

Case Study Toolkit: Massachusetts State House Luncheon

On May 3, 2017, the School Nutrition Association of Massachusetts (SNAM) sponsored a luncheon for members of the Massachusetts State House. The purpose of the event was to:

- 1) Raise awareness about child nutrition programs and their importance
- 2) Raise awareness about challenges school meal programs face in the state
- 3) Encourage visits by legislators to local school districts

Their event was a great success, with over 80 legislators and/or their staff attending the luncheon, many signups for cafeteria visits, and a productive dialogue about school nutrition programs. SNAM provided all their materials and background used in planning and executing the event for this step-by-step guide to planning your own State House Luncheon.

Planning the Luncheon

Partnering Up – SNAM partnered up with Representative Jennifer Benson and her staff to plan and coordinate the event. It's key to identify a legislator who is a champion of school nutrition, and who would be willing to put his or her name on the event. Planning began almost a year in advance and the room was booked approximately three months before the event. The staff contact helped SNAM identify a date when the most Representatives would be in the building and reserved the room to have the event within the Capitol.

The Panel – First, a panel needs to be selected to run and present at the event. SNAM put together a great panel of school nutrition professionals composed of School Nutrition and Food Service Directors from various school districts within the state, a Sales/Marketing Specialist from Thurston Foods Inc., the Director of the Office for Food and Nutrition programs at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Director of Youth Wellness programs for New England Dairy & Food Council, a non-profit nutrition education organization. [A bio page](#) was created for all the panel members, detailing their backgrounds and relevance to child nutrition, so the panelists all knew who they were working with.

Designing the Presentation – [An outline](#) was established to layout a timeline for the luncheon. Within this outline, topics were assigned to the panelists and a time limit of two minutes for each panelist to speak was set. The topics included: importance of breakfast, meal choices, food waste, farm fresh initiatives, meal times, unpaid meal charges and industry concerns. For the presentation itself, SNAM put together [this video](#), which illustrated the various challenges school meal programs face and really helped Legislators to understand the problems. When thinking about your presentation, it's important to remember to back up the data and information that the panelists will be sharing, while adding a personal touch. An alternative to creating a video, like SNAM did, could be to collect photos from local districts to create a slideshow or PowerPoint to show while the panelists are presenting. Any creative way to personalize the information and make it more connected to legislators' districts would be prudent. It's also a good idea to have a rehearsal of some sort with the panelists, so you can make sure everyone is prepared and on the same page. If you can't physically meet before the event, schedule a conference call so that you can do a quick run through of how everything is going to go and answer any questions your panelists may have.

Inviting the Legislators – The Massachusetts State Legislature is comprised of 160 State Representatives and 40 State Senators. A week before the event, [save the date cards](#) were hand delivered to each office by two board members. The information was also sent via email the day before and an hour before the luncheon by the staffer who was assisting with the event. Serving a free, hot lunch is always a draw for legislators and their staff!

Executing the Event

The Presentation – The meeting kicked off with an introduction from the SNAM President on the goals of the luncheon. Next [the video](#) was shown to highlight some of the challenges that school meal programs face daily. After the video, panel members introduced themselves and spoke for 1-2 minutes on the topic they were covering. An [info sheet](#) was also passed out, which highlighted some key school meal statistics in Massachusetts on one side and had the names and contact information of the panelists on the other. The meeting was then opened up for discussion. The video prompted most of the questions and drove the discussion by enabling attendees to grasp the issues. Be sure to have some discussion questions prepared in case you need to get the conversation going!

District Visits – Towards the end of the event, Legislators were given the opportunity to sign up to visit schools in their legislative districts in order to see the programs in action – also a great photo op! The visits were coordinated with school nutrition contacts in each district, who provided input about the best dates, schools, and programs for the Legislator(s) to attend. [A follow up letter](#) was also sent to the Legislators, again encouraging a district visit. Check out SNA's [Cafeteria Site Visit 101](#) resource for tips on how to plan those as well.

Measuring Success – A key aspect of advocacy is building and maintaining relationships in order to gain support for your cause. Success can come in many shapes and forms, but the more Members you educate and engage on school nutrition topics, the better! Attendance and the tone of the discussion are great indicators of success. Remember that the goals are to raise awareness and understanding of the issues, and to get Legislators to visit schools to see the programs in action. As long as you're meeting those goals in some way, your event can be ruled a success!



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