



Oakland, CA

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of “Lessons for Leaders:”
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

Many of the low-income, high-crime neighborhoods surrounding Oakland’s public elementary schools do not have a full-service grocery store. As a result, residents use liquor stores and convenience stores as primary sources of food. The population is more than 90 percent Latino, African American and Southeast Asian in these school communities, and 96 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Community Action

Informed by an assessment, a partnership between the East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC); the Oakland Unified School District Nutrition Services Department; a broad array of public, private and nonprofit community organizations; parents, school staff and students shared a vision of school-based produce markets that would provide direct access to high-quality, affordable fresh foods in neighborhoods with no nearby supermarkets. With early financial support from The California Endowment and *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities*, a pilot program launched in April 2006 with weekly produce markets at Franklin and Garfield Elementary Schools.

The markets were complex. Together, they offered over 50 varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables, herbs, nuts and honeys. Each market featured cooking demonstrations, nutrition and food education, and the use of “student buyer cards,” which incentivized children to patronize their market. A market manager (a paid part-time position filled by a school parent) and a team of five to 10 parent volunteers operated each market. Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) food stamps were accepted. These two test markets allowed the partnership to

engage in applied learning, unearth challenges and refine the concept as they inspired larger change. They demonstrated the potential for public schools to be resources for healthy food distribution as sales, volunteer participants and repeat customers at each market increased each year.

Informed and encouraged by these early pilots, funders invested more and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) contributed its institutional purchasing and distribution powers to help EBAYC grow the network of markets. Joint work included branding the market network “Oakland FRESH”; selecting new school hosts and market managers; and training school principals, market managers, and community partners. It also involved developing contracting procedures with family farmers, establishing protocols for purchasing and sales accounting, and organizing central receiving and distribution processes.

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Launched in October 2009, Oakland FRESH had weekly markets at 12 schools. By the fall of 2012, the network had grown to 22 school-based markets, and OUSD institutionalized the initiative as part of a larger, staffed farm-to-school program. Early pilot testing inspired and informed a significant change in neighborhood healthy food access and supported a significant systems change within the public schools.