



memo

To: The Board of Education and Dr. Patrick Broncato, Superintendent
From: Curt Saindon, Assistant Superintendent for Business Services/CSBO
Date: April 18, 2025
Subject: Food Services RFP Update

Just a quick update on the Food Service RFP process. We opened proposals on April 7th and received two qualified proposals (from Just a Dash Catering and Quest Foods) and four no-bid letters (from Organic Life, Aramark, Open Kitchens, and Whitson Food Group). The review team (me, Michelle Swanson, Kelly Neylon, Yadi Alfaro and Alisa Zawodny) reviewed and scored the proposals the week of April 7th, scheduled site visits to schools that each responder services on April 14th, held taste testing sessions with students from each school (and the review team) on April 15th, finalized our scoring and recommendation on April 16th and sent ISBE our proposed recommendation on April 17th. ISBE has up to 30 days to review and approve our recommendation, follow up with any questions, and make any final determinations in advance of us bringing a recommendation to the Board of Education (hopefully on May 19th, if things go smoothly).

If you remember, last year we ran into a snag during final negotiations when we asked our preferred finalist a few questions that ISBE believed should have been asked during the RFP process (not afterwards) and as a result ISBE determined that the process had been “spoiled” and they decided to “throw out” the preferred finalist, forcing us to go back our incumbent provider (Open Kitchens) for this year. It was our belief that we did nothing wrong, and at the very most, only the information related to the additional conversation should have been barred from consideration, and not the vendor or the underlying contract, which was in accordance with the RFP. As a result, we will not be having a final negotiations meeting this year, so as not to potentially “spoil” the process, and we will provide the RFP responses and our scoring sheets directly to ISBE for their review and approval, hopefully avoiding any last minute issues or concerns like we encountered last year.

As you probably remember, we did switch from a pre-packaged, vended meal program (we had this type of program for the past 12 years) to a bulk food vended meal program with Open Kitchens this year. While a little more labor intensive and requiring some additional equipment, we felt like it was a definite improvement in both food quality and menu variety. We did have some ongoing challenges with Open Kitchens related to staffing/labor issues and menu



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changes/meal options, so we decided to do another RFP this year and see what was out there. We received two quality proposals (I had hoped for 3-5), and we expect to have a solid program to recommend to the Board in May. As always, if you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know...thanks!