Promoting Healthy School Meals: Best Practices

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Professional Standards Code

- This session provides one (1) CEU

**Key Area:** Operations - 2000

**Key Topic:** Promoting Healthy School Meals: Best Practices - 2200
Kids Safe and Healthful Foods Project
School Nutrition Programs Have Gone Through Big Changes
How’s It Going?

- Amount and variety of healthy foods is increasing (Turner et al, Bridging the Gap Program, 2015)
- Disparity gaps are closing (Terry-McElrath et al, Preventive Medicine 2015)
- Middle schoolers ate more, wasted less (Schwartz et al, Childhood Obesity 2015)
  - Greater variety led to healthier choices
- Elementary students ate more fruit, made more varied vegetable choices and did not waste more. (Cullen et al, Preventive Medicine, 2015)
- Elementary and middle school children ate more of their entrees and vegetables (Cohen et al, American Journal of Preventative Medicine, 2014)
  - Increased meal time lead to increased consumption.
Nutrition Standards Influence Many Facets of School Meal Programs

- Menu planning
- Cooking and serving procedures
- Food costs
- Marketing strategies
- Student participation rates
SCHOOL MEAL APPROACHES, RESOURCES, AND TRENDS (SMART) Study
SMART Study

- Online survey of school nutrition directors
- Conducted toward the end of 2014-2015 SY
- Nationally representative of all public SFAs
- SMART Study Expert Panel
Background Characteristics of the SFAs

- Most SFAs were small (about half)
- About six in ten SFAs characterized their location as rural
- In general, SFAs were evenly distributed by poverty category (determined by the percentage of students approved for free or reduced-price meals).
Districts Are Emerging From the Most Challenging Phases of the Transition to Healthier Meals

- Three school years after most of the updated lunch requirements were put in place, about 4 in 10 directors said they faced no or only a few ongoing obstacles to meet them.

- Most directors are implementing healthier breakfast requirements with ease.

- Most recent requirements were most challenging.
Expert Experience: Successful Strategies to Implement the Meal Requirements

Network

Prioritize training opportunities

Earn buy-in from stakeholders

Make numerous changes

Involve students
Districts Are Using a Number of Strategies to Get Students to Eat the Healthier Meals

- Nearly every district was using at least one strategy to:
  - promote healthy eating
  - reduce plate waste
  - encourage fruit and vegetable consumption

- Active vs. passive strategies perceived as most effective
School Snacks are Getting Healthier, But Progress Still Needed

Eliminate or Reduce Snack Offerings

Offer More Nutritious Snack Alternatives

School setting and administrator support matter!
Trends in Student Participation and Revenue

• Wide variety of experiences by districts in maintaining student participation

• Looking at the change in total revenue (meals and competitive foods) revealed a more positive picture
  – The majority of districts reported their combined revenue either remained stable or increased over the past year.
Expert Experience: Like Running A Successful Business

Culture
Creativity
Collaboration
Communication
Consistency
Celebration
What do we do now?
1. Maximize ‘Healthy Competition’
2. Mitigate ‘unhealthy’ competition

Fundraising Exemption Policies

- Zero Exemptions
- Early Adopter (zero exemptions before Smart Snacks)
- Exemptions allowed, less than ten
- Exemptions allowed, length based on school-dependent variables
- Exemptions allowed, ten or more (for at least one grade level)
PS. Parents Don’t Want to sell food (they just don’t realize it!)

Assuming all of the following types were equally profitable, which two or three would you MOST prefer be used in public school fundraising efforts? (rank order based on responses)

1. Activity-based fundraisers such as car washes or walk-a-thons
2. Auctions of items donated by families or businesses such as event tickets or gift baskets
3. Asking for donations without selling anything
4. Sales of non food items such as wrapping paper or garden plants
5. Bake sales held on school grounds during the school day
6. Sales of food meant to be taken home such as cookie dough or popcorn
7. Sales of ready-to-eat food such as pizza, doughnuts, or candy held on school grounds during the school day.
Be the Fundraiser

• Partner with Business clubs or PTA’s on stores
• Sell fruit baskets, birthday “treats” or other ‘fun’ raisers
• Do the class pizza parties or other parties as reimbursable meals
3. SPEAK UP! Parents would support
(If they only knew it was happening)

- 3 out of 4 of parents indicate support for strong nutrition standards in schools
- Only 1 in 3 has actually been in the school cafeteria in the past year!
Promote And Participate!!

- Back to school nights
- Parent/Teacher Conferences
- “Choose the menu” events
- Vendor Fairs
- Family meal days
- Cater school events
- Participate in community “Taste Of” events
4. Address timing

“We have a lot of kids who have food insecurity at home—they’re getting themselves up, maybe their parents are already at work, and there might not be any food at home. Students really will eat breakfast if it’s made available to them. And they’re hungry, just not at 7:30 am.”

---Connie Vogts, Liberal Kansas
www.healthiergeneration.org
Solving the meal time and timing dilemmas

• Inform parents and invite them into problem solving
• ‘Second chance’ meals
• Vended reimbursable meals, Kiosks, and carts
• Staggered meal times vs. traditional meal periods
5. Make changes with and not just for customers.
Student Participation Strategies

- Surveys
- Taste Tests
- Focus Groups
- Comment cards
- Guest Chef Taste tests
- Advisory Groups
- Cooking competition
- “local,” “sustainable,” “scratch,” “fresh”
- “choice,” “variety,” “make/choose your own.”
6. Focus on getting the right tools
7. Pack your patience
Change takes time for producers and consumers
What does that mean at the local level?
KSHF Recommendations Beyond the School Nutrition Department

Local policy makers and school officials should work collaboratively to prioritize school nutrition as part of a broader culture of health and education.

- Take advantage of opportunities such as school breakfast, after-school meals and snacks, and the Community Eligibility Provision to maximize revenue and ensure students are well nourished and ready to learn.
- Integrate nutrition education into regular classroom lessons, and encourage teachers to partner with school nutrition team when possible.
- Develop lunch and recess schedules and design cafeteria procedures to ensure students have enough time to eat.
- Support the full implementation of Smart Snacks standards across campus and limit exemptions for fundraisers or other special occasions regardless of state allowance for exemptions and especially before and during all meal times.
- Establish systemic communication among administrators and school nutrition leadership in order to consider school nutrition in district and building decision making.
- Prioritize providing opportunities for professional development for school nutrition staff.
- Utilize local wellness policies and committees to bolster efforts that further encourage healthy school environments.
- Consider expanding community access to cafeteria and kitchen in order to permit positive shared use activities.
Questions and Discussion!

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