



Santa Clara Unified School District.

K-12 farm to table.



Farm-fresh produce every day.

There are only a few school district farms in California and the Santa Clara Unified School District is one of them. The school district owns an 11-acre farm in Sunnyvale, in the heart of Silicon Valley, that grows organic produce like rainbow carrots, fava beans, red romaine lettuce, cabbage, kale, snap peas, cucumbers, blood oranges, apricots, butternut squash, tomatoes, basil, and cilantro.

Robert Mencimer, known as Chef Bob, is Culinary Supervisor for the Santa Clara Unified School District. With 30 years of experience and a degree in culinary arts, the district hired him in 2006 to elevate the quality of the nutrition services program. Today, he has two chefs on staff and roughly 50% of the food is cooked from scratch using fresh, healthful ingredients.

Chef Bob works with Operations Manager Sheri Nielsen and David Tuttle, Farm Consultant, to plan crops that can be used in recipes and are liked by students. From there, farm produce is distributed to the district's 28 schools. Chef Bob's style is homemade comfort food that tastes good: pasta and meatballs, roasted chicken with mashed potatoes, brisket, and chili made with grass-fed beef.

In 2009, the district began replacing convection ovens with RATIONAL combi ovens to prepare school breakfasts and lunches that look great and taste better as well as cook faster and more evenly.

“Using the RATIONAL helps us really bring out the quality of the food.”

Chef Robert Mencimer, Culinary Supervisor,
Santa Clara Unified School District



Industry:
Unified school district

Core business:
School catering

Location:
Santa Clara, CA



Elevated quality, lower labor costs.

“Whenever we have a RATIONAL oven, that is the oven we are using to cook the hot food. Everything goes into the RATIONAL.”

Sheri Nielsen, Operations Manager, Santa Clara Unified School District



Sheri Nielsen remembers when the first RATIONAL oven arrived in 2009. “The first thing we cooked was grilled cheese; I was amazed how you could get the color on both sides just like you get it off the grill, but it only took three to four minutes. It was quick – you could put six trays into the oven and cook about 150 grilled cheese sandwiches at the same time.”

Today, 14 kitchens in the Santa Clara Unified School District are equipped with 32 RATIONAL combi ovens. Nielsen, Chef Bob, and their culinary team attributes a notable increase in labor savings and food quality to RATIONAL. The cooking speed, overnight cooking, and self-cleaning function save time, and the finished products retain moisture, cook more evenly, shrink less, and experience no flavor transfer.

“The RATIONAL helps us serve a better product ... after working with it, I couldn’t think of using any oven other than a RATIONAL,” Chef Bob said.

Staff use the ChefLine for immediate answers to questions, and their RATIONAL rep provides on-site training and support. The RATIONAL app is there for recipes and guidance on cooking and cleaning.

The challenge:

- › Elevating the freshness, quality, taste, and healthfulness of food served to students at the Santa Clara Unified School District.

The solution:

- › 1× SelfCookingCenter® 61
- › 24× SelfCookingCenter® 62
- › 7× SelfCookingCenter® 102

Customer benefit:

- › iCookingControl: The intelligent probe accurately identifies the lowest internal temperature, ensuring perfect results every time.
- › Efficient CareControl: The self-cleaning function is easy to use, effective, and saves time and labor. The integrated, retracting hand shower makes it easy to clean splatters between deep cleanings.



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