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To: The Board of Education and Dr. Patrick Broncato, Superintendent
From: Curt Saindon, Assistant Superintendent for Business Services/CSBO
Date: January 10, 2025
Subject: Food Services Update

Just a quick update on our progress in preparing and letting an RFP for Food Services. As you know, we did an RFP last year, and after initially selecting Quest Foods as our preferred and recommended provider to move to a bulk food vended program (we previously had a pre-packaged vended meal program), we were told by ISBE that we could not use them due to a technicality/error that occurred during the final stages of the review process. As this process was new last year, and as we received minimal guidance and support from ISBE, an error was made during the final negotiations stage of the review that disqualified Quest and ISBE would therefore not allow us to recommend/use them. The error was my fault, and an honest one that could easily have been rectified, but ISBE seemed less concerned with correcting an honest mistake and more concerned with following the letter of the law to the extreme, and after much wrangling and negotiations by us and our legal counsel with ISBE, we gave up and abandoned recommending Quest, and moved on to our second choice, our incumbent Open Kitchens.

Open Kitchens was then recommended and approved in May of 2024 and we have been working with them since that time to transition to a bulk food vended meal program. We have had a few issues, especially with staffing and personnel management, as well as ordering and inventory management, but despite these challenges, the new bulk food program definitely seems to be an improvement over the old pre-packaged program. The attractiveness of the meals has improved, the menu variety is a little bit better, and meal counts have consistently been going up. We have had a long history with Open Kitchens, having used them for 11 of the past 12 years, and while the overall quality of the new bulk vended meal program is certainly an improvement over the old pre-packaged program, we believe that there may be opportunities for overall improved meal service.

Therefore, in an effort to have the very best program possible, with great menu variety, superior food quality and maximum program participation, we believe that we should again consider our options and do another RFP this year. Our plan and hope would be to complete the RFP process, select the very best option available to us this spring and recommend a five year contract (reviewable and renewable annually) that would run from the 2025-2026 school year



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memo

through the 2029-2030 school year. Michelle Swanson has been working on updating the RFP document and is sending it along to ISBE for their review and comment this week. We hope to have their comments back by the end of January and would then plan to make any final edits based on ISBE's comments, and release the RFP to the public in early February.

Even though we are doing an RFP instead of a Formal Bid, this is still a very regulated and controlled process by ISBE, and if everything goes smoothly, we would hope to work through the process and have a recommendation for the Board in March. Realistically, due to projected delays in working with ISBE, I would expect that we probably will not be able to bring a recommendation to the Board until April or May. That is still plenty of time to make any changes if they do occur. If Open Kitchens is still the best option, then no transition would occur and we would simply work with them to continue improving the quality of the program and enhancing student participation. If we do end up selecting a different food service provider, then we would need to work with Open Kitchens on transitioning out of the school district (probably in June) and a new provider on transitioning into the school district (probably in July), so that we could have a new provider up and ready to go for the start of school (in August). As always, if you have any questions, please let me know. Thanks!