-school programs and many of the other practicalities which you will have to think about.

The "original" recipes were developed on site in Huntington, WV. The other recipes were developed by school food consultants Sustainable Food Systems, LLC (<http://www.sustainablefoodsystems.com/>) for Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution. The team used Renegade Lunch Lady Ann Cooper's site for reference (<http://www.chefann.com/>) and recipes from the Massachusetts Farm-to-School Cook Book which is available to download from Amy Colter's site. (<http://www.amycotler.com>) as well as recipes from Jamie' UK School Dinners pack. We've added a note to let you know where they came from.



STEP 1 Find someone who cares – Appoint an ambassador

This is going to be challenging, so if you know you won't have time, you will need to find one person in your organization who will become the champion for this project. They need to have endless energy and enthusiasm, be passionate about the children and the food they eat and be open to change. They should be aware that this is going to be a time consuming and challenging project and that they may come up against some very stubborn obstacles.

Be creative about who you put in this role – they may not be the obvious choice - for instance, a young teacher who is fully involved with the kids may be better than a more hardy deputy who has enough on their hands, but it could also be a cook, a parent or it may even be you. Behind the scenes, you will need to:

- Work with them, to help lobby the people you need.
- Set a timetable with them for making the changes in your school.
- Support them by helping to get the whole school – kids, teachers and parents – on board.

Now give that person this pack and your full support to push this as far as they can.

Here's what they need to do...

STEP 2 Find out your current position

Find out who needs to be involved to change your food. If you don't employ the catering staff, you will also need to involve your contracted food service supplier. If your meals are coming from a central kitchen, you will need to work with them as well.

Include **all** school food in your plan. That means breakfast, vending machines, the school store, school parties and fundraisers and guidelines for packed lunches.

It's going to be easier to make a program for your whole school district, but work with one or two schools first to pilot the idea and work out a solid master plan.



If you employ a foodservice company these are some of the questions you need to get answers to:

- Which company supplies our school lunches?
- When is the contract with this supplier up for renewal?
- Can the contract be changed to adopt new food?
- Who manages this contract on behalf of the school?
- Who manages this contract on behalf of the supplier?
- How do these people feel about the proposed changes?

STEP 3 Convince the right people

Make sure you involve the cooks right from the start. They are your frontline troops. If they're not on board, this won't work! Once you've got them involved, start targeting:

- The school nutrition director
- The district board of education
- Members of the school board
- School administrators
- The food service director
- The local wellness committee
- Student leaders

Contact all of these important people and explain what you are trying to do and why, and that you will need their help for the benefit of the children under their responsibility. Ask for their support. Don't take NO for an answer!

If you're having problems convincing anyone on this list, get parents and kids to write to them.



STEP 4 Bring in the professionals

It's tough to do all of these things on your own. That's why there are expert catering companies with real food values setting up all over the country. You need people like them to help you with the transition, to get your own systems up and running for the longer term.

We wouldn't have been able to make any changes in Huntington without help from the professionals whose business it is to improve school food. Sustainable Food Systems, LLC (www.sustainablefoodsystems.com) have turned around food services in other schools and other states and they know how to work with all stakeholders including school foodservice and nutrition teams, how to interpret the federal guidelines, how to manage supply relationships, and how to balance the costs. More importantly they know how to put great food on the lunch table and can assist in executing your Food Revolution.

You may need to get funding for this kind of professional support. The best place to look will be a local non-profit organization involved with family health or education. Once you can show this project is having an impact on the health and learning of your children, it will be easier to secure long term support from your local and state government.

STEP 5 Meet your suppliers

Your school kitchen is going to need good, fresh ingredients supplied to your own quality standards. It may be difficult at first to get your suppliers to deliver something outside their usual specification and they'll probably want to charge more. Use this as an opportunity to find new, local suppliers. Ask them to give you a competitive quote. See if you can find a local farm or co-operative which can supply seasonal fresh produce that the supermarkets don't want. There's always someone out there looking for business.

You will need to do the same for your commodity foods allowance, to switch processed and part-processed products to raw foods, preferably fresh. In West Virginia, this was complicated because everything is ordered at a state level. It may be easier in other places, where foods tend to be ordered by the food director for the school district.



STEP 6 Get into the kitchen

Make your school cooks feel like a million dollars!

Make sure the cooks know that they are a valued and important part of the school and are central to the school day, both physically and emotionally.

They should feel totally involved in the process and not feel it's something they're being forced to do against their will. It will take commitment and determination from them and it won't necessarily be easy at first. They will need your enthusiasm and support to make them believe they can do it.

The Huntington recipes are a basic kit to get you started. They make up a two-week cycle of menus which have been tried and tested and meet the federal nutrition standards. Use them as the platform for your food revolution.

Get the cooks involved

- **Talk through the idea** and see what they think.
- **Find out about their skills**, training, and past experience. Do they need further training to help them cook with fresh ingredients? Find out if there's a way to get funding and whether you can organize it on site. Otherwise, you could organize a group event with staff from other local schools to make it more cost effective.
- **Ask about the hours** the cooks currently work. See if you can help to re-structure their shifts to accommodate the new way of doing things. Work out if you need to find extra money to fund a few more hours a week, even if its only for a short time to help everyone get used to the new recipes, food prep and ordering.
- **Make a list of the changes** that need to be made and prepare a realistic timetable which the cooks can be in charge of.
- **Support them** to work out how they will go about making these changes and what problems they might come up against.
- **Encourage them** to get out on the floor during lunchtime and talk to the kids about the new food, telling them what's happening.
- **Keep talking**, every day if possible. Ask them what went well and what they think could be improved. They may well be defensive at first but if they feel they are making progress and that the kids are getting fed better they'll start enjoying it and see it as their own achievement.



Take a good look at your equipment

You need to know what changes are required in the kitchen.

- Write up a list of the equipment they have, what needs replacing, what they'll need to move forward and what you can do without for now.
- Focus on essential labor saving gear – an institutional grade food processor, a hand blender, a salad spinner and if possible a potato rumbler. (There's a full list in the Kitchen Advice pack on the website.)
- You may also find you need more fridge space to store all the fresh produce you will be using.

STEP 7 Countdown to the Food Revolution

So you've got support from all the right people, your new suppliers are lined up and the kitchen team is ready to go. How do you launch your Food Revolution?

- Make a plan and work out what needs to be ready by each key date.
- Work out what you need to do to start getting the new food on the menu and how long it will take.
- Plan it out with a countdown: 1 month to go, 1 week to go and work out what needs to be ready by each date.
- Make sure your revolution is gradual; don't try to change everything at once. Allow plenty of time for the kitchen staff and children to adjust and try out the new dishes. Some of the new dishes may not work at first, but don't be put off, try other ones and build up your repertoire based on success.



One month before – tell everyone

- Get the principal to write to all of the parents to tell them when it's happening.
- Plan a parents' evening in the cafeteria to show off the new dishes.
- Put with information about some of the new food on the school notice board to let the kids know too.
- Look at the menus and start to think about what new dishes will be available and how you can publicize them.

One week before – planning and testing

- Make sure the kitchen is planning out the ingredients list and orders.
- Do a couple of trial runs so the cooks get a chance to practice some of the dishes.
- Have an open day. Invite kids and parents to come and try the new dishes.
- Invite the food service director and cooks to hold an assembly and tell the whole school about the new menu and delicious ingredients. Put up a menu for the first week on the school notice board.

Ready to go

- Make sure the kitchen prep is done.
- Gear up the kitchen team with loads of encouragement.
- Make sure they know how to explain that each child must take a bit of everything. Allow them a "no thank you" portion but make sure they always have a taste of the new food.
- Print out new menu cards; be descriptive and include the ingredients in each dish.
- Label each dish clearly.
- Put out a basket of ingredients on the counter top so they know what's in it.
- Do the same in your main reception so anyone coming into the school can see that you're taking food seriously.
- Encourage young kids to try new foods by rewarding them with stickers.



Tell the kids

Make sure you involve the kids – they're the customers. It will be much easier to get them to change and become more adventurous about what they eat if they feel they've been part of the change. Use your judgment to interpret the results but make sure you incorporate their ideas; lots of them will be good.

- Give them small tasting cups of each new dish the first time you serve it.
- Ask individual classes to do a project about school dinners – about what they like best and what they like least.
- Have an ideas box. It may get some negative comments at first, but you'll get a few good suggestions as well and those kids will be proud to see their ideas being served up as dish of the day.
- Use the student council to discuss the future food and menus.
- Organize a demonstration or cookery lesson in the kitchen to show the kids how the new food is made and the differences between pre-prepared food and using fresh ingredients.
- Use cookery classes to teach some of those dishes.

Tell the teachers

- Put the menus up in the staff room.
- Get staff to create a schedule to sit down and eat with the children so they can enjoy the meals together and help the cooks and supervisors.
- Make sure they get to know the kitchen staff and regard them as equal and important colleagues.
- Put up a school food notice board in the main foyer and ask staff to display the best project work.
- Encourage teachers to talk about the new food in their classrooms.
- Start a food garden on the school grounds or on a local plot so kids can learn where food comes from and how to grow their own. There might be a big enough harvest to feed the school!



Tell the parents

- Send out a letter to let them know that you are changing your school dinners, how you're going about it and why.
- Send them the menu cycle.
- Invite them to come and have lunch to try out the new food.
- Ask for volunteers to come into school to help supervise lunch hour.
- Encourage parents NOT to send their kids to school with candy, sodas and chips. This way, the kids will be encouraged to eat the school lunch.
- Give them recipes so they can make their child's favorite dish at home.
- Run cooking classes to teach them too!

STEP 8 Add your own menus

The Food Revolution menus are just a starting point. Once the school has made the switch from processed, pre-prepared food to fresh, it's important to keep developing your own menus.

Don't let the nutritional guidelines become a barrier. Use your common sense first and judge what looks good on the plate. You can tweak things from there to make sure the meals have the right balance and meet the state and federal standards.

You can get great ideas from:

- The cooks who run your kitchen. Make the most of their skills as trained professionals. Go through a load of cookbooks with them. Pull together recipes that get them excited.
- The children themselves. Do a survey of the top ten dishes they would most like to see on the menus. Think about what age group they are in, the local mix of cultures, and whether they have special dietary needs.
- For special occasions in the school create favorite national, seasonal and festive dishes. Make a list of days when you could put special dishes on the menu for a change.

These ideas will make the food more interesting and unique to your own school.



STEP 9 Put food at the heart of your school culture

This revolution is all about changing the lives of the children in your care. Set out a plan for a term, a school year and beyond. Put food at the heart of the school culture. Back this up with a set of core values and a clear mission statement. Use Jamie's School Food Charter on the website as a base. If you can get everyone signed up to these you will have their commitment to making it work.

Write a mission statement

Set out what you are trying to achieve, such as:

- "We want our school meals to help our children to be healthy, alert and get the best out of school."
- "We want our school lunches to be the most important meal of the day."
- "We want our children to get the best, tastiest, freshly prepared food at school."
- "We want our children to leave our school knowing what good food and a healthy diet are about."
- "We want our children to learn about food and cooking for life."

Write down five words that describe what your Food Revolution stands for. Make these your core values.

Write a short rulebook setting out what you want every meal to always do e.g. establishing the core components of each meal and making sure that each child takes a full meal. Be sure to include what you want them to always avoid, e.g. are there ingredients you would never use or foods you never want to serve?

Send these to your staff, school board, patrons, local health care staff and government to let them know you're taking it seriously.

Food education

Make school food an integral part of the school curriculum. Don't just keep the food in the cafeteria, use it throughout the school to help kids to learn about where their food comes from; what fresh quality ingredients look and taste like; how to cook for themselves and their families; that food is fun!

Get the kids, teachers and parents involved. Ask for their ideas and support.

Evaluate the lunch schedule and adjust if needed. For example, if timing is a problem see if there's any way you can work with the principal to change the lunch hour so everyone has time to sit down and enjoy the delicious new meals being cooked.



And finally, keep it up!

Changing your school dinners will be hard work and you won't do it overnight. But if you're well prepared from the start and passionate about making a positive change you'll begin to see a difference in just a few weeks.

Set your sights high, be determined and you will make lasting changes.

- Find someone outside the school that can measure and evaluate change. Tell everyone about the progress you're making.
- Do look back and remind yourself where you started. It will give you a huge sense of achievement.
- Keep moving forward and doing "One more thing".
- Inspire your neighbors. Tell them what you've done and how you've done it. Inspire them to follow in your footsteps.

You're a leader of this important change. Good luck! And enjoy it!