

2025-2026 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY



KERN COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS CENTRAL KITCHEN

**Release Date
April 30, 2026**

KERN COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS CENTRAL KITCHEN



Kern County Superintendent of Schools Central Kitchen
Photo Taken by Grand Jury

SUMMARY:

The Kern County Superintendent of Schools Central Kitchen (Central Kitchen) broke ground in 2023, expanding their workspace from a 2,400 square-foot building to the newly constructed 6,400 square-foot building. This facility began operating on June 19, 2025, and went from serving 1,000 meals to approximately 7,000 meals a day. The Central Kitchen provides meals to non-traditional schools such as Special Ed, alternative education, charter schools, child and adult programs, and small outlying school districts. These programs include Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), 18 after-school programs, Friendship House, and the Martin Luther King Center. The Central Kitchen does all the menu planning, preparing, delivering food and janitorial supplies. The Central Kitchen also makes meals for Head Start field trips, the Kern County Library after-school programs, and caters for social events. The new state-of-the-art facility will have a crucial role in nourishing the minds and bodies of children enrolled in its programs.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

Pursuant to Penal Code §933.5, the 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) investigated the Central Kitchen in Kern County. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the new Central Kitchen in serving our community. This inquiry also sought to determine how scratch cooking¹ is being implemented in local schools.

¹Scratch cooking is defined as the practice of preparing meals from whole, unprocessed ingredients rather than relying on pre-packaged or processed foods.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with staff from the Kern County Superintendent of Schools (KCSOS), and the Central Kitchen. The Grand Jury also toured the Central Kitchen and viewed the production and distribution of daily meals. Additionally, various laws, policies, food guidelines, and official USDA websites were reviewed.



Shelving, Prep Stations, and a large mixer located in the Central Kitchen



Central Kitchen Sealing Machine.

Photos taken by Grand Jury

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

1. The Central Kitchen is outperforming KCSOS's expectations in several hands-on, locally sourced, and student engagement-focused nutrition initiatives.
2. The food comes from suppliers and vendors through bidding proposals submitted every three years. Thirty percent of the foods are sourced locally from the "Farm to School Program."
3. The Central Kitchen participates in the "Food Recovery and Donation Program" which picks up leftover food and redistributes it to the community free of charge.
4. The Central Kitchen has been recognized by the California Department of Education for its scratch-cooked meals.
5. Special meals are prepared to accommodate those who have food allergies, or other special dietary needs. Of the 7,000 meals prepared, up to 3% are special diet meals.

6. The Central Kitchen has 17 delivery trucks, all of which contain National Safety Food approved equipment. This equipment is designed to maintain food at safe temperatures for up to four hours. Two of the 17 delivery trucks are refrigerated for long-distance.
7. The Central Kitchen employs 40 people to run the daily operations.
8. The Central Kitchen receives suggestions and menu advice from children, parents, staff, and community members of the Nutrition Advisory Committee.
9. Internships are provided through the “JobsPlus²” Program.
10. Many of the employees come from adult employment programs.
11. The Central Kitchen menus comply with Head Start requirements and the CACFP guidelines.
12. Good nutrition for students has been found to be a factor in their studies, social life, mental health and behavior.

FINDINGS:

- F1. By providing balanced and nutritious meals, the new kitchen is an extensive investment aiding in students’ success.
- F2. There are plans to expand internships to engage students through extensive cooking demonstrations and tasting activities enabling them to work in culinary services.
- F3. The Central Kitchen also helps the community by creating jobs and strengthening the local food economy.
- F4. The Central Kitchen participation in the “Food Recovery and Donation Program” helps eliminate food waste in our community.

RECOMMENDATION:

- R1 By August 31, 2026, the Kern County Superintendent of Schools explore opportunities to secure funding to expand the training opportunities at the Central Kitchen. (Finding F2)

² JobsPlus is an employer incentive which encourages and rewards employer who offer employment opportunities to individuals who are unemployed.

COMMENTS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury would like to thank the staff at the Central Kitchen for their cooperation and participation when conducting interviews and tours. The Grand Jury was impressed with the variety of services provided to the community.

NOTES:

- The Kern County Superintendent of Schools Central Kitchen should post a copy of this report where it will be available for the public to view.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury final reports and responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 60 DAYS FROM:**

Kern County Superintendent of Schools
Findings F1 – F4 Recommendation R1

RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF KERN
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**
- **FOREMAN
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.
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