



Fresh, locally grown, and organic produce is available on a daily basis to students.

## FAST FACTS

<b>NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:</b>	Morgan Hill Unified School District
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Morgan Hill, CA
<b>GRADES SERVED:</b>	Pre-K - 12th Grade
<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED:</b>	5,321
<b>PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE- OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS (PRE-PANDEMIC):</b>	30%

At Morgan Hill Unified School District, Michael Jochner, Director of Student Nutrition, and his hardworking staff are elevating school meals. Jochner brings elements of his culinary background to the job. With 13 schools in his district, Jochner approaches each cafeteria as its own restaurant, and the students as his guests. He is determined to bring the guests back each day with new, exciting, flavorful, and healthy dishes.



A typical lunch tray at MHUSD: Teriyaki chicken with vegetable brown rice, salad, fresh fruit, and milk.



Whole grain pizza is a student favorite! Served with fresh fruit and vegetables, and fat-free chocolate milk.

### 100 PERCENT WHOLE GRAINS

MHUSD has been striving to offer 100 percent whole grains to students for more than four years, which exceeds the federal standard requiring at least 51 percent whole grains for grain products. Jochner recognizes that school meals may be some students' only source of nutritious foods of the day. He believes his job is to "present and provide the meals that are best for the students," even if it is a new dish or flavor they aren't used to. Even if the students don't accept the dish at first, Jochner notes that with time, most students become big fans of the whole grain dishes. Some whole grain student favorites include 100 percent whole grain pizza, Baja fish tacos made with a whole grain tortilla, and brown rice dishes. Product shortages have forced Jochner to use whole grain-rich items (made with at least 51 percent whole grains) in some cases, but Jochner says this is the last resort.

“IT'S MY PASSION TO PROVIDE NUTRITIONALLY DENSE MEALS WHICH ARE ALSO DELICIOUS.”

### FARM-TO-TABLE PRODUCE

In a mission to improve the sustainability of their school meals, MHUSD recently purchased a Freight Farm and now grows 50 percent of their district's lettuce. They partner with three local organic farms to source the local produce they don't grow themselves. MHUSD is one of a handful of school districts with a "Lead Farmer" and Jochner is currently working on purchasing a second farm to grow 100 percent of the district's lettuce. He also has plans to build additional high-tech hydroponic spaces to grow the remainder of the salad bar items (cherry tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, etc.). Having the food grown and sourced right from the school provides students with a deeper connection and appreciation to their food.



Picture from within the "Freight Farm" where 50 percent of the district's lettuce is grown.

### HOLISTICALLY OFFERING HEALTHY MEALS: LOWER ADDED SUGAR AND SODIUM, MORE WHOLE GRAINS, LOCAL PRODUCE, PLANT-BASED FOODS

Beyond grains and local produce, Jochner and his team are also passionate about limiting added sugars and sodium in school meals. While the district doesn't have an official policy, Jochner aims for an average of less than 12 grams of added sugar per meal over the course of the week—CSPI estimates that school meals should have no more than 12.5 to 21 grams of added sugar averaged over the week, depending on grade level—and meeting USDA's former sodium reduction target 2 (less than 935 mg of sodium at lunch in high school). He regularly monitors weekly menus to ensure dishes served stay below the weekly targets for sodium and added sugar while remaining flavorful and nutrient dense.

Jochner has also incorporated more plant-based items on his menu, such as replacing beef burgers with flavorful vegan patty options and replacing the chicken in Tikka Masala with cauliflower.





## KEYS TO SUCCESS

Jochner notes that his culinary background has been very helpful in understanding the cooking and presentation techniques to prepare and serve whole grains in an appealing manner. Some of his key tips? Make sure sauces are covering the brown rice, and place vegetables and/or protein on top of the rice to prevent it from drying out.

He also emphasizes the importance of experiencing a meal with his “customers,” the students. He believes it’s crucial to stand in the lunch line, sit down with the students, and try the food with them. He encourages his staff to sample the food as well. This helps them better identify any weaknesses of the dish so they can make adjustments to correct them.

Finally, Jochner notes that the recent purchase of convection ovens, updated refrigerators and freezers, and food warmers have been invaluable in his district’s kitchens. He states that many ovens in schools do not get hot enough, making proper crisping of items like breaded chicken challenging, if not impossible. Jochner applies to every grant he is eligible for, and uses those funds to purchase updated equipment, which is yet another testament to the importance of funding kitchen equipment in schools.



Fresh berry parfaits.



Chef Salads are available each day during lunch.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES/FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Jochner has several goals and plans for the upcoming school year. He notes that mastering whole grain pasta dishes has been challenging, and he hopes to explore some of the parbaked pasta products on the market. Additionally, while almost all of his kitchens use “speed scratch” cooking (a combination of using raw, whole, and convenience or “ready-to-eat” ingredients), Jochner plans to implement more scratch cooking across the district’s kitchens in the 2022-2023 school year. In terms of large-scale change in the school meals industry, Jochner hopes that culinary training for school nutrition directors become accessible and widespread across the country to improve the quality and healthfulness of school meals.

This story was developed and based on an interview and email correspondence with the district. Compliance with nutrition standards is self-reported and has not been verified by CSPI.

School website: <https://www.mhusd.org/departments/business-services/student-nutrition>

For more information, please contact [policy@cspinet.org](mailto:policy@cspinet.org)

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