

“The Quality School Lunch Program created a platform for skill building related to youth advocacy. The students were able to **identify an issue and design a solution** on their own.”

– Dom Portis, United Way

## SUCCESS STORY



# Community Schools' QUALITY SCHOOL LUNCH PROJECT

## Capacity Building Grants

In 2023, Milwaukee Succeeds awarded \$400,000 in Partner Capacity Building Grants to five local youth-serving organizations: Community Schools Partnership at the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County, the Department of Black and Latino Male Achievement at Milwaukee Public Schools, Mentor Greater Milwaukee, SKY Schools, and Teach for America Milwaukee.

The funding, informed by discussions with Milwaukee Succeeds' youth ambassadors and the larger Youth Forward MKE Coalition, is intended to **expand the work of coalition partners and fuel their innovative youth-centered programming**. Each of the projects will be highlighted in their own success story.

## About the Project

At the 10 community schools supported by United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County, student voice is vital for success. After receiving their grant funding, youth councils at each of the schools were tasked with deciding how to spend the funds.

Using existing student data, it was clear that improving the school lunch experience was going to be the focal point.



# The Initiatives

## ● SCHOOL LUNCH PROJECT

The youth council representatives at each location surveyed students – and in some instances school staff – to get feedback from all constituents around how to improve school lunch. This intentional step represented a learning opportunity for students, allowing them to see that their own ideas might not be what the larger group wanted.

While items like microwaves and air fryers were the initial goal, due to various rules and regulations, the schools pivoted to salad bar tabletops, condiment stations, spice racks, cleaning supplies and games to enhance lunch at the 10 schools.

## ● YOUTH COUNCIL CONVENINGS

Funding was also used to support fall/spring youth council convenings at Marquette University. This was an opportunity for youth councils in the Community Schools network to identify priorities, collaborate on issues and work together to make change.



*Working closely with our partners during the grant execution phase, we encountered inevitable challenges. However, what stood out was the unwavering trust and collaboration that defined our relationship.*

**- Maria Hamidu, Milwaukee Succeeds**



## WHAT WORKED

### ▶ Voluntary Nature & Collaboration

For some students, this was a long-term project, taking over 12 months for their ideas to come to fruition. Students were not required to participate, and having a product of that work is meaningful. The students came together and accomplished something on their own, demonstrating change for both youth and adults.

### ▶ Creative Compromise

While feeling pressured to do the status quo and use the funds for an “easy fix” like painting a mural in the lunchroom or ordering new furniture, United Way staff got resourceful. Having a cushioned seat won’t make the food taste better, so they compromised, ordering things that stayed within the parameters while still being responsive to students’ ideas.

## WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

### ▶ Communication & Systems

Along with experiencing frequent and prolonged delays with communication, there is also a disconnect between different levels of staff. Ensuring that the right people have all of the information as the project continues is crucial to success.

### ▶ Focus on Student Voice

The project was designed to be student-centered and student-led, but spending decisions were ultimately driven by adults and inflexible systems. There was minimal ability to think outside the box, which hindered the process.

Partners

