



collaboration  
culture  
community  
courage



**The 4C's** behind the  
business of child nutrition



# Culture workbook 02

NextUp has partnered with LINQ to explore the 4 C's behind child nutrition. The 4 C's include:

- collaboration
- culture
- communication
- courage

Student perceptions of school foodservice operations have been studied. Both high school and middle school students reported that school foodservice staff behaviors (e.g., staff smiling and greeting students, staff being polite to customers) were significantly related to overall satisfaction with school meals. High school students who reported higher satisfaction with school meals reported eating school meals more frequently.

Source:  
[The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management](#)

As school food service professionals aim to create healthy and irresistible meals to feed students, the culture around what and how to serve plays a large role in decision making.

In the second episode of "The 4 C's Behind the Business of Child Nutrition," a four-part video series hosted by NextUp and moderated by Shannon Solomon, a renowned, passionate leader in the restaurant business and K-12 education industries, school nutrition professionals discuss how the culture of food service affects school food service managers' decisions around everything from menu creation to meeting nutritional needs while creating appealing dishes for children with varying tastes.

They also share examples of how they encourage their food service teams to break away from tired stereotypes as they strive to meet their top goal: feeding children.



### Meet the Panel

From Left: Shannon Solomon, Jessica Shelly, Roy R. Pistone II, Katie Cossette

# Culture summary

### PANEL MODERATOR

**Shannon Soloman**  
School Nutrition Professional

Connect with me



At the end of the day, school food service teams aim to achieve a single (yet critical) goal: bring healthy and appetizing meals to school cafeterias and lunchrooms.

No matter what problems or challenges may arise, feeding students and meeting their nutritional needs remains a clear and consistent goal.

Computers don't always work. Ingredients don't always arrive on time or in the freshest condition. Ideas don't always succeed. But with some creative thinking and the realization that sometimes things go wrong before they get better, these challenges aren't impossible to overcome.

To provide a better idea of what a positive and productive culture can do in a school nutrition program, event host and moderator Shannon Solomon and panelists Roy R. Pistone II, Jessica Shelley and Katie Cossette discuss what's working in their own districts.

*"Don't be afraid of out-of-the-box decisions as kitchen managers. It's worth it to empower your kitchen managers and your kitchen staff. Throw it away if you wouldn't eat it. What kind of culture are you creating [if you say], 'Oh, no, you can't throw it away'?"*

Keep reading to hear more from the conversation!

## Create a goal-based culture

### FEATURED SPEAKER

Roy R. Pistone II

Food Service Director at Citrus County



*"Our superintendent is big on what she calls Mission Possible. We're all about kids, plain and simple. Whatever it takes, we're going to be there for the kids."*

Leaders should always focus on the most important objective, and all the panelists instantly agreed: Feeding the students in their district is the only thing that matters.

*"Our superintendent is big on what she calls Mission Possible,"* said Roy Pistone II, RD, M.Ed., SNS, Director of Food Services for the Citrus County School District in Florida. *"We're all about kids, plain and simple. Whatever it takes, we're going to be there for the kids."*

This mindset forged around a shared goal can help district employees overcome unexpected challenges as they work to meet the needs of students.

Foodservice employees play a major role in setting students up for success—and at a time when staffing shortages are affecting industries across the globe, it is more important than ever to retain the people who are doing the important work of keeping schools running.

*"In my department, we have a motto: One team, one goal, no limits. That's something we truly believe in,"* Pistone added. *"Whatever it takes, we're going to make it happen--everything [else] is secondary. The main focus is to feed our kids. We collaborate; everybody is focused on that mission."*

When leaders place the end goal at the center of all decision making, then problem solving becomes much easier.

*"Everything is about feeding the kids,"* said Katie Cossette, MDA, RDN, SNS, Director of Nutrition Services for Englewood Schools in Colorado. *"If the POS doesn't work, just feed the kids. We'll get through it. Write down numbers, write down names, but at the end, you have to make sure it's seamless for them."*

Meeting that goal might require unorthodox methods, but it's well worth it, panelists agreed.

## Encourage creativity and innovation

### FEATURED SPEAKER

Jessica Shelley

MBA, SNS, REHS, Director of Student Dining Services for Cincinnati Public Schools in Ohio



*"It's our responsibility to ensure they feel empowered, comfortable, and they know that we trust them to make the right decisions for their students."*

While straying from traditional practices might seem daunting, especially when food services teams are feeding thousands of children, trying something new can yield unexpected and inspiring results.

*"Don't be afraid of out-of-the-box decisions as kitchen managers. It's worth it to empower your kitchen managers and your kitchen staff,"* said moderator Shannon Solomon, MS, SNS, Director of Nutrition Services at Aurora Public Schools in Colorado. *"Throw it away if you wouldn't eat it. What kind of culture are you creating [if you say], 'Oh, no, you can't throw it away'?"*

Food service teams that feel empowered by leadership feel supported when they try something new.

*"It's our responsibility to ensure they feel empowered, comfortable, and they know that we trust them to make the right decisions for their students,"* said Shelley.

Sometimes, an out-of-the-box decision is as simple as varying the seasonings used in the same dishes, depending on who is eating the dishes.

*"Putting basil on green beans on the west side of Cincinnati is going to make the kids say, 'What?' But if I do that on the east side, the kids are like, 'Wow,'"* Shelley added. *"I have to make sure my managers know it's OK [to experiment], as long as they're not completely changing the nutritional profile. It's not just thinking outside the box, it's taking that box, tearing it up and crushing it. Why do we even have a box to begin with, when we can make sure we are providing the absolute best for our students?"*

Follow LINQ on LinkedIn to hear more from those making a difference in nutrition within their districts!



## Don't be afraid to fail

### FEATURED SPEAKER

#### Katie Cossette

MDA, RDN, SNS, Director of Nutrition Services for Englewood Schools in Colorado



*I'm not attached to the recipe; I'm attached to what the kids would like better. So let's talk about it. Don't be afraid."*

It's a fact of life: everyone fails. But it's the next steps you take that determine what you learn from this experience. Food services teams will fail, the panelists agreed—and that's OK. Failure should be viewed as an opportunity to learn and improve.

*"I tell my staff that if there's something about a recipe that doesn't work, or if they have a better idea or flavor, tell me. I'm not attached to the recipe; I'm attached to what the kids would like better. So let's talk about it. Don't be afraid,"* Cossette said.

In most cases, failure is a prerequisite for inspiration and growth.

While it's important for school nutrition leaders to discuss opportunities for growth when analyzing what didn't work, it's equally important to end conversations about failures with positive takeaways.

*"We try to focus on all the positives,"* Pistone said. *"We're so programmed to think about all the things that went wrong [each] day. Instead, think about that one great thing that happened. Focusing more on that is something we try to [emphasize with] our employees. Don't always focus on the negatives."*

## Culture Key Takeaways

### Create a culture of 'yes'



Encouraging food service staff to try new ideas, and to focus on what's possible instead of what isn't possible, pushes employees forward to innovate and consistently improve.

### Stay positive



Failure is a natural part of growth and innovation. Learning from mistakes is a critical part of a success-based culture.

### Collaborate for success



Providing consistent opportunities for collaboration and career development doesn't only contribute to the growth of school nutrition teams—it enables impactful decision making.

### Culture Resources

Use these resources to support culture in your district's nutrition program.

#### Free Toolkit:

[Make Meal Planning Your Jam!](#)

#### Related Resource:

[Conversation Starters For Designing More Inclusive School Meals Programs \(via No Kid Hungry\)](#)

Looking for more tips on bringing together the best team possible?

Take a look at this A-Team Career Ladder, provided by Aurora Public Schools!

[Click here](#)

*In the next chapter workbook, discover the importance of and how to nurture good communication in your district.*

**Missed Episode 1: Communication?**  
Take a look at everything 4C's here!

