



The Lunch Club

CREATING for CAFETERIAS

A guidebook for bringing student-led
artwork to school cafeterias



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INTRODUCTION



School Cafeterias are all too often uninspiring spaces comprised of blank cinder block walls and antiquated folding tables. Students sit banquet style, trying to cram in as much social time as possible between mouthfuls of home-packed food or processed lunches during their 30 minutes of freedom. The shortness of the lunch period and the number of students in the room creates a noisy and chaotic environment, one that requires constant supervision from school staff. In the American public school system, this room is not a place of education, aesthetics, or even health, it is a space of necessity and efficiency. Students must eat during the school day, but what and how they eat is not part of their education, it is simply a requirement of being human.

But it doesn't need to be this way. Research has clearly shown that improvements in these spaces also improve student health and well-being. And these improvements are not solely related to food. Transforming cafeterias into inviting and inspiring eating environments also provides enormous benefits to students, and even more so when students feel that they have ownership and agency within the space. Instead of a dreary and cold room, imagine a cafeteria that becomes a vibrant gallery for student art, where students can share their cultural identities, stories, artistic skills, and visions. Perhaps these works of art also serve to educate their peers and spark conversations about their food systems, their community, and their environment.

Large-scale national programs like the Smarter Lunchroom Movement have not overlooked the positive role student art can play in cafeterias, and include it in their scorecard and metrics for success. However, regardless of the positives, this improvement may be challenging for schools to accomplish. Teachers (and art teachers even more so) are undervalued and underpaid. School administrators have many responsibilities on their plates and may feel disconnected from the cafeteria, particularly when an external food service provider is involved.

This guidebook provides a journey map for generating and incorporating student-led art in the cafeteria. It is designed for high school students interested in improving their cafeteria experience, as well as teachers, administrators, and other sponsors who wish to support this effort.



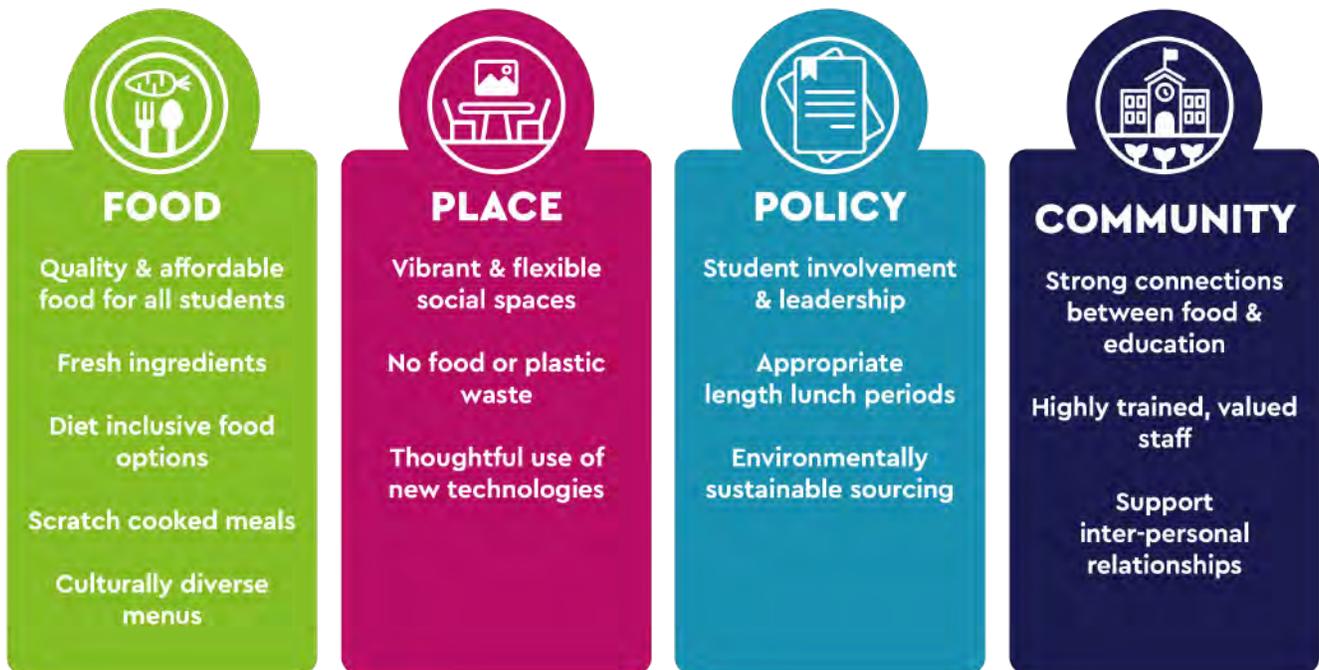
Equitable and Sustainable Cafeteria Goals



Between 2020–2021 high school students participated in a research project where they were asked to design their ideal future school cafeteria in 4 sections: People, Plate, Place, and Policy. From these cafeteria futures, 14 student-generated goals were identified to help guide the development of these spaces.

“Creating for Cafeterias” aligns with the goal of “vibrant and flexible social spaces” from the Place category, by supporting the inclusion of student-generated art in the cafeteria.

Cafeteria Goals



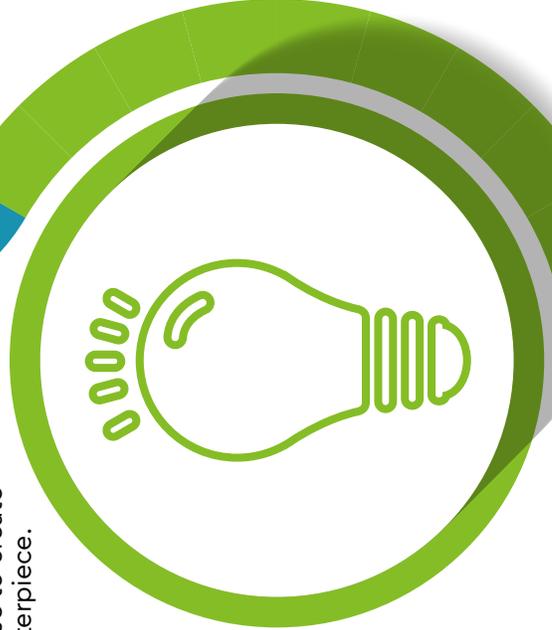
3. Experiment

Take your ideation sketches and start experimenting in your materials. Don't be afraid to get messy and make mistakes.



2. Ideate

Start brainstorming what your project will be about and what materials you will use to create your masterpiece.



4. Plan

Create a plan for where and how you will install your piece, create a budget, and timeline. Present your plan to your stakeholders.



1. Start!

You've decided to improve your cafeteria by creating an art installation! It's time to write a Statement of Purpose and find a sponsor!



6. Celebrate!

Organize a celebration of your accomplishments with your school.



5. Make & Install

See your masterpiece come to life in the cafeteria.



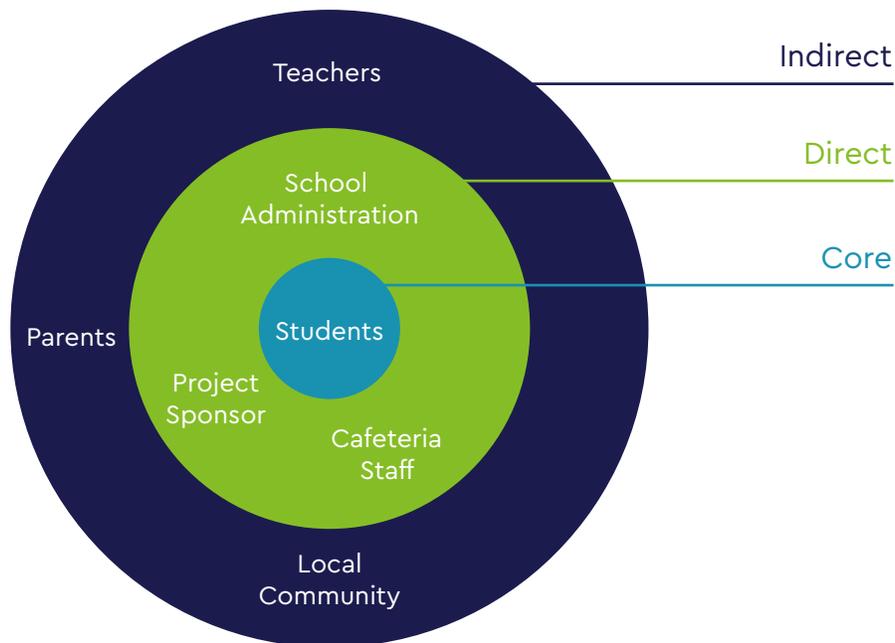


Start!

1. Identify Your Stakeholders

- 1) **Students** – The project leaders
- 2) **Project Sponsor** – Supports the student throughout the process and can act as a liaison to school administration (this might be the art teacher)
- 3) **School Administration** – Individuals such as the school Principal and Vice Principal who can approve the project and any costs
- 4) **Cafeteria Staff** – Individuals who work in the cafeteria and can assist with planning and installation of the project
- 5) **Parents and other external supporters** – People who support the student and assist with the project by providing materials, labor, outreach, etc.

Stakeholder Map





Start!

2. Write a Statement of Purpose

This should be a 1-2 sentence statement of what you hope to accomplish that you can share with your stakeholders. Think about how your project will benefit yourself, other students, and the school.

Example: I want to create an art installation for the cafeteria that communicates the problems with food waste and inspires students to reduce their own waste. This art piece will make the cafeteria feel more inviting for students and help me develop my creative thinking and making skills.

2. Identify Your Sponsor

It is important to identify someone in a supervisor role who can help support the project, be a champion of your work, and act as a liaison to the school administration when needed. Think about who would be able to provide the best support for your project — this might be a teacher (such as your art teacher), an after-school activity supervisor, etc. Brainstorm a list of people below:

Circle the name of your top choice.



Start!

2. Identify Your Sponsor (cont.)

Set up a meeting with the sponsor you have identified as your top choice. Share your project statement and ideas with them. Discuss how your sponsor will support you throughout the project, and complete the sponsorship agreement below.

Student Cafeteria Art Project Sponsorship Agreement

Date: _____

I, _____, will be designing, planning, and making an art installation for
Student Name
the school cafeteria. My sponsor, _____, will help me in the process by
Sponsor Name
(list the types of support you discussed here):

Example: meet with me for weekly check-ins, help me procure materials, give me feedback on my ideas

As student and project leader, I will be professional and respectful when working with my sponsor and others. I will complete my project to the best of my abilities, and strive to make my cafeteria a more vibrant, equitable, and sustainable space.

Student Name & Grade (Print)

Student Signature

As sponsor, I will support the student to the best of my abilities. I will treat the student with respect, and allow them to act as leader of the project.

Sponsor Name & Role (Print)

Sponsor Signature



Start!

3. Get the "Green Light"

Now that you have a Statement of Purpose and a sponsor you are ready to kick off the project! Look back at your stakeholder map.

Who do you need to get a "green light" from before you can start working? (List their names below)

Example: My school Principal, the lunch servers, the custodian, my mom

Reach out to the individuals on your list. You can send an email, write a letter, or schedule a meeting. You can use the template provided on the next page to help you reach out. Your communication should:

- 1) Let them know that you wish to undertake your project and share your Statement of Purpose and sponsor's name.
- 2) Let them know that you will be sharing a more detailed project proposal at a later date and that you are looking for their "green light" at this stage so that you can start ideating project ideas.
- 3) Encourage them to ask any questions or express any concerns before you begin.

This is also a good time to identify any constraints that will inform how your project develops.



Start!

3. Get the "Green Light" (cont.)

Get the "Green Light" Communication Template

Dear [stakeholder name],

My name is [your name], and I am a current student in grade [your grade]. I feel passionately about improving the cafeteria by bringing my art and that of my peers into the space.

[Share your Statement of Purpose]

To help me in this effort, I have identified [sponsor name] as my project sponsor. They will support me by [list the types of your support from your Sponsor Agreement].

I am reaching out to you before I begin this project to gather your feedback, and get the "green light" to move forward with the process. Your valuable input will be used to complete a detailed project proposal which will be shared with you once it is complete [you can also enter a date here if you have a timeline in mind].

I would love to hear your thoughts and answer any questions about the project. You can contact me by [share email, phone number, or another way to get in contact]. Or we can schedule a meeting to discuss the details in person. [Suggest a meeting date, time, and modality].

Thank you,

[Your Name]



Start! Completed



Ideate



1) Brainstorming Ideas: Writing Prompts

It can be helpful to start your brainstorming by writing. Even if you already have an idea for your project, it is important to go through the brainstorming process to strengthen and refine your idea. Grab a sheet of paper and quickly write down answers to the prompts below.

What topics, themes, places, things, people, or issues are you passionate about?

What message(s) or stories do you want to share through your work?

What will make your cafeteria a more vibrant, inviting, and inspiring space?

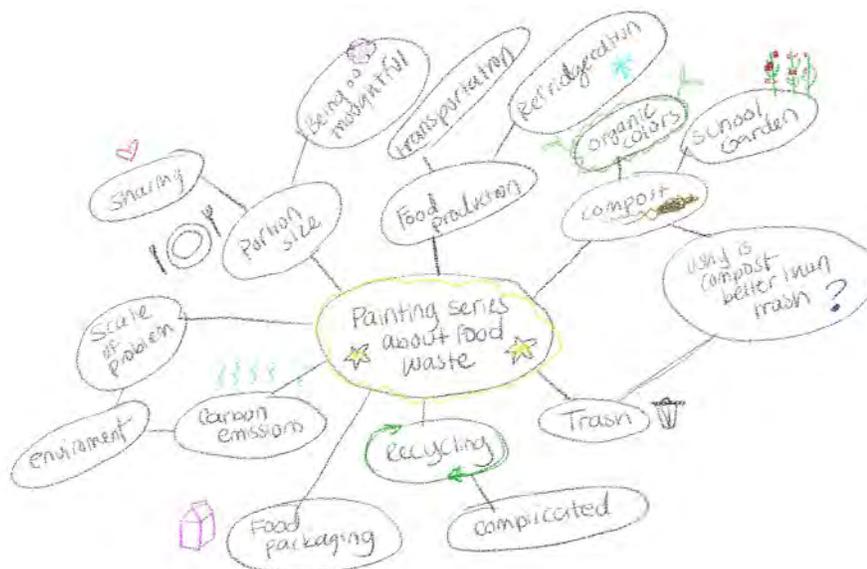
What types of materials are you excited about working with?

Now look back at your ideas. Which ones seem particularly interesting to you? Identify 2-4 ideas that you would like to continue developing. You can always repeat this process to generate more ideas later.

2) Brainstorming Ideas: Mindmapping

Now you'll be expanding visually on the ideas you've identified by mindmapping. Grab a blank sheet of paper and turn it sideways. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Write one of your ideas in the center of the page and draw a circle around it. Start branching out from the center by adding additional words or images and connecting them to each other. Add everything you can think of that relates to your idea to your mindmap. Repeat this for each of your ideas.

See the example below or visit www.nesslabs.com/mind-mapping to help you get started.





Ideate

3) Brainstorming Ideas: Sketch-A-Thon

Once you've completed your mindmaps you may have found that some ideas seemed more interesting than others. If you can, refine your ideas down to 1 or 2. Don't worry, this doesn't mean you are committed to these ideas. The ideation process is ongoing, and you can repeat these brainstorming steps as many times as you would like!

You are now going to start quickly sketching out those ideas. Sketching can mean many different things. For you, sketching might be drawing with pencil and paper, manipulating images on the computer, collaging, modeling in clay, or even more in-depth writing! Don't worry about the idea being "good" or "correct." Do your sketching in several rounds starting with five 1-2 minute idea sketches, then choose one and iterate on it with two 5 minute sketches, and one final 10-minute sketch.



*"Art does not reproduce what is visible; it makes things visible."
- Paul Klee, Painter*

A collage of business-related icons and a colorful brain drawing. The brain is drawn with intricate, colorful lines in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red. The background features various business icons such as a lightbulb, a bar chart, a pie chart, a network diagram, and a flowchart. The word "Social" is visible in the top right corner of the collage. A green circle with a white lightbulb icon is in the top left corner.

Ideate

4) Describing Your Project Idea (cont.)

Add to your project description by including a sketch or other visual of the project below.

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for drawing or sketching a project idea.



Ideate



5) Reflection and Equity Scan

Now it's time to take a moment to reflect on your project description. Think about these equity-centered questions as you reread your statement and look at your sketch.

Does my project improve my cafeteria and student food experiences at my school?

Who/what is being represented by this project?

Am I representing anyone's voices and experiences besides your own?

Who/what is being left out?

Does my project demonstrate respect for the people, places, and things being represented?

Is this project visually and physically accessible to everyone?

What assumptions am I making?

Who may benefit from this project?

Who may be harmed by this project?

Make any changes to your project description that you feel might be needed after your reflection.



Stop!

Time to check-in with your sponsor



Ideate Completed



Experiment

1) Choosing Materials

It's time to start getting messy and playing with materials! This is an important step because most of the time the ideas in your head and what you end up making won't be an exact match. That's ok! This is time to play around with materials and find different ways of bringing your ideas to life. Use "mistakes" or "failures" as opportunities to learn and adjust your project idea.

There are some important things to consider when you are selecting materials to experiment with:

Accessibility

- What materials are you comfortable with?**
- What knowledge do you have about different materials?**
- What materials are available at school?**
- What materials could you acquire outside of school?**

Safety

- Will you be at risk of harm using certain materials? (Chemicals, sharp cutting tools, etc.)**
- Will any of your peers be at risk from certain materials? (Allergies, asthma, etc.)**
- Are there certain materials that are not allowed in school?**

Installation

- Are the materials fire safe? (Some materials like fabric and paper do not comply with fire code; discuss with your school)**
- Will the materials disintegrate over time?**
- Are the materials a good choice for a space where food is served and eaten?**



Experiment

2) Make-A-Thon

Once you have some materials in-hand, it's time to start making!

Like we did with sketching, you will start the making process in several rounds. Spend about 1 hour quickly combining materials to create 4-6 material tests. Next, choose the 2 you find the most interesting and build on them for the next hour. Then select one of these materials tests, and spend another hour exploring that one in greater depth.

Take notes about what materials and techniques you used for each test below.

Test #1

Test #2

Test #3

Test #4

Test #5

Test #6



Experiment

3) Reflection

Don't worry at this stage about trying to capture your project themes in your tests. At the end of your Make-A-Thon, take a few minutes to look back at all your creations, and consider these reflection questions:

What did I discover through the making process?

What were the most interesting or important things I learned?

How does what I made relate to my project?

How will it help inform what I do next?



Experiment Completed



Plan

1) Talk to Cafeteria Staff

Congratulations! You are ready to start planning how your project will live in the cafeteria. It is important to understand how your project will interact with the people and the space before you actually make and install it. To get a better understanding of the space, you will be doing some detailed mapping and documentation of the cafeteria.

Before you move on to the next steps, get the "green light" from your cafeteria staff to draw and photograph in the space before school, during lunch, and after school.

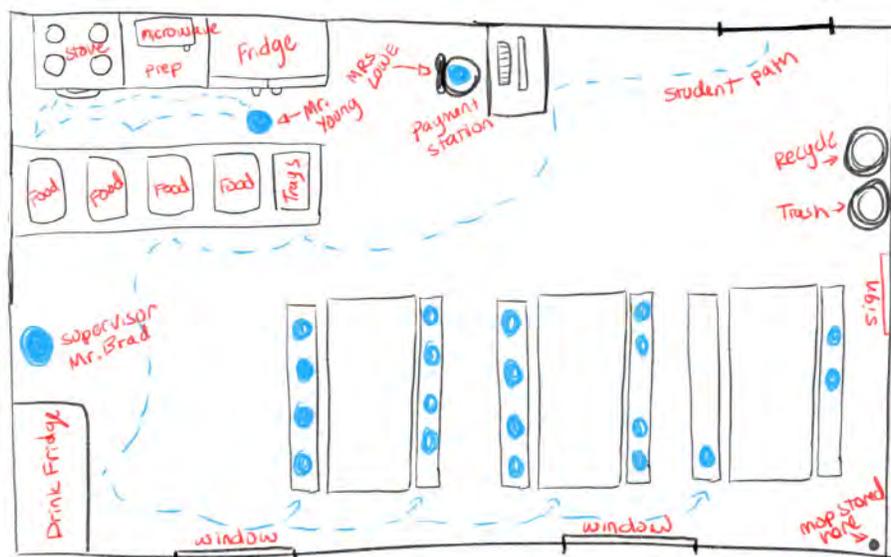
2) Mapping and Photographing the Cafeteria

You are going to map your cafeteria at 3 different times of day: before school, during lunch, and during after school activities. This will help you see how the space is used throughout the day, and help you identify any issues or opportunities for how and where your project is installed.

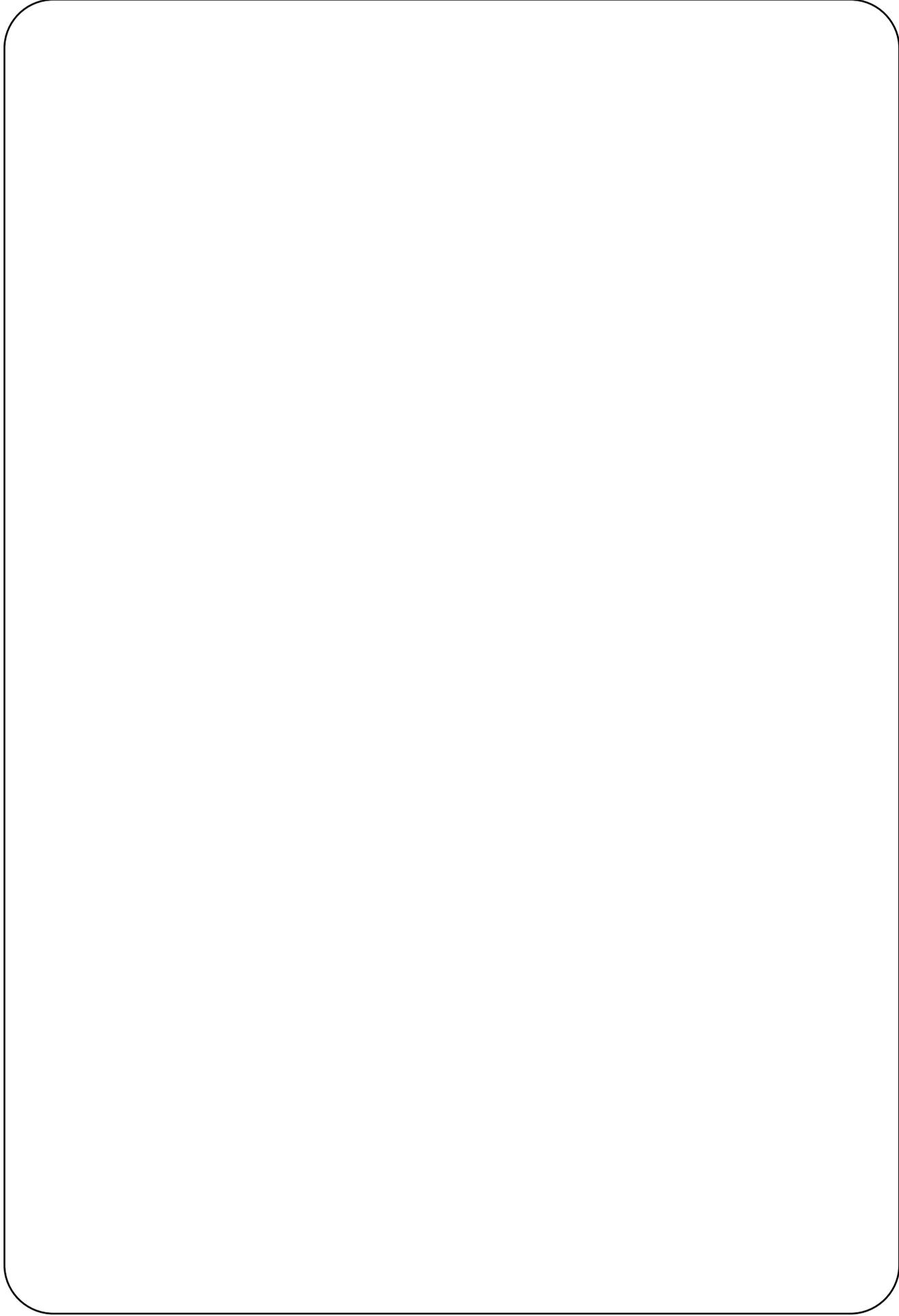
Using the templates on the next few pages you will (see example below):

- 1) Map the layout (including what is on the walls) in a black color
- 2) Map where people are and how they move in the space in a blue color
- 3) Add labels and notes about what you observe in a red color

While you are mapping, take detailed photographs of cafeteria during each time of day so that you can refer to them later.



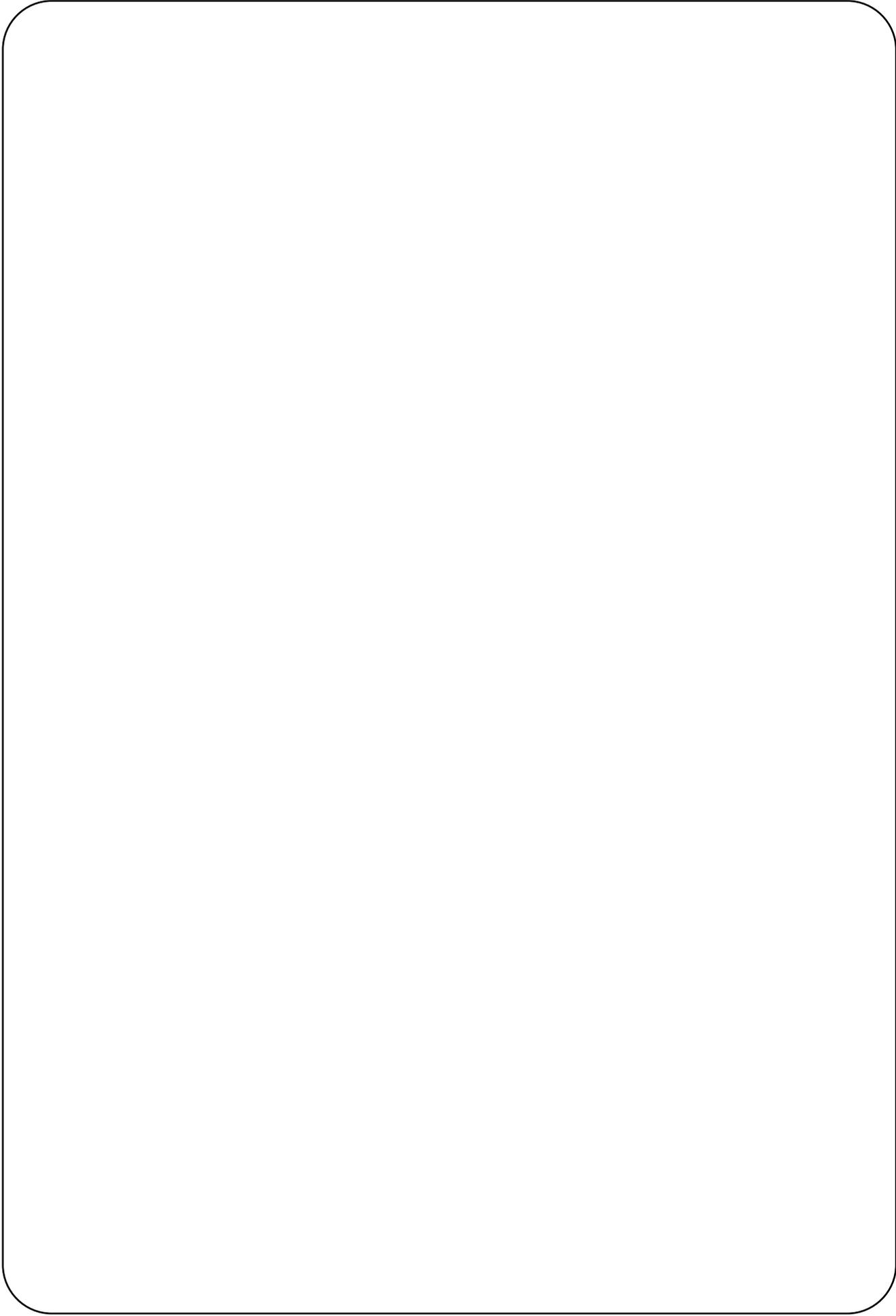
CAFETERIA MAPPING: Before School



Questions to consider:

- 1) Where are tables and other furniture located? 2) What is on the walls? 3) Where are windows and doors located?
- 4) Where do people sit, stand, and lean? 5) How do people move through the space? 6) How does food move through the space?

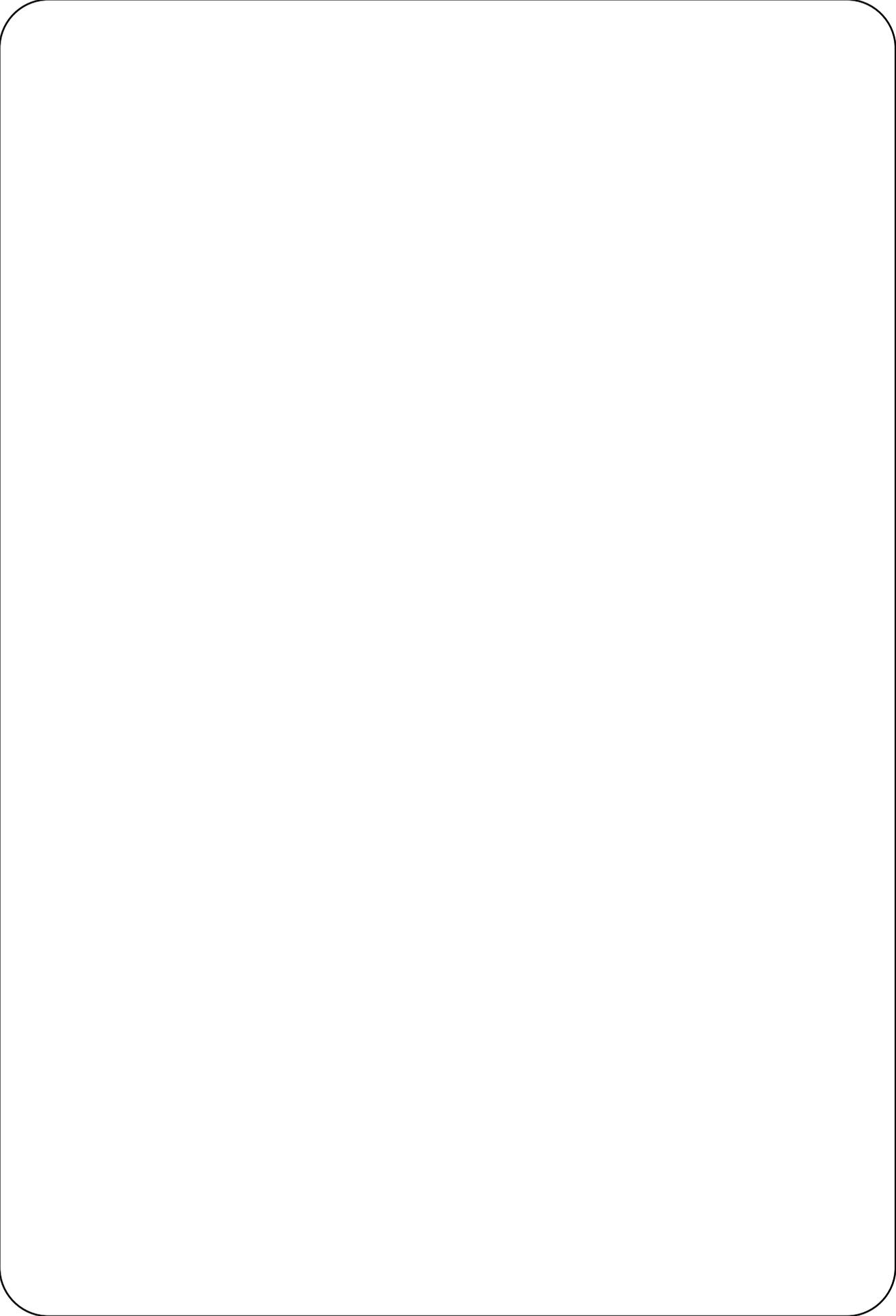
CAFETERIA MAPPING: During Lunch



Questions to consider:

- 1) Where are tables and other furniture located? 2) What is on the walls? 3) Where are windows and doors located?
- 4) Where do people sit, stand, and lean? 5) How do people move through the space? 6) How does food move through the space?

CAFETERIA MAPPING: After School



Questions to consider:

- 1) Where are tables and other furniture located?
- 2) What is on the walls?
- 3) Where are windows and doors located?
- 4) Where do people sit, stand, and lean?
- 5) How do people move through the space?
- 6) How does food move through the space?



Plan

3) Choosing Your Installation Location

Although you may have thought about this already for your project description, you will be using your maps and photographs to determine the best place to install your project. Consider how people use the space and how the layout may have changed throughout the day. Use these questions to help guide your thinking:

Where will your project have the most impact?

How do you want people to interact with your project?

What are ways that your project can integrate with the space?

Are there any areas where your project would be in the way or cause problems?

(Remember, your project should not obscure windows, doors, lights, vents, or exit signs. It should not interfere with how people access and use the space.)

Where is it feasible to install your project?

Write where you plan to install the project and why:

Example: I will be installing my painting series on the south wall of the cafeteria, between the two windows and at a height of approximately 6' . I chose this location because it is not used for any other signage, and is easily visible from the door and seating area. I also discovered during my mapping that the cafeteria tables are sometimes folded and stacked against the wall with the trash and recycling bins, which would put the paintings at risk of being damaged.



Plan

4) Take Measurements

Now that you know exactly where your project will be installed, you need to return to the cafeteria and take detailed measurements. This will help you determine how much of your materials you will need for the next planning steps.

Grab a tape measure (or use a measuring app on your phone) and a pencil. Think about what measurements you will need to determine the size of your finished project and draw a diagram of the wall, floor or other area in your in the space below. Label each part of your diagram with exact measurements.

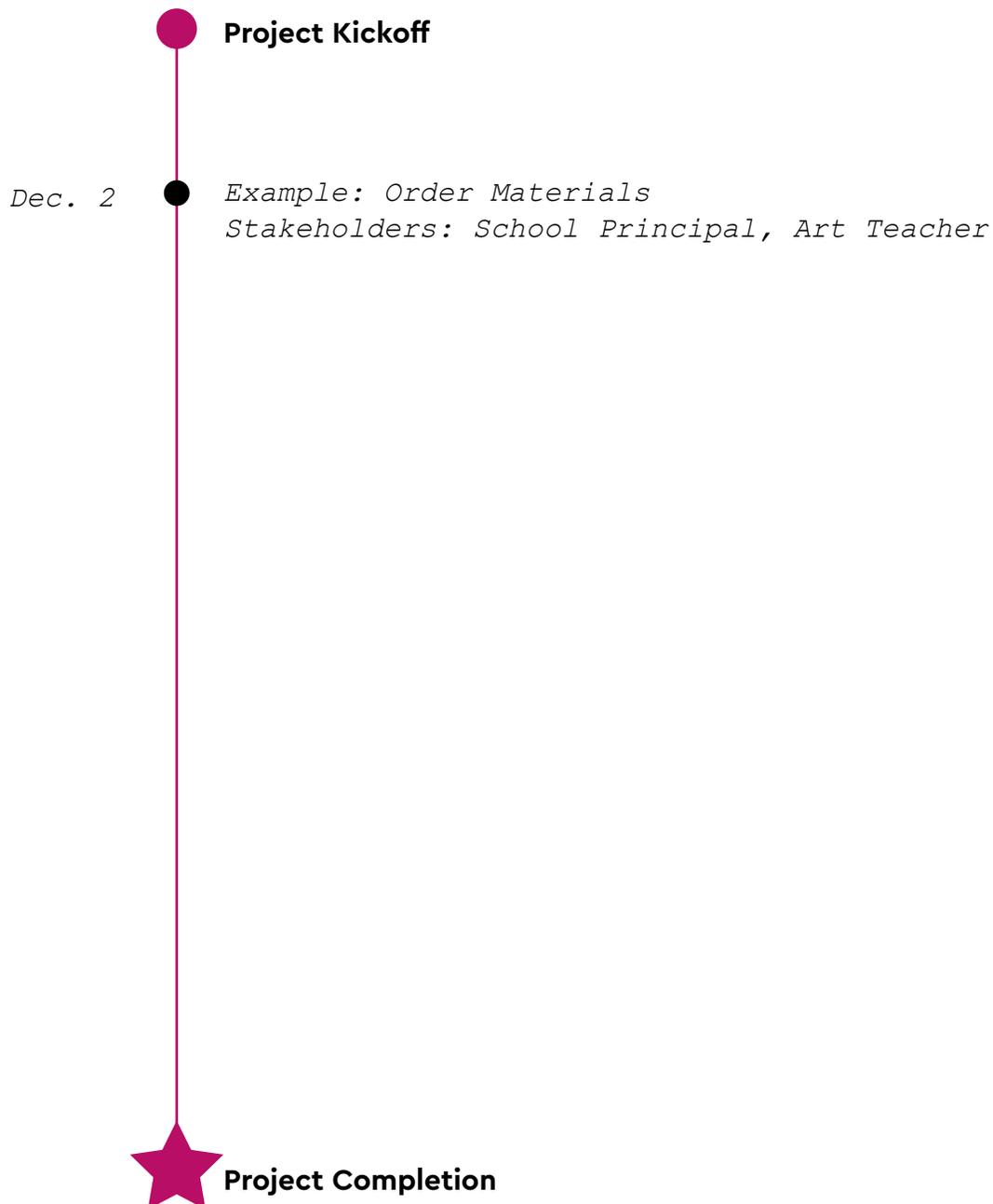
Project Installation Diagram



Plan

5) Create an Action Plan and Timeline

Use the template below to create an action plan for completing your project! To the right of the line, list the major steps or "milestones" that will need to happen and in what order. To the left of the line write the approximate date they will be completed by, or the amount of time they will take. Note any stakeholders that need to be involved in completing milestones.





Plan

6) Putting the Pieces Together

You've done a lot of hard work! Now you get to share that work with your stakeholders. You will be combining all the information you have collected into a detailed Project Proposal. This is an important tool that helps you to communicate all the details of your project clearly and concisely with others. Flip to the next page and fill in the prompts.

CAFETERIA PROJECT PROPOSAL

Student Name _____ Date _____

Grade _____ Sponsor Name _____

Project Title

Describe your project

Use your project description but make any updates or changes that were generated during the Experiment and Plan steps

Sketch of your project

What materials or other resources are needed to complete the project?

What is your plan for completing the project?

What will the outcomes of the project be?

What benefit will the project bring to the cafeteria and the school? How will the project benefit you as a student?



Plan



Stop!

Time to check-in with your sponsor

7) Share Your Project Proposal

Discuss with your sponsor how you should share your project proposal with the stakeholders who you listed during the Start! step. You might organize a meeting or video call, or send them a document via email. The most important thing is to gather any feedback on your proposal and make sure it is OK to move forward with the milestones you listed in your action plan.

This is a great time to get some feedback from your peers as well!



Plan Completed



Make & Install

1) Make Your Art!

Work with your stakeholders to tackle the milestones in your action plan. Ask questions, ask for help, and use "failures" as learning opportunities. Revisit your project description often to make sure you aren't straying too far during the making process. If your project is something that is created during the installation process (like a mural) move on to the next step.



2) Installing Your Project

Communicate with your stakeholders to find a time frame to install your work. Know that the installation process will vary greatly depending on your project. Use the Installation Plan Template on the next page to help you prepare.

Installation Plan Template

Date / Time of Installation: _____

Installation Team

Name	Role	Contact Info	Are they responsible for providing anything?

Materials and Supplies

Item	Who is responsible for providing it?

Other Notes:



Make & Install Completed



Celebrate!

1) Plan a Celebration To Recognize Your Hard Work

It's important to honor and celebrate what you have accomplished! Work with your sponsor to plan an appropriate event. Consider the following elements as you plan:

1) Location – Where will you have the celebration?

This might be the cafeteria itself, the classroom of a teacher who has supported the project, your home, etc.

2) Date and Time – When will you have the celebration?

Communicate with your stakeholders to find a time that also works for them.

3) Guest List – Who will you invite?

Make an invite list of everyone who was involved in the project, as well as anyone who you want to come see the project like relatives, friends, or even media.

4) Share – How and what information will you share about the project during the celebration?

Brainstorm ways to talk about the project in your invite and at the celebration. Maybe you give a short presentation, share videos and photos you took, or do an unveiling ceremony.

5) Thank – How will you thank those who helped you make the project possible?

Make sure to show your appreciation to those who helped you make the project a reality.





Celebrate!

2) Reflect on the Experience

Before you move on from the project, make some time to reflect on the experience. Think about these questions:

What did I learn going through this process?

What skills did I gain?

What skills did I use that I already had?

How has my project impacted the cafeteria and other students?

What were my favorite and least favorite parts?

What surprised me the most about the process and my project?

What relationships did I build throughout the process?

How will this project affect what I do in the future?



Celebrate Completed

