



A New Resource for Educators to Support Social and Emotional Learning

As most schools return to in-person instruction, we have a crucial moment to support students amidst an ongoing and traumatic pandemic. It's within this context that FoodCorps is releasing the **Our Cafeteria Project (OCP)**, a new program that helps educators build relationships with students, allows kids to share their voices and perspectives, and supports a welcoming cafeteria (or other eating space) environment.

SOUND
BETTER

MORE
CHOICES

FEEL
BETTER

MORE
FUN

LOOK
BETTER



Project Background

From 2017–2018, FoodCorps conducted research in nine diverse school communities as a part of the [Reimagining School Cafeterias Project](#). Through interviews with more than 400 elementary school students across the country, we learned that students *want more agency and voice* in the decisions that affect them at mealtimes. Based on these findings, FoodCorps developed and piloted the OCP. From this pilot, we learned that participating students *felt empowered to make decisions and teachers observed positive behavior changes, including improvement in student confidence and teamwork skills*.

About the Resource

The program is a resource for educators or school staff who want to lead students in a project that supports their social and emotional learning (SEL). During the project, students will lead conversations with their peers and school staff about how to improve their cafeteria or mealtime environment. Through hands-on activities, students gain leadership experience and feel empowered to ask for change in their school. The program outlines a process for a teacher or school staff to support students as they problem solve, develop a vision for change, and collaborate on the process to enact the change they envision. Though the program has been designed for FoodCorps, it is widely applicable for any educator.

Why Use This Resource?

During this time of education recovery, it is crucial for educators to emphasize social and emotional skills. Using a project-based learning framework, this guidebook offers many ways to support SEL:



Opportunities for students to express their voices and make choices that impact their experience in the classroom, cafeteria, and garden



The consistent presence of a caring adult who can help to build social awareness skills



Opportunities to work collaboratively and build rewarding relationships based on cooperation



Opportunities for students to take leadership roles, which supports positive behavior change