

Los Angeles Food Policy Council Questionnaire

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LAUSD District 4

1. What would you do to leverage the school district's food purchasing power and expand its commitment to the Good Food Purchasing Program? How will you ensure that all five values of the Good Food Purchasing Policy (healthy, sustainable, local, fair and humane) are preserved in the district's food purchases?

My campaign is all about local control and accountability for schools and communities, and this extends to the food LAUSD offers to students, faculty, and staff. The goal of the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) is to provide "high-quality, locally-sourced, sustainable, fair, humane, and healthy" food to students. While the LAUSD was the second organization to sign on to the GFPP, maintaining the high standards set by the program requires working with parents, staff, students, and companies for a transparent and accountable food program.

In practice, the GFPP is a tool for the District and communities to hold food providers accountable for meeting the high standards we expect for our children. That means that when companies like Tyson Foods are cited repeatedly for OSHA violations, poor working conditions, and failure to meet sustainability standards, they must be held accountable and new providers must be sought. The only way to do that is through oversight—which is the responsibility of the LAUSD Board, and what I'm running to promote.

The District must be governed by a school board that is committed to the GFPP and willing to make available information about the food in LA schools and where it comes from. The Board should also work with administrators and staff to implement training and re-training programs for LAUSD employees so they are knowledgeable of the GFPP evaluation system.

2. If you are elected, how will you increase participation in school meal programs and support schools in becoming champions for nutritious food access? How will you influence meal programs to encourage greater progress in healthy eating?

Already, nearly half of all LAUSD students are eligible for free school lunches without parents or guardians having to file any paperwork or applications. LA Unified has been nationally recognized for the success of its efforts to provide low-cost, healthy options to students. Still, more needs to be done in order to ensure the long-term success and fiscal health of LA Unified's food service program.

In 2015, the Independent Financial Review Panel found that LAUSD’s food program had cost the general fund roughly \$50 million a year. The panel called for “actions to be implemented immediately” to address the problem. Later that year, the director of food services for LAUSD was fired following revelations that he had mismanaged a \$500,000 marketing budget and failed to report conflicts of interest in contracting deals. That was a strong first step. Two years later, LAUSD has finally found a permanent replacement in Joseph Vaughn. But the saga is just another example of lack of oversight, transparency, and accountability in LA Unified.

My primary goals for LAUSD meal programs then are improving their fiscal health, and better implementing healthy eating into the curriculum and school community. Fiscal responsibility is the first step in ensuring longevity for the district’s already-successful efforts to increase access to healthy and nutritious food. It is also the first step in broadening our efforts to educate kids and families about healthy choices, not just making them available in cafeterias. Through proper funding and budgetary planning, LAUSD can and should grow school gardens, enhance food science and urban agriculture education curricula, and increase partnerships with parents and community groups to improve access and education around healthy choices.

3. What would you do to strengthen and expand the district’s support for school gardens?

The first step for supporting school gardens is to craft a well-researched strategic plan for their use, so that the entire district has a touchstone set of policies, guidelines, and suggestions for cultivating gardens and integrating them into curricula. This would be money well-spent by the district: studies indicate that every dollar invested in community gardens yield as much as \$6 in return.

The second step is to acquire more gardening space so that as many schools as possible can take advantage of community garden opportunities, and so that land is put to the best possible use. To do that, we should work with the City of Los Angeles to establish a program similar to one in San Francisco, which gives tax breaks to owners of vacant lots that are transformed into community gardens.

Community gardens are one of the best ways to increase access to nutritious food and educate students and families about healthy choices. Engaging kids and communities in the food and nutrition process through urban agriculture is an important way to make healthy habits stick.

4. Would you support healthy food carts outside of LAUSD schools?

Yes. We should provide as many nutritious snack options to students as possible, and healthy food carts can play a role in that while promoting local business and creating jobs. That said, I think LAUSD should play an active role in ensuring high-quality and healthy food carts and food trucks outside LA schools.

To do that, I would propose seeking grants from vendors such as Whole Foods to facilitate local community members creating new food trucks and carts that are health certified. I would also supporting continuing to enforce the 500-foot ban on all food vendors that are not health certified.

When I started as a teacher at Markham Middle School in Watts, one of the first things I noticed about local stores was that soda was cheaper than water, and unhealthy food options were almost always less expensive even than fresh fruit. I know that since then, LA Unified has taken enormous steps to address issues of access to nutritious food. If elected, I would push to continue down that path.

5. **What would you do to increase the effectiveness of these food waste efforts in LAUSD? How will you ensure each school participates in these programs? Would you support composting the cafeteria food scraps in school gardens?**

This school year, food waste has been at the center of the conversation around LA Unified's food program. It's a problem that needs to be addressed. If elected, I would work with officials at the city, county, and state levels to make it easier for schools to donate excess food to shelters and soup kitchens so less is wasted. I would also push to address food waste in the plan for school gardens, so that food that is unsalvageable can be composted, providing an opportunity for students to learn about sustainability and the science of decomposition.

By engaging with schools, students, and families around food waste, we can create district-wide metrics for tracking food waste. We can also create opportunities for students and communities by developing district-wide challenges for lowering school waste and providing incentives and prizes for students and schools. This would not be a competition for needed resources, but rather a friendly contest to keep students interested and committed to these issues throughout their time in LAUSD and into adulthood.