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**School Nutrition Association**

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While SNA, its members and its many allies continue to press lawmakers in Congress to pass legislation that would provide USDA with the authority to extend child nutrition program waivers into SY2022-23, the clock is running out on such action, as the current waivers expire on June 30. Advocates in education, hunger relief and child wellness have all joined SNA in grim predictions for the school year ahead without the flexibilities and funding these waivers provided.

Significant participation drops lead the list of potential catastrophic consequences. Other possibilities include record spikes in unpaid meal debt, schools and districts discontinuing the federal program, vendors (unable or unwilling to reformulate products to meet stricter whole grains and sodium targets) leaving the K-12 segment and veteran school nutrition directors and supervisors, already burnt out, opting to retire or leave the profession. It is, indeed, a harrowing forecast.

But I remain hopeful about the future. I am confident that the passionate women and men that work in this segment are going to rally, doing whatever it takes to keep feeding kids, keep innovating menus, keep making the cafeteria a fun and nurturing space and keep earning the right to wear those superhero capes.

I’m not dismissive of the difficult challenges that lie ahead. But after 28 years of observing, reporting and advising school nutrition professionals through the pages of this magazine, I believe my rose-colored glasses are well-earned. Within mere days of the news breaking about the failure of Congress to include waiver authority in a key funding bill, I saw many, many school nutrition directors square their shoulders and set about making plans. They didn’t wallow in disappointment or fear, although there has been much of both to go around. They started reaching out to their networks of colleagues and peers in other districts in their state, region and across the country to brainstorm and share approaches for tackling the most immediate hurdles.

In the meantime, I continue to see so much joyful creativity in social media posts from school cafeteria teams. School Lunch Hero Day and end-of-year celebrations are among the most recent shining examples of the spirit and resilience that are the hallmarks of this profession. I have faith that, despite the struggles ahead, the love of doing what you do for kids will dominate in SY2022-23. Stay strong! eSN
SNA’s ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE (ANC) is poised to return to its in-person format in Orlando, Fla., in July, and I know many of us are eager for this much-missed signature event. At the same time, I recognize that overwhelm and fatigue are dampening some spirits. I believe we are collectively in need of the very fitting ANC theme, “Powered by Imagination,” especially when simple coping eclipses our creative thinking, and we ask, “How can I make time for ANC when there is so much work to be done and so few people to do it?”

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.” The sentiment of this quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln about the value of preparation is an important reminder. ANC is all about sharpening the axe. It will be a valuable opportunity to share solutions and best practices. It will be a timely occasion to embrace the support found in the camaraderie of professional colleagues united in a common goal, facing common struggles. It will be an ideal gathering to network with peers and build valuable new relationships.

I recall experiencing a breakthrough moment during ANC in 1992. As I walked the Exhibit Hall and socialized with colleagues, I could feel my passion, professionalism and commitment to this beautiful industry crystallize in a way I had never felt before. I knew I had found a home and a career path that would change my life, along with the lives of so many others whom I have served, both as a school nutrition professional and as an association leader.

I felt it again in January at SNA’s School Nutrition Industry Conference in San Antonio, as our return after two years being apart delivered a similar spirit of promise and potential. Attendees were exhilarated by the shared energy exclusive to an in-person experience. I returned home invigorated and refreshed in my commitment to my own program.

I encourage other school nutrition directors not only to join me in Orlando but also to recognize how vital it is that we share this opportunity with our supervisors and managers to allow them to have their own breakthrough moments. We need that next generation to find their passion and solidify their commitment to this profession. That is the power of imagination at work.

Dreams don’t disappear under pressure. I assure you that they are still there, lying just beneath the surface, waiting to be unleashed. Come join me in Orlando in July and set the power of your imagination free. Visit www.schoolnutrition.org/anc for details. eSN
Think Circle is an initiative conceived and led by Huhtamaki that brings together key stakeholders from across the global food value chain to gain an improved understanding of the challenges and opportunities that come with sustainable innovation. Participants are committed to making packaging more circular, with a lower carbon footprint and embedding sustainability in every step.

Packaging circularity involves everything from raw material to design, production and disposal (recycling, recovery and reuse). All stakeholders must cooperate to protect the health and safety of consumers and the wellbeing of the planet, collaborating and learning from one another as we deliver sustainable solutions for generations to come.

On March 31, a Think Circle roundtable discussion focused on the role packaging has in enabling accessible, affordable and safe food in an uncertain world. View the recording at www.huhtamaki.com/en/think-circle.

In addition, stakeholders in the foodservice community can find thought pieces by packaging leaders on such topics as “Food packaging—the most underrated invention since the fridge?”, “Defining what constitutes good packaging requires a broader view on material impacts” and “Meaningful progress becomes achievable through a shared vision for circularity.” Visit www.huhtamaki.com/en/think-circle/articles to access these and other articles.
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Beyond The Bandage: Learning Mental Health First Aid

Just as CPR training can help a person with no clinical training assist an individual experiencing a cardiac event, training in Mental Health First Aid builds skills for reaching out and providing initial help and support to someone who may be developing a problem with mental illness or substance abuse, as well as those experiencing a crisis. May is Mental Health Awareness Month and a great opportunity to improve your ability to identify, understand and respond to the challenges experienced by many of those in your community, school and even your own family.

According to Mental Health America, which sponsors the awareness month, some 50 million adults in this country had experienced a mental health challenge before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, studies show that an estimated 10% of U.S. youth currently have severe major depression. But more than half of adults with mental illness, as well as more than 60% of youth with major depression, do not receive treatment. Rates of substance abuse in both youth and adults are also on the rise.

A Mental Health First Aid course teaches you the risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, as well as strategies for helping someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations. The course is built around a five-step action plan focused on assessing risk, respectful listening, offering support and identifying appropriate professional help. Topics address depression, mood and anxiety disorders, trauma, psychosis and substance abuse. Experiential practice scenarios (such as helping someone through a panic attack, engaging someone who may be suicidal or responding to an overdose) are featured in the training to help you apply knowledge learned in real-life situations.

Mental Health First Aid was first developed in 2001 in Australia and has been adapted in other nations across the globe. In the United States, the initiative is managed by the National Council for Mental Wellness in partnership with the Missouri Department of Mental Health. To find a training course near you, visit www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: And So It Begins Again

THE TIME WARP OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC is one reason many of us find it hard to believe that the development cycle for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) has begun once again. As a first step in creating the 2025-2030 edition, USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services have released proposed scientific questions for a brief public comment period, which expires May 16.

The next step will be a call for nominations from the public for the appointment of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. This group will conduct a review of the evidence related to the scientific questions, producing a scientific report that is used, along with federal agency and public comments, to develop the DGAs that will be released in 2025. The federal child nutrition programs are mandated to comply with nutrition standards that are informed by the DGAs.

You can view the specific scientific questions at www.tinyurl.com/DGA-ScienceQs-SNmag and find the link to submit a comment. To follow the overall development progress, bookmark www.dietaryguidelines.gov.
 WHEN PARENTS ARE GONE

It's a simple fact that the vast majority of us will experience the deaths of our parents at some point during our lifetimes. Whether that loss comes when we are 17 or 77, it can mean that all the commercial and cultural attention on Mother's Day (and Father's Day in June) can prompt spikes of fresh grief and depression, felt even more keenly among those who are not themselves being honored as parents by children.

If you're dreading these annual observances, consider turning to one or more of a variety of coping mechanisms. The following ideas represent a range of approaches for making this occasion easier to bear. Just remember that there are no “shoulds,” no matter what you decide to do.

» Plan to spend the day doing an activity that your parent loved, such as a hobby/craft, a physical pursuit, reading or even watching one of their favorite movies or television shows. Be intentional in your choice.

» Make a donation in their honor to a charitable cause that you connect with them. This could be a place of worship, a volunteer-based nonprofit or an advocacy organization. Given the spring weather, some charities sponsor community walk/runs on this weekend; you could be a participant in or a volunteer for the event.

» Wear a piece of jewelry, item of clothing or even a favorite color as a way to spark positive memories.

» Reach out to someone who knew and loved them well, perhaps a family member or maybe a close friend. This can be especially impactful if it’s someone you aren’t in regular touch with.

» Share family pictures in a social media tribute—or avoid social media altogether if you expect seeing posts about others’ celebrations to be painful.

» Tell friends and family what you need. Sometimes, loved ones fail to reach out for fear that they will make you feel worse, so be upfront about what you need and what you don’t.

» Spend an hour or other set amount of time writing about a special memory or something about your parent that you miss. Whether in a print or online journal, this can be a cathartic experience to immerse yourself in a cherished memory and feel a reconnection.

These strategies work equally well for getting through either Mother's or Father's Days. Read More: “How to Find Comfort on Mother's Day When Your Mother Has Passed Away,” Parade, www.tinyurl.com/MothersDayCoping-SNmag
 Growing Mini Gardeners

School gardens are great opportunities to engage youngsters in agricultural awareness, but as the school year winds down, and the growing season ramps up, you can turn your focus from the school plot and instead encourage parents to make home and community gardening a family affair! Here are a few tips that you can share on what to grow that will help them (or you) make this project a bloomin’ success!

» Kids are fascinated with the very small and the very large. Consider planting cherry tomatoes or raspberries on one end of the spectrum and pumpkins on the other. Above all, discuss plans and reasons in advance to arrive at joint decisions on what to plant. (Be sure to include some sure bets for your part of the country.)

» Another approach to planting decisions is to base them on foods you know you will serve at home. For example, plant foods that will be added to a dinner salad: Lettuce greens, carrots, tomatoes and cucumbers are all kid-friendly and fairly easy to grow.

» Remember the “buried treasure.” Include at least one root vegetable, such as carrots or potatoes, in your garden.

Kids love digging these up, eager to discover the size and shape that’s been hidden from view.

» No access to a yard? You can plant tomatoes, greens and cucumbers in large pots set out on a deck or patio. Meanwhile, most herbs can grow in small pots set on a windowsill.


 Keeping the Faith

While many school districts seem to have inclusive policies in place when it comes to recognition of non-Christian religious observances for students and employees, DEI experts say that it’s a good idea for leaders in districts, companies and allied organizations to work with their human resources departments to review holiday practices and policies.

An October 2021 article in the Harvard Business Review (HBR) cites studies from the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life that find while two-thirds of Americans identify themselves as Christian, that number has dropped 12% over the last decade and the number of people in this country who identify as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu is increasing, as is the number of people who identify as having no religious affiliation. As this shift is reflected in your talent pool, a similar shift may be required in policies that allow staff time off to celebrate the observances that are meaningful to them and their families and communities.

This can actually be a competitive advantage when it comes to attracting labor when unemployment is low and recruitment is challenging. But it’s also challenging to create a policy designed to manage an estimated 176 religious holidays (estimated from internet sources). Closing operations for even a fraction of these is simply untenable for most organizations.

More practical is to approach all religious holidays (including Christmas) with a policy that designates a number of “floating holidays.” This fair-handed practice allows even those who have no religious affiliation to benefit equally—especially when the language of the policy emphasizes the “holiday” aspect, without referencing a religion-based driver.

Other tips shared in the HBR article include pairing floating holiday policies with generous PTO (personal time off) as a separate benefit and offering flexible work schedules. Most important, managers should endeavor to improve their religious literacy in order to have a greater general awareness and avoid making inaccurate presumptions about employee practices. Create a work environment that encourages team members to share key tenets of their beliefs or traditions that may result in requests for accommodation.

Bills Keep Attention on School Meal Waivers
Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), Chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and Lisa Murkowski (R-Ala.), along with 50 colleagues, have introduced S. 3979, the Support Kids Not Red Tape Act, to extend pandemic child nutrition waivers through September 2023. A similar bill, H.R. 6613, the Keeping School Meals Flexible Act, had been introduced earlier in the House by Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-Va.), and Rep. Jon Katko (R-N.Y.). Another proposal, the Securing Nutrition for American Communities and Kids (SNACK) Act, H.R. 7373, was introduced by Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-Ind.) and extends certain waivers for school nutrition programs continuing to struggle with supply chain disruptions.

SNA is urging all members to contact their legislators in both chambers to urge prompt action and provide USDA with waiver authority. Use the SNA Action Network to send your letter at www.tinyurl.com/NewWaiversBill-SNmag.

Budget Proposal Boosts Funding for School Meals
On March 28, President Biden release his FY2023 budget request, which includes $28.5 billion in discretionary funding for USDA, which is a $4.8 billion increase from FY2022. Of this total, $15 million is earmarked for the National School Lunch Program, $6 million for the School Breakfast Program, $21 million for various studies and evaluations and $35 million for school nutrition equipment grants.

Funds Would Support Local Food Procurement
USDA announced it is accepting applications from state agencies for the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program, which will provide up to $200 million for states to purchase local food for school meal programs. Allocations to states will be based on enrollment share; estimates range from $45,000 (U.S. Virgin Islands) to $23 million (California). USDA will make only one award per state/territory. This is part of a funding package announced in December 2021 by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to provide up to $1.5 billion to help school meal operators deal with supply chain disruptions.

SNA Releases State Legislative Report
In the first quarter of 2022, state legislatures introduced 35 key bills that pertain to school nutrition programs. The bills reflect a number of trends across the states, including universal school meals, increasing time to eat and alleviating administrative burdens. State legislation and policies often crop up in other states and make their way to Congress. To review SNA’s summary of state legislative action so far in 2022, visit www.tinyurl.com/StateLegRpt1Q-SNmag.

INGREDIENTS FOR HEALTH: BUTTERMILK

It's perfectly reasonable to expect that buttermilk is a buttery, high-fat milk, but its name has steered you wrong. Buttermilk has no butter and, indeed, is lower in fat than regular milk. The name is a reference to its origins as a byproduct of churning butter. Today, commercial buttermilk is produced in a manner similar to yogurt, with bacteria cultures added to pasteurized low-fat or skim milk before undergoing a fermentation process.

FACT. In a pinch, you can create your own buttermilk substitute by adding 1 tablespoon lemon juice or white vinegar to 1 cup of milk.

HOW TO EAT. While you can drink buttermilk, you’re more likely to use it in recipes, where it adds a slightly sour, tangy flavor and a rich, creamy texture to a wide range of dishes. The lactic acid in buttermilk is an effective leavener in baked goods, generating a great rise, and it acts as a tenderizer for meats, leaving them juicy instead of dry, which is why it’s a staple in many fried chicken recipes.

TRY THIS. Most recipes won’t use up the whole quart of buttermilk you bought at the grocery store. You can create an easy, tangy, creamy, herby buttermilk salad dressing by combining the following in a food processor: 1 cup buttermilk, 1 cup fresh basil leaves, ¼ cup chopped chives, ½ cup Greek yogurt and ¼ tsp. garlic powder.

NUTRITIONAL PROFILE. One cup of cultured buttermilk provides 22% of the calcium you need each day. It also contains around 8 grams of protein, 12 grams of carbohydrates and 3 grams of fat.

Discover Creativity in Action

The power of imagination will be on display everywhere you turn when you enter the Exhibit Hall at SNA’s Annual National Conference (ANC). It’s a one-stop shop of food, beverages, equipment, technology, supplies and resources—every product category related to the K-12 school foodservice segment all under one roof! The Hall will be open on both Monday and Tuesday, July 11-12.

More than 300 companies will be in Orlando ready to showcase their solutions to your school nutrition challenges. You’ll be able to taste delicious items that comply with nutrition standards, explore the benefits of innovative equipment, make connections with new vendors, view demonstrations of culinary mastery in action and collect resources to bring home to the rest of your team. Best of all, ANC’s Exhibit Hall lets you combine business with pleasure! Get your photo taken on the “cover” of School Nutrition, greet well-known mascots and play fun games to win giveaways.

Don’t miss what’s certain to be an extra-special live experience after a two-year pause. Have you registered for #ANC22 yet? Act now—take advantage of Early Bird discounts, which expire on May 20! Visit anc.schoolnutrition.org for all the details!

FINISH STRONG!

SNA’S MEMBERSHIP YEAR IS WINDING DOWN, but there’s still time to share with others your own pride and commitment in being a national member—and earn a great prize as a bonus! Peer recruitment is essential to building your association and raising the volume of its voice. As the school nutrition profession faces more challenges in the next school year, SNA needs strength in numbers to influence lawmakers to provide support to flexibility and funding school meal programs.

When you recruit at least one new SNA member this month, you earn an entry into a drawing for a great prize, including a free SNA membership, a gift card for the SNA Shop or a free SNA Training Zone course. Be sure that the new member you recruit enters your name as the “referrer” when joining SNA using the print or online application.

Also, as you recognize school lunch heroes and celebrate the end of the school year, consider the gift of membership to show your appreciation! Learn more at www.schoolnutrition.org/MembershipStartsWithME.
The training content of the LEAD to Succeed™ program from the School Nutrition Foundation becomes more valuable with each new self-paced release in LEAD’s Communication for Impact series. It began with Module 1: LEARN to Master Difficult Conversations, a three-hour course of tips and techniques to help strengthen one-on-one relationships and encounters, especially among team members, as well as with customers and stakeholders. In Module 2: EDUCATE and Engage Customers with Strategic Communication, the focus of the three-hour training is on building a framework for reaching specific audiences, packaging key messages for each group, capturing their attention and earning their trust.

Now, discover Module 3: ADVANCE Your Professionalism. In this longer (3 hours and 45 minutes) course, you will further develop workplace communications skills, explore the critical nature of effective communication and develop strategies to convey the benefits of school meals to stakeholders. All three modules are available at no cost to all school nutrition professionals and each includes a Facilitator Guide to help you bring this high-quality training to your staff in a group setting. Learn more at www.schoolnutrition.org/LEAD.
Marketing is essential in most foodservice segments—and in K-12, there are pluses and minuses to having a relatively captive audience for a dozenish years. With students continually moving up from elementary to middle to high schools and changing cafeterias as they do so, you always have a significant number of new customers to attract and then retain. Attention should be paid to general marketing strategies, of course. Menus that balance familiarity and variety. Serving lines that boast multi-sensory appeal, delivering high-quality visuals, tastes and aromas. Warm and friendly customer service. Themed events and activities that surprise, delight and engage. Communications—traditional and social—that intrigue.

Another smart strategy is to reach out to groups of students who have unique needs, interests and expectations related to the school nutrition program. This can be a long list, including, for example, students enrolled in high school culinary arts programs, marketing/business classes/clubs or family/consumer sciences classes. In this article, however, the focus is on just three groups: student athletes, students with non-medical dietary needs and students in agricultural programs. Every school district has its share of athletes, whether they are official participants of school teams or private clubs/leagues—or are just active on the playground! Most districts also have students who seek menu options that will conform to religious requirements or with personal preferences. And across the country, many students are involved in organizations like FFA and 4-H, as well as programs run by cooperative extensions and, of course, farm-to-school initiatives.

While the approaches and examples highlighted here are specific to each particular group, some of the processes and the overall strategic philosophy will apply in outreach efforts to a wide range of niche customer groups. Keep an open mind about ideas that you can apply in your district and individual schools.
Chef Brenda Wattles, RDN, is well-known to many school nutrition professionals as an in-demand trainer, presenter, menu developer and culinary consultant. Last summer, she teamed up with Erin Green, MS, RDN, LD, a former professional athlete and fellow dietitian, to present “Power Play Your Menu for Athletes” at SNA’s 2021 Virtual Annual National Conference. As colleagues crossing paths at various professional events over the years, the pair had regularly tossed around ideas to collaborate before hitting on this one. “I saw Erin’s love for working with teen athletes,” explains Wattles, of the ideas that began to percolate. Plus, as Wattles began college tours with her own children, she observed how those foodservice operations catered to their athletes with menus and lots of marketing. “This is an avenue where we in K-12 are missing the boat,” she says.

“Athletic programs can benefit from school cafeterias providing valuable, wholesome options to keep their athletes healthy and ready for action,” adds Green. Plus, school nutrition programs can benefit from the support of athletes who are seen as leaders and influencers among their peers, note both experts of the classic win-win.

At the core of their advice: You don’t have to completely overhaul your menu to reach student athletes; the greater investment comes in building awareness through marketing, as well as by connecting with coaches and parents. “Many people believe sports nutrition is special and somehow separate from daily foundational nutrition practices,” says Green. “There are unique considerations for student athletes for sure, but most of what we know that makes healthy students also makes healthy athletes.” The inherent health benefits of reimbursable school meals that comply with federal nutrition programs are incredibly undervalued—and operators can do a lot to turn around those misperceptions among young athletes, along with their parents, coaches and physical education teachers.

**Snack Talk**

While teenagers have more specific nutrient needs for training and competition, making connections between the cafeteria and athletics should begin at the elementary level. In many communities, youth involvement in organized sports can start before kindergarten! But beyond programs like travel soccer and Pop Warner football, most elementary students have opportunities for daily activity in gym class, during recess and in parks, playgrounds and backyards. The cafeteria is a great place to promote the connection between nutrition and energy.

“Kids require a lot of energy, but they don’t always have the appetite or the opportunity to eat larger meals to satisfy those energy needs,” says Green. One strategy she offers is for the school nutrition team to advocate ways that kids (and their parents) can become a snacking pro. (Of course, you can do the same in your involvement in afterschool programs.) “I love a PRO + PRO combo for busy kiddos,” Green continues. “This means always pairing more than one type of food together and aiming for PROtein + PROduce.”

Common—and easy—options include a fruit/nut mix paired with celery and peanut butter, cheese/grape combos and yogurt with fruit. “Of course Goldfish crackers and cookies can be part of the snack rotation, too,” concedes Green. “But to help kids stay well-nourished and satisfied between meals, adding a bit more substance to snacks can play a big role.”

Wattles also encourages school nutrition professionals to take a fresh look at school breakfast as a snack. While an increasing number of high schools are positioning school breakfast as a “second chance breakfast option,” this is not a tactic seen much, if at all, at the elementary school level, says Wattles. But perhaps it should be. “I know a lot of schools don’t participate in snack programs,” she notes. “And when my kids were younger, they would eat breakfast at
home and then again at school. It was considered a snack to bridge the hunger gap.⁶

Smaller, more frequent meals have a real benefit in getting young kids the nutrition they need for active days. The same is true with small amounts of a wide variety of foods. Put multiple small portions of vegetables and grains in the menu mix to make them more palatable for kids to develop acceptance—or get past food-related phases—over time. Wattles recently read a book on “extreme picky eating,” which cited research that even though parents may fear their child isn’t consuming enough food for healthy growth, eating small amounts multiple times in a day accomplishes the goal.

Another challenge with menu development for young children is to find a balance between the foods they want, expect and typically will select in the cafeteria, with the items their parents want to see on school menus. Think of dishes where you can incorporate both sides of the equation, Wattles advises. For example, kids love chicken tenders and nuggets. Well, why not menu these as a component in an entrée salad? Or pair them with a whole-grain side dish? It will help to change perceptions, with both kids and parents seeing their needs/wants reflected.

**Focused Food Choices**

Start early in associating healthy foods with attributes that speak to athletes. Wattles and Green created a series of playful food-based icons for elementary students and more sophisticated versions for older students (see above). Designs like these are easy to add to menus and on serving line signage, and they are quick identifiers that will linger in mind when students are making selections. Younger kids may not retain the fact that bananas are good sources of potassium, but they will remember that they are a good source of strength!

Similarly, older athletes will start paying closer attention to your menu offerings if they realize certain dishes can be
valuable assets when training or competing. Key attributes to promote to athletes are **power**, **strength** and **endurance**. High-protein foods can be marked for strength, complex carbohydrates associated with endurance and nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables designated as power foods. Combination foods, such as lasagna, are good sources of strength *and* endurance.

These menu labeling strategies are appropriate for all athletes, whether they participate in team or individual sports, along with other active groups you might overlook, such as the marching band, pep squad, cheerleaders and dance team. Wattles goes further, suggesting that *any* student who has activities scheduled after school will need healthy snacks to keep them going until they get home. Even if you don’t have an afterschool snack program, consider creating (and marketing) an a la carte station available at lunchtime that is stocked with non-perishable, grab-and-go items that students can slip into their backpacks and eat later in the afternoon.

**Share Your Expertise**

If you are a registered dietitian—or have one on your staff—make sure that coaches, trainers, physical education teachers and parents of athletes know you are available as a food and nutrition resource, with expertise and knowledge they may not themselves possess. At the start of the new school year (or as training camp gets underway), send a letter to parents and coaches explaining the benefits of school meals to young athletes and describing some ways that you and your team are prepared to go the extra mile for them with menus, education and support.

For example, you have access to many free nutrition education materials from sources like Team Nutrition and the National Dairy Council, and you can share these with students or make them available to coaches for distribution. You can offer to make short presentations about nutrition, athletic performance and the school meal connection to athletes at the start of the school year or the beginning of a competition season. Use these opportunities to showcase some of the specific cafeteria menu items you offer that will have resonance for athletes, such as potatoes for carbo loading or the salad bar to boost endurance.

“Sometimes, parents and coaches don’t know the right foods for athletic performance,” notes Green. “Making this information available through bulletin boards, social media infographics and team meetings are all great options.”

Don't be shy about initiating conversations with coaches and phys ed teachers, says Wattles. “Go find them or send an email and suggest setting a time to meet. At the very least, invite coaches to join you at mealtimes.” Maybe you can comp them lunch on the day of a big game.

The most fundamental goal here is to show the athletics
personnel in your district that you care about the success of student athletes and that you are open to their feedback and suggestions, say both dietitians. Use the opportunity to build awareness about your own challenges, especially when it comes to restrictions around budget, regulations, staffing and equipment, but do so in a way that stresses your solutions-focused mindset. “Be honest. This is who we are. We want to support you. What do you need?” says Wattles. Be ready also to correct some misperceptions they might have about school meals and misinformation they may be passing along to their athletes. “They might need the spiel,” she says.

In particular, school nutrition professionals can team up with the adults in the lives of young athletes to convey a crucial message: “Don’t skip meals! I see this with so many teens these days,” laments Green. “Many prefer to socialize or simply nibble at lunchtime. Just about every single teen athlete I’ve worked with in recent years has needed to make more time for lunch—and breakfast, too!—to get quality nutrition. Those meal opportunities are critical for meeting their nutritional needs. It cannot be done by snacking or grazing all day.” Getting kids to embrace and act on this fundamental is a critical first step, she says. “Sport-specific nutrition needs can be addressed after kids have met consistent daily nutrition targets.”

Athletes are “human beings first,” says Green. “This means that what we know makes a healthy human being is the foundation to building a healthy athlete.”

**Going for the Goal**

Wattles and Green offer other strategies to help school nutrition professionals capture the attention—and loyalty—of student athletes.

Do you have the assistance of an intern in your school nutrition department? They can be highly effective in connecting with student athletes. “They are closer in age to the students and sometimes have been athletes themselves,” says Wattles. “I’m working with one now who played soccer in college.” An intern could take your place presenting at a team meeting.

- Depending on your staffing levels, consider establishing a “fueling station” marketed specifically to athletes and located strategically for their access, such as near a training/weight room or the gym.
- Leverage your salad bar! These are coming back in many schools, and they are a great option for athletes who complain that the portions of a served meal aren’t enough to fill them up. “With a salad bar, they have no excuse,” says Wattles, adding that cafeterias should be sure to feature different satiating legumes.
- Menu and market high-protein and carb-loading pairs. These can include a Sloppy Joe, a chili/baked potato combo with a roll or spaghetti with meat sauce and a breadstick. “These are all hearty options and will help athletes to feel full,” says Wattles. She also advocates for promoting chocolate milk to young athletes, as it is high in protein and the carbohydrates from added sugar. “Professional athletes find chocolate milk to be fantastic,” she notes.
- Make a point to invite student athletes to be a part of special taste-testing or recipe development activities. Let them know you value their perspective as athletes. This kind of involvement also builds student leadership, which can have ripple effects that benefit your school meals program. “Athletes are often influencers,” says Green. “If they are observed selecting and eating school lunches—especially ones perceived as more health-conscious—by their peers, this can help gain buy-in from other students.”

**Team Spirit**

There are many simple ways to show your support for the athletes in your schools and district and gain maximum impact. For example, get permission to wear school colors on the service line when you’re hosting an important game, meet or match—especially against archrivals! “Support
everyone involved," says Wattles, offering another reminder about outreach to band and pep squad members.

Be sure to market all performance-boosting menu items, acknowledging their importance for the big occasion. You might even consider developing a signature team meal to be served on these days and market it accordingly with positive messages and/or mascot references, such as Eagles Soar Lasagna. "Maybe the team votes on what they would like the theme meal to be," suggests Wattles. If you have the capacity to go the extra, extra mile by catering team events, delivering special pre-game sandwiches or providing concessions, that's terrific. But don't underestimate the power of simple supportive outreach in earning a big victory for all!

WELCOME AT THE TABLE

School nutrition programs have an obligation to provide alternative meals to students with medical reasons for various dietary restrictions or requirements. But in most communities, no such obligation exists when it comes to special menu items for children from faith traditions that restrict certain foods. Similarly, school meal offerings for students who follow a vegetarian or vegan diet are not required and are often limited to a single choice with minimal variation across the menu cycle. Gluten-free options may not be available to children without medical documentation. But forward-thinking school nutrition leaders recognize the importance of expanding menus in ways that make all students feel welcomed as valuable customers in the cafeteria.

The School Nutrition team at Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools demonstrate their commitment to meeting the needs of their diverse student enrollment in many ways. One recent example is the addition of a certified halal burger to their menu at all 141 schools in February 2022. At a time when many school districts were cutting back on menu offerings to manage costs, labor and procurement challenges, Gwinnett's menu move is particularly impressive and inspiring.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Halal foods are those that are considered permissible according to Islamic law. Muslim students can eat many foods offered to all students on the cafeteria line, but most meats are off-limits, unless they have been certified as meeting certain standards. For a meat product to be certified halal, it cannot be a forbidden cut (such as from the hindquarters) or from certain animals (such as pigs). In addition, certain processing steps are required, such as animals must be fed a natural diet without animal byproducts, and Allah's name must be invoked at the time of slaughter.

Gwinnett’s 180,000 students come from all around the world, speaking 110 different languages and representing many cultures and traditions. A little over a year ago, when members of a Muslim community group worked with district leaders on a variety of issues around inclusivity, a subgroup approached Karen Hallford, School Nutrition Director, and her colleagues. "They explained how their children love eating lunch with us every day and typically select our vegetarian options," recounts Hallford, noting that the group explained Islamic dietary laws. "But what their children would really like is to be able to enjoy a hamburger or hotdog alongside their peers."
This prompted research into halal-certified meats, as well as outreach to current vendors about the availability of halal products—and the ability to sustain supply. “We contacted our current beef supplier and they happened to have a halal-certified burger they could provide,” says Hallford. Forecasts in hand and a little time to ramp up production didn’t take too long. “It took us about nine months to get the burger launched in five of our schools as a pilot in October 2021,” she reports. “We then launched the burger in all K-12 schools in February 2022.”

Hallford explains why they began with a burger: “We wanted a popular item that was menued often, and Burger Day is just that!” The halal-certified burger is clearly labeled with a sticker and is served alongside the conventional burger option.

The halal burger is just the latest in a series of menu introductions designed to celebrate and reflect the district’s diversity. For example, “Having a strong vegetarian line is something we’ve focused on for most of my tenure, dating back to 2008,” says Hallford. “We also try to hit on a variety of cuisines to add depth and interest to our menus. We recently added a Dan Dan noodle bowl and Asian-style dumplings to our menus, and both have been very popular.”

**Silver Linings**

While the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to all school nutrition programs, Hallford and her team strove to keep a glass-half-full attitude. “We viewed the past two years as a golden opportunity to gain new customers and maintain the loyalty of existing ones. When our meals started going into students’ homes, we knew it was our time to shine,” she says. “Parents and caregivers were getting the chance to see our meals in person, which meant that quality, presentation and acceptance were more important than ever before.”

Hallford concedes that it can be “tricky” to navigate meal patterns when it comes to offering culturally acceptable dishes and other menu items to meet students’ needs. Plus, there can be procurement and preparation hurdles to overcome. “But when we can make it work, we want to,” she insists. “We view it as great customer service. We will continue listening to our customers and to our staff, making ourselves available to anyone with feedback or questions, whether they come directly or through social media. Inquiries are always answered, which builds trust and loyalty.”

**RAISING ENGAGEMENT**

Three years ago, *School Nutrition* showcased the progressive partnership in Holmen, Wis., between the school nutrition program and students engaged in agricultural sciences through the high school’s FFA (Future Farmers of America) chapter (“Farm At School,” June/July 2019). What began with an FFA capstone project (required of graduating seniors) to grow and then serve hydroponic lettuce as part of school meals expanded to an annual “Winner Winner Chicken Dinner” lunch, featuring student-raised chicken, pork and corn. This month, *School Nutrition* checked in with Holmen
Nutrition Services Supervisor Michael Gasper to discover how this partnership has fared in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We adapted,” says Gasper. One program-related casualty was the annual chicken lunch, which had to be cancelled when the pandemic led to the permanent closure of a nearby poultry processing plant. Without a facility to handle student-raised chickens, this aspect of the partnership won’t be revived, although Gasper says the dinner itself may return next year, with fresh chickens from a commercial processor about 20 miles down the road.

But an FFA greenhouse is still producing student-cultivated hydroponic lettuce and microgreens for cafeteria salad bars, and Gasper has high hopes for the harvest of the district’s enormous asparagus garden, set to be featured on the menu for the annual end-of-school-year Surf n’ Turf lunch in mid-May. Plus, Holmen’s FFA chapter president, Avery Bailey, single-handedly raised two prize-winning cows and a half-dozen pigs that eventually became steaks, burgers, meatballs, low-sodium bacon and Italian sausage served by Nutrition Services in a number of different recipes and meals.

In summary? The collaboration is not what it was before COVID, “but we’re getting back there,” says Gasper.

Head of the Class

Gasper and his team prize these and other opportunities to serve Holmen students by engaging with them in projects that help them to grow and thrive on multiple levels. Avery Bailey and her Highland steers, Bandit and Renegade, were regularly spotlighted on the Nutrition Services’ social media channels, and she frequently volunteered to help serve meals like Swedish meatballs and chili that featured the meat from her animals. In one 2021 news piece about an annual Wisconsin Chili Day event in Holmen that featured Italian sausage made from six Berkshire hogs she raised, Bailey spoke about her pride in collaborating with the school food-service program: “It is gratifying to see the end product right here at school, because if I were to sell the pig meat via the commercial market, I would not be able to see the direct food impact on my community.”

In addition to the FFA collaboration, Gasper has started a partnership with local restaurants to establish a cooking club for select middle school students expected to benefit from this mentorship opportunity. “It creates a positive environment for the kids, and they all love it,” he says. The program uses food as a way to provide important social emotional learning skills. Both partnerships—and several other initiatives—represent the commitment of Gasper and his team to truly connect with their customers, recognizing that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach.

Go and Grow

Gasper remains upbeat and optimistic about the potential of the FFA partnership, gratified by the support it has earned across the community. When his original partner, the FFA adviser, retired from the district, the superintendent made sure that the collaboration with the school nutrition team was a featured aspect of the search process for a new educator. An 85-tree FFA-cultivated school orchard planted a few years ago is about to bear fruit, with apples expected in the fall, barring any blossom-time spring hailstorm, says Gasper. They are exploring ideas to expand the greenhouse. And he will again provide financial support for the FFA to raise beef cattle and about a dozen pigs for Nutrition Services—a long-term project that will launch under Avery Bailey’s watchful eye, and then be carried on by her younger sister! The cafeteria connection will continue, one new generation at a time. eSN

Patricia Fitzgerald is Editor of School Nutrition.
May is Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Reserve some time to raise your own awareness about the contributions of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the U.S.

BY DYLAN ROCHE

Each May is designated as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the achievements and contributions that Americans of Asian and Pacific Island heritage have made throughout U.S. history. While there is no consensus on the official name of this Heritage Month—alternately referred to by reputable sources as Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), Asian Pacific American (APA) and, most recently by the Biden administration, as Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI)—there is no debate about the importance of being intentional and proactive in your recognition as a valuable strategy in raising community awareness and eliminating stereotypes and racism.

The resilience and innovations of people of Asian and Pacific Island descent have helped shape every facet of U.S. society from business to government, from the arts to athletics, from science to humanities. AANHPI Heritage Month is a time to recognize the influence of this community, to address their ongoing marginalization in too many ways and to learn about the cultural practices many immigrant families brought to the U.S. from their native countries.

FORMAL RECOGNITION

As with most national commemorations, the process of establishing a designated period of recognition for this group began in Congress, and it took several attempts before lawmakers successfully passed legislation that was subsequently signed by President Jimmy Carter in 1978; the initial week-long observance was held in 1979. It was later expanded to a whole month in 1990 under President George Bush and became a permanent annual observance in 1992.

As broad umbrella terms, AA and NHPI encompass people from some four dozen Asian nations—including China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea and Japan—
as well as those from Pacific Islands, including Hawaii, New Zealand and many nations in the Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia archipelagos. Each individual group of AA and NHPI peoples has its own complex immigration history. For example, you may be familiar with stories of Chinese workers who were instrumental in the construction of the transcontinental railway in the mid-1800s, which was transformational to the U.S. economy.

But you may be unaware of the story of Filipinos who fled Spanish enslavement 100 years earlier, in 1763, and established a community in what would become Louisiana. Two hundred years after that, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed restrictive quotas and allowed for larger numbers of Asians and Pacific Islanders to come to the U.S., especially in the wake of war and instability in Southeast Asia.

The history of how Hawaii came to be the 50th U.S. state and why the Pacific islands of Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands are administered as U.S. territories is similarly complicated. AANHPI Heritage Month is an opportunity to learn more about the complexities of the past, acknowledging the cultural infamy of historic expansion and annexation, while celebrating the positive impacts born of time and resilience.

ACHIEVEMENTS ABOUND

You can see the influence of AA and NHPI innovators and leaders throughout American history and ongoing today. Some names regularly in the zeitgeist are probably recognizable, such as Vera Wang, the renowned fashion designer; Dr. Sanjay Gupta, the chief medical correspondent for CNN; Senator Tammy Duckworth, a veteran and person with disabilities making history in Congress; Yo-Yo Ma, the famous cellist; and Chef Jet Tila, who graced the cover of School Nutrition in April 2019.

But then there are many—even from our fairly recent past—who have significantly less name recognition, although their influence and achievements have been revolutionary. For example, there’s Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu, a Chinese American who came to this country in 1939 and became a leader in the study of nuclear physics, drawing comparisons with Marie Curie and playing a role in the famous Manhattan Project. She was named the first female president of the American Physical Society. Avid film enthusiasts may know Anna May Wong, an actress in early Hollywood who advocated for greater representation of AANHPI characters and actors (a struggle that has persisted over the decades, seeing the casting of non-Asian actors in key Asian roles, such as Rita Moreno in “The King and I” and Jonathan Pryce in “Miss Saigon”). Kalpana Chawla was the first Indian American astronaut in space; she tragically died in the Columbia space shuttle disaster. Taiwanese American Steven Chen is one of the co-founders of YouTube. Look for other influential AANHPI leaders in the box on page 22.

Fortunately, pop culture is getting some long-deserved bona fide AANHPI representation today. Marvel debuted its first Asian superhero in the 2021 film “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings.” “Crazy Rich Asians” earned big bucks as both a best-selling novel by Singapore American author Kevin Kwan and as a film directed by Jon Chu, a reputed filmmaker of Chinese Taiwanese descent, who also directed Lin-Manuel Miranda’s “In the Heights.” Comedian-rapper-actress Awkwafina, whose heritage is Chinese and Korean, is earning well-deserved applause for her work in both comedies and dramas.

Politics and government are other areas where AANHPI representation is improving. Most notably, Vice President Kamala Harris is the first person of Asian descent to serve in her role as the second-highest officer in the executive branch. Current Congressional lawmakers who trace their family lines to Asia and the Pacific include Bobby Scott of Virginia, the first U.S.-born Congress member of Filipino descent; Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, a Japanese American and
HAVE YOU HEARD OF THESE AA AND NHPI CHANGEMAKERS?

» **Ajay Bhatt:** He is an Indian American who co-invented the USB, which led to easy data storage and transfer via flash or "thumb" drive.

» **Joyce Chen:** This Chinese American chef popularized authentic Chinese cuisine in the U.S. and is reported to have established the popular all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet.

» **Connie Chung:** A noted journalist and the second woman to co-anchor a national network's evening news program, she is a first-generation American born of Chinese parents.

» **Dr. David Ho:** A Taiwanese American research physician and virologist, he has been at the forefront of AIDS research and, more recently, coronavirus research.

» **Daniel Inouye:** The long-serving Japanese American senator representing Hawaii earned the Congressional Medal of Honor for his combat heroism during World War II.

» **Duke Kahanamoku:** A Native Hawaiian who won gold medals while representing USA in the Olympics, he later popularized the sport of surfing.

» **Daniel Dae Kim:** This South Korean American actor may be best known for his roles on "Lost" and "Hawaii 5-0," but he has expanded his resume as a film/TV developer and producer, notably of "The Good Doctor."

» **Michelle Kwan:** The five-time world champion in ice skating, Kwan, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, was recently nominated by President Biden to be U.S. Ambassador to Belize.

» **Maya Lin:** A first-generation American born of Chinese parents, this designer has earned renown for her historic memorials, notably the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Ala.

» **Lisa Ling:** A journalist, documentarian, television personality and author, Ling comes from a family of Taiwanese, Chinese and Malaysian descent.

» **I.M. Pei:** The celebrated Chinese American architect is known for many innovative buildings, including the Louvre Pyramid in Paris, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland and the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

» **Kal Penn:** Born Kalpen Suresh Modi to Indian American parents, he famously put his rising acting career on hold to serve in the White House Office of Public Engagement in the Obama administration and later was appointed to the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

» **Troy Polamalu:** Of American Samoa descent, Polamalu is a former professional football star who played his entire 12-year NFL career for the Pittsburgh Steelers and was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame his first year of eligibility.

» **Michelle Rhee:** Born to South Korean immigrants, Rhee is a vocal advocate of education reform, who served as Chancellor of D.C. Public Schools and founded an advocacy organization called StudentsFirst.

» **George Takei:** This Japanese American made a name for himself as an actor before becoming a noted civil rights activist.

» **Eric Yuan:** He is the Chinese American founder of Zoom, which shot to prominence as a communications lifeline during the coronavirus pandemic.

first Buddhist senator; Mark Takano, a Japanese American and the first openly gay person of Asian descent serving in Congress; and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, the first Hindu of Indian descent in Congress.

BATTLING BIGOTRY
The importance of AANHPI Heritage Month lies beyond stories of achievement and accolades. There’s also a more somber side to why this observance is so crucial—the long history of discrimination and racially motivated violence the AA and NHPI communities have faced in the past and continue to face in the present. It’s only by confronting these problems that we can create a better future of equity and respect.

As far back as the 1850s, Asian immigrants faced exploitation and abuse in the workforce. An estimated 30% of all immigrant workers involved in the California Gold Rush were of Chinese descent, and many of them were victims of attacks from white workers and overseers. Perpetrators got away with these anti-Asian crimes because of a 1854 ruling by the California Supreme Court that anyone of Asian descent could not testify against a white person in court (People v. Hall).

By 1882, compelled by xenophobia, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited all immigration from Asia for two decades. This law was not formally repealed until the 1940s, but even then, only a limited number of immigrants were allowed in the country. Such racial barriers on immigration from Asia weren’t struck down until the 1950s and 1960s.

The disgraceful treatment of Japanese immigrants and their descendants following the attack on Pearl Harbor is one of the best-known acts of institutional racism in the U.S. in the last century. From 1942 to 1946, it was the policy of the federal government to forcibly remove Japanese American families from their homes, confiscate their belongings and businesses and incarcerate...
them in concentration camps. It was a policy based solely on the Japanese lineage of more than 120,000 citizens and immigrants and considered today to be one of the most horrendous acts of civil rights violation in U.S. history.

Despite a formal apology issued by Congress to Japanese Americans in 1988, along with financial reparations, Asian Americans as a community have continued to be a focus of shameful bigotry and stereotypical rhetoric across the country and even within the U.S. government, most notably by former President Trump, who, while in office, referred to COVID-19 as the “kung flu” and “Chinese virus.” In 2020, the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism reported a 124% increase in incidence of anti-Asian violence in the United States. This dismaying statistic prompted several advocacy organizations to launch a collaborative Stop AAPI Hate Coalition, which tracks instances of discrimination, abuse and violence.

In addition to overt acts of bigotry, AA and NHPI communities regularly face microaggressions in everyday life. As a 2009 study published by the Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group puts it, AANHPI people are often perceived as “perpetual foreigners” or presumed that they aren’t “real” Americans. Many natural-born citizens share stories of having been asked, “So, where are you from? I mean, originally.”

At the same time, there’s also the perception that these demographic
groups represent what's known as a “model minority.” Because they're assumed to follow stereotypical norms associated with certain Asian nations, these Americans “must be” smarter and more successful by default—and they couldn’t possibly face any professional or academic barriers, despite evidence to the contrary. As recently as April 2022, a USA Today analysis reported that Asian American women miss out on professional leadership opportunities at a disproportionate rate.

**APPRECIATE—DON’T APPROPRIATE**

From their design and music to their religion and food—and much more—the peoples of Asia and the Pacific Islands have had a profound influence on U.S. culture. But when cultural touchstones are adopted with little regard for and understanding of their context and importance, appreciation can verge on disrespectful appropriation. Examples run the gamut from benign (getting a tattoo of an Asian language character without understanding its meaning) to insulting (models wearing Sikh turbans as an accessory in a fashion show).

By celebrating AANHPI Heritage Month and taking advantage of opportunities to learn, we can gain a better understanding of many of the cultural elements that have become mainstream in the United States. The goal is that the next time you take a yoga class, you’ll understand its origins as a spiritual practice rooted in Hindu philosophies. If you enroll in martial arts (of which there are many disciplines), you’ll have a better appreciation of their historical significance. And if you ever watch anime or decorate with bonsai trees, you’ll know why these cultural icons are meaningful in the regions where they originated.

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**LEARN MORE**

- Asian Cultural Council: [www.asianculturalcouncil.org](http://www.asianculturalcouncil.org)
- Asian Pacific Heritage Month: [www.asianpacificheritage.gov](http://www.asianpacificheritage.gov)
- Asia Society: [www.asiasociety.org](http://www.asiasociety.org)
- History Channel: [www.history.com](http://www.history.com)
- National Park Service: [www.nps.gov/subjects/aapiheritage/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/aapiheritage/index.htm)
- Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center: [www.smithsonianapa.org](http://www.smithsonianapa.org)

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According to the U.S. Census, there are some 22 million AA and NHPI people living in the United States. That's about 7% of the population, and research from the Pew Research Center finds Asian Americans to be the fastest-growing ethnic group in the country. Between 2000 and 2019, the Asian population in the U.S. grew 81%, compared to 70% among Hispanic Americans, 61% among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders and 20% among Black Americans.

This doesn't mean you have to discontinue cafeteria celebrations of Chinese New Year, cancel a special event luau or shouldn't try adapting a traditional Vietnamese bahn mi sandwich recipe so it meets the needs of your school nutrition meal program and your customers' taste preferences. Cross-cultural evolutions have generated their own uniquely Americanized hybrids in many areas of society. But, as a good rule of thumb, if you are planning cafeteria theme days intended to celebrate Asian or Pacific Island heritage, do some first-level research, especially to avoid any touchstones that are based in religion or spirituality.

**OBSERVING AANHPI HERITAGE MONTH**

While many people from AANHPI communities may welcome your curiosity and interest in learning more about the traditions of their family's heritage, take care to avoid unintended microaggressions with your questions. Similarly, don't expect a coworker or parent to be your sole source of education in this area.

Make yourself receptive to learning whenever the opportunity presents itself. AANHPI Heritage Month is likely to be observed with greater media coverage of current and historic figures. Take time to read articles, watch a documentary and follow social media posts by AANHPI influencers. Your local library may have recommendations of biographies, memoirs and novels to check out. If you are aware of local businesses that are owned by or that serve an AANHPI community, make time this month to check them out. For example, perhaps there is a market specializing in the foods and ingredients unique to, say, Korean cuisine. Stop by and ask for some advice about a new menu item that would be an accessible entry point or how to incorporate gochujang, the spicy paste that is making inroads across cuisines, into an existing recipe.

While AANHPI Heritage Month comes at a very busy time for school cafeterias beginning to prep for the end of the school year, even a few small activities leave a big impact. It may be too late to implement these for May 2022, so make note of opportunities to implement in 2023! Start with your menu. Review current Asian flavor profiles that have gained traction with students and explore ways to use these as a foundation to introduce new items. For example, if sriracha has proven very successful, then an experiment with gochuchang may be just the ticket. Or forgo spicy heat and focus on kids' love of noodle dishes by serving up a pad Thai recipe.

If you have a student (or adult) cooking club in place, consider hand-rolled sushi as the activity for May. Be sure to explain the origins and traditional ingredients of the Japanese classic, as well as review different types of sushi and how it's been adapted. Maybe ask participants to write a classic haiku (a three line poem broken into 5/7/5 syllables) to describe their sushi creations. This combination of culinary craft and education is a perfect way to celebrate AANHPI Heritage Month!

Dylan Roche is a School Nutrition Contributing Editor based in Arnold, Md. SN Editor Patricia Fitzgerald contributed to this article.

**BONUS WEB CONTENT**

**CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**

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- Ready To Operate
Veterans of SNA’s Legislative Action Conference (LAC) will never forget the March 2020 gathering. COVID headlines were picking up in frequency and urgency. Many attendees opted for elbow bumps instead of hugs and handshakes. Meeting rooms buzzed with conversation about how to manage if schools and offices had to close for a few weeks. No one imagined that it would be two years before they would gather again in Washington, D.C.

The in-person return to LAC 2022 was joyful, albeit tinged with concerns about the business at hand, especially once word broke that an extension of child nutrition waivers into SY2022-23 had been blocked by a coalition led by Senator Mitch McConnell. But #LAC22 was the perfect venue for state teams to rally, calling on members in D.C. and at home to rev up their grassroots advocacy.

The program agenda was packed with other timely topics, including an insider’s view of the mid-term election environment from Keynote Speaker Amy Walters; a recorded address by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; breakout sessions on CEP, building a bipartisan advocacy program and maximizing Hill visits; exchange sessions for industry and state agency representatives; panel discussions on SNA’s 2022 Position Paper, USDA’s transitional rule on nutrition standards and other agency updates, best practices for managing supply chain and labor shortage challenges and predictions for the year ahead; plus a much-needed presentation on maintaining well-being during stressful times. Dinner, drinks and dancing were on tap at the School Nutrition Foundation Together Again Gala to close out official events.
SNA’s top leadership welcomed the expert insights from Keynote Speaker Amy Walters.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack sent greetings and gratitude in a recorded message to #LAC22 attendees.

USDA FNS Program Administrator Cindy Long

Eileen O’Grady, PhD, RN, NP, offered welcome advice on “Triaging Difficult Others” in a Sunday breakout session, as well as a general session on “Choosing Wellness: Well-being in Challenging Times.”

SNA President-Elect Lori Adkins, SNS, took to the microphone with urgent questions about the future of school nutrition programs.

Several members of SNA’s hard-working Public Policy & Legislation Committee presented the priorities of the Association’s 2022 Position Paper.
Panel discussions featured updates from USDA, best practices for managing supply chain challenges, predictions for SY2022-23 and reflections on the breaking news about the failure of Congress to authorize an extension of regulatory flexibility into the next school year.
#LAC22 attendees gathered Monday evening, March 7, to recognize the achievements of school nutrition professionals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and to celebrate being “Together Again.”

The Gala event of dinner, drinks and dancing was hosted by the School Nutrition Foundation and made possible thanks to the generosity of several organizations, including Premier sponsors SFSPac and Gold Star Foods. Contributions by participants to the Foundation support its mission to provide scholarships, research and education to school nutrition professionals.

“Capture the Moment” photos by Ro Moreno
These one-dish meals are versatile solutions to meet K-12 challenges.

See recipe on next page

Over the last decade, bowls have come a long way from conveying soups, stews, chilis and salads. In the restaurant world, you’ll see bowl meal options on menus for breakfast, lunch and dinner, promising intriguing taste combinations from a wide array of ingredients. It’s a trend that shows no signs of slowing down, as chefs push the boundaries in mixing up flavors and textures—and as customers embrace both curated and customizable build-your-own options. According to trend-watching Datassential, bowls are surpassing pizza and tacos in menu mentions today and even 20% of fine-dining restaurants offer at least one bowl option. The research firm also finds that there are more than 10,000 foodservice concepts that feature the word “bowl” in their restaurant’s name!
**BLT Breakfast Rice Bowl**

1 Combine the rice, water and salt in a 2-in. half-size steamtable pan and stir to combine. Cover tightly. Cook in a 350°F oven for 50 to 60 minutes or a steamer for 30 to 40 minutes.

2 Remove the rice from the oven or steamer and let stand for 15 minutes.

3 Remove the cover and fluff the rice with a fork. **CCP:** Hold above 135°F for service.

4 Scramble the eggs according to package directions.*

5 Place the bacon slices in a single layer on a baking sheet. Heat in a warm oven for 7 to 8 minutes, then remove and crumble or chop.

6 Wilt the spinach by placing it in a perforated steamtable pan. Place in the steamer for 1 minute, making sure not to overcook.

7 Mix the ranch dressing and sriracha together. Portion into 1-oz. cups. **CCP:** Hold below 41°F for service.

8 To assemble each bowl: Place 1/2 cup (#8 scoop) of brown rice in a serving bowl. Add 1/4 cup (#16 scoop) of scrambled eggs, 1/4 cup (#16 scoop) of wilted spinach and 1/4 cup (#16 scoop) of cherry tomatoes. Garnish with 1/2-oz. chopped turkey bacon.

9 Serve each bowl with 1-oz. sriracha-ranch dressing in a portion cup.

*Notes: Liquid eggs may be used with an operation's recipe to prepare the scrambled eggs.

Recipe and Photo: USA Rice, [www.usarice.com/Healthy School Recipes](http://www.usarice.com/Healthy School Recipes), [www.healthyschoolrecipes.com](http://www.healthyschoolrecipes.com)

Nutritional, Meal Pattern and Cost Analyses: Rebecca J. Polson, CC, SNS, Instagram: @ChefRebeccaK12

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While bowl meals are not entirely new to K-12 school foodservice, it’s only recently that we’re seeing them live up to their culinary potential and properly reflect wider industry trends. (When Chipotle announces that it sells more bowls than burritos, it’s time for kid-centric foodservice operations to take notice and take action!)

Even if K-12 is a little late to the big bowl bonanza, this is actually a perfect time to explore the possibilities. One reason is that healthy bowls are all the rage these days, and that, of course, is right on point with the mission of school nutrition. One of the opportunities here is to focus on popular flavor profiles, like Mediterranean or Latin, which reliably carry a healthy halo from such foundational ingredients as beans and rice without scaring off kids who might equate “healthy” with “no fun to eat.”

Bowls allow you to tap into other current food trends, such as the growing popularity of plant-forward dietary choices and flexitarian eating sensibilities. They can also present Instagram-worthy visual appeal for kids compelled to share. One other timely reason to be bowl’d over right now is the flexibility bowl meals can offer in accommodating late-breaking ingredient shortages, allowing for a wide variety of simple substitutions—and the students none the wiser nor disappointed.

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**BACKING THE BOWL**

In September 2021, Tips for School Meals That Rock Administrators Daye Hayes, MS, RD, and Jeanne Reilly, NDTR, SNS, produced a Facebook Live culinary demonstration focused on the popularity of bowl-based meals. “Bowl Goals for Back to School,” sponsored by the National Mango Board and Fruits & Veggies—Have a Plant, featured recipes that could be made by families at home and be scaled to serve in schools. The 30-minute “cook-along” is a visual affirmation of the potential presented by bowls that can be mined by school nutrition operators. You can view it at [www.tinyurl.com/Bowls4Kids-SNmag](http://www.tinyurl.com/Bowls4Kids-SNmag), and find one of the featured recipes, Very Veggie Chipotle Chicken Bowl, on page 40.

Reilly, School Nutrition Program Director, Windham Raymond Schools, RSU #14, Maine, understands the behind-the-scenes value of bowl-based school meals. “Bowls allow you to improvise,” she notes. Improvisation has been a watchword in school nutrition since March 2020, and it’s likely to be an ongoing characteristic through SY2022-23. School nutrition teams have been put to the test as many center-of-the-tray menu items and ingredients fail to show up when the distributor’s delivery arrives. “But if you are offering a bowl, it’s usually easy to substitute something else,” says Reilly. “You can swap different proteins—chicken strips, fajita chicken, even tofu—could easily work in the same recipe.
1 Rinse off the parboiled brown rice under cold water. Divide rice evenly between two 2-in. full-sized steamtable pans and add 2 1/2 qts. of the water, 1.5 Tbsps. of garlic powder, 1 Tbsp. dried thyme and 1 bay leaf to each pan. Mix to combine. Cover both pans tightly with plastic and foil and crimp the edges.

2 Steam or bake at 350°F for 40 to 45 minutes, until cooked through.

3 Fluff seasoned rice with a spoon and store hot at 140°F or above.

4 To prepare the chimichurri sauce: Place the red vinegar, lime juice, olive oil, honey, oregano, parsley, black pepper and cilantro into a container and blend until smooth. Store chilled at 40°F or below.

5 Spread the vegan Buffalo wings onto a pan and bake at 350°F until hot in the center, 14 to 16 minutes. Remove and hold hot at 140°F or above.

6 To assemble: Scoop 1 cup cooked rice into a bowl or boat, and top with five Buffalo wings. Spoon 1 oz. of the chimichurri sauce on the top or serve on the side in a cup.

*Note: MorningStar Farms Veggie Buffalo Wings can be used in this recipe. Photo shows the bowl build with beans; these are not reflected in the ingredients list or the analyses. As this recipe includes honey, it does not truly classify as vegan.

Recipe and Photo: Kellogg’s Away From Home, www.kelloggsawayfromhome.com

Nutritional, Meal Pattern and Cost Analyses: Rebecca J. Polson, CC, SNS, Instagram: @ChefRebeccaK12

She’s also a fan of bowls as a waste-minimization tactic. Say you have a partial case of frozen corn or you didn’t serve all the beans you had cupped up or put on the salad bar. Using them in a bowl dish doesn’t “feel” like using up leftovers—to your students, it’s just another tasty cafeteria offering!

Bowls also provide an accessible entry point to kids when it comes to trying new foods. “You can make the amounts very small,” advises Reilly. And if the unfamiliar item is paired with favorite flavors that dominate? Students may surprise themselves in their willingness to accept the new item in this context. Bowls could prove challenging for students resistant to having ingredients or menu items touch one another. But Reilly suggests mindful arrangements that will allow students to eat individual items separately, easily remove offending ingredients or mix it all up themselves with gusto!

SET YOUR BOWL GOALS

How can you go bonkers with bowls in your school meals program? Start by reviewing menu items and flavor profiles that already enjoy menu success and customer popularity.

“Anything can go in a bowl,” says Hayes. “Pick a flavor profile or combo that your customers already love and put it in a bowl format.”

Take, for example, smoothies. Leverage the success of the popular beverage by creating a smoothie bowl and offering it at either breakfast or lunch. In fact, give it a try on the summer meals menu, where its cool refreshment is sure to have added appeal.

A smoothie bowl is a really thick smoothie, says Reilly, explaining that the thick, creamy consistency is necessary to hold up the added fruit in the bowl. “You want a different texture than what can be consumed with a straw. It’s almost like a sorbet or even ice cream,” she notes.

Any fruits—in any forms—can work in a smoothie bowl: fresh, frozen, canned and even dried! And the bowl format provides for a double dose—fruit as an element of the base, as well as fruit toppings. If you have multiple fruit options on hand, Reilly suggests prepping the smoothie base ahead of time, freezing it in individual serving containers and then directing students to a station with toppings that they can add themselves. “It’s a great way to engage kids,” she explains. “One of the best things about bowls is how customizable they are!”

The internet is a great source of easy-prep smoothie...
bowl recipes. You can find ones that star popular fruits (blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, bananas, mango, kiwi) paired with trending ingredients (overnight oats, granola, acai, chia, dragon fruit). Even veggies like spinach and sweet potato can be stealth ingredients in the base of sweet smoothie bowls.

Veggies can be more prominent in savory bowl combinations both at breakfast and later in the day. For example, hashbrowns or tater tots can deliver welcome familiarity and satiating attributes when used as the base of a breakfast or—when time is tight—breakfast-for-lunch bowl. “Totchos” (nachos-style tater tots served in a bowl or boat) is one example gaining in popularity, says Hayes. Other great veggie ingredients for bowls include, but are in no way limited to, beans, chickpeas, corn, tomatoes, chopped broccoli, onions, edamame and peppers. And while fresh, frozen and canned all work well, Hayes urges operators not to overlook the appeal of roasted vegetables. “Kids really love these as sides and in salads, and they definitely can be used in bowls,” she says.

There’s great flexibility for protein choices, as well as grains, plus a drizzle of a flavorful dressing. The versatility of bowls can be mind-boggling. Swap just one or two ingredients and you can change the flavor profile from Latin to Asian to Mediterranean, allowing you to menu bowls with greater frequency without the risk of customer boredom.

Color and arrangement are keys to success, advises Reilly. Eye appeal is “so critical to a good bowl.” Keep textures in mind, too. With the right inclusions, you can deliver crunchy, chewy and creamy in a single bite! Do some kitchen experimentation to find the right balance, as you don’t want a bowl that becomes super soggy nor one that is overly dry.

**BOWLS ON A ROLL**

Feeling overwhelmed by the opportunities? “I think Asian flavor profiles are ones that most students are familiar with, so that could be a good place to start,” advises Reilly. Southwest bowls are another good entry point, given the popularity of chains like Chipotle and Taco Bell with young customers. For these, a mix of taco- or fajita-seasoned proteins, paired with other signature ingredients (like a bean-and-roasted-corn salsa and a cheese with a bite) work nicely.

While Reilly is personally a fan of smoothie bowls, egg-and-potato bowls, oatmeal and other warm grain bowls menued for breakfast, she’s more pragmatic about their fit for most school breakfast programs. “Breakfast is just so time-crunched. I think it would be challenging to offer customizable bowls at breakfast on a large scale.”

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**Fiesta Mac Bowl**

**FEATURED PARTNER RECIPE**

1. Place frozen, unopened bag of mac & cheese in a steamer, tilt skillet or stock pot with boiling water and heat for approximately 45 minutes or until product reaches 145°F (HACCP).
2. Remove mac & cheese product from steamer, kettle, tilt skillet or stock pot and place the unopened bag in a hot holding cabinet (135°F HACCP) until ready to serve.
3. Place frozen, unopened bag of beef taco filling in a steamer, tilt skillet or stock pot with boiling water and heat for approximately 45 minutes or until the product reaches 145°F (CCP).
4. Remove the taco filling from steamer, kettle, tilt skillet or stock pot and place the unopened bag into a hot holding cabinet (CCP: 135°F) until ready to use.
5. Remove beef taco from the holding cabinet, carefully cut open the bag and pour into a 2- or 4-in. deep steamtable pan and place on the serving line.
6. Remove mac & cheese from the holding cabinet, carefully cut open the bag and pour into a 2- or 4-in. deep steamtable pan and place on the serving line.
7. Serve as instructed on the line or assemble bowls in advance: Portion 6 ozs. (#8 scoop) of mac & cheese into the serving dish and top with 1/2 cup (#20 scoop) of beef taco filling. Optional toppings include salsa, pico de gallo, sliced jalapeños, sour cream and shredded cheese.

**Yield** 20 servings

**Per Serving** 230 cal, 15 g protein, 12 g fat, 6 g sat. fat, 19 g carbs, 2 g fiber, 610 mg sodium

**Meal Pattern** Each 6.13 serving provides 2.5 meat/meat alternate, 1.0 grain, ¼ cup red/orange vegetable

**Recipe, Photo and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses:** J.T.M. Foods, [www.jtmfoodgroup.com/k-12](http://www.jtmfoodgroup.com/k-12)
Food Focus

Buffalo Chicken Hash Brown Bowl

Anything can go in a bowl. Pick a flavor profile or combo that your customers already love and put it in a bowl format.

For operations ready to take bowls to the next level—and push the boundaries of regional taste preferences—Middle Eastern flavors represent an intriguing opportunity. “Curry, turmeric, couscous, hummus, tandoori chicken, crispy chickpeas—those are all flavors and bowl ideas that would be really interesting for schools,” says Reilly, acknowledging that it’s a direction that would require a baby steps approach in her own district. “For our New England clientele, we’d need to do a bunch of taste-testing and focus groups first.”

Hayes agrees, encouraging school chefs to consider regional preferences. “Where you start might vary. Rice and Asian flavors in New England; or California; beans, rice and Latin flavors in the Southwest and Buddha bowls with grains like farro in the Pacific Northwest. Just pick a foundation—rice, beans, potatoes, pasta—and then add in toppings and flavors that are already popular,” she says. Be mindful, however, that global cuisines are seeing increasing growth in what might be considered unexpected parts of the country. Keep an eye on the menus and concepts of restaurants in your community.

A BORROWER BE

Social media has long been a terrific source of inspirational ideas. In addition to Facebook discussion groups like Tips for School Meals That Rock, Tips to Succeed: School Meals in Small, Rural Districts and School Nutrition Professionals, follow the Facebook, Instagram and Twitter feeds of individual district school meal programs that put social media to enviable use.

Buffalo Chicken Hash Brown Bowl

Serves 72
Per Serving: 490 cal., 24 g pro., 19 g fat, 60 g carb, 7 g fiber, 1,712 mg sod.

Meal Pattern: 2-oz. meat/meat alternate, 1-oz. grains*, ½ cup starchy vegetables, ¼ cup dark-green vegetables, ¼ cup red/orange vegetables, ¼ cup other vegetables

Cost Per Serving: $1.30

6.375 lb. hash browns*
3 cups Buffalo sauce, prepared
4 ½ cups ranch dressing, low-fat
36 cups chicken, cooked, shredded
36 cups romaine lettuce, chopped
18 cups carrots, matchstick-cut
18 cups celery, thinly sliced
72 whole-grain rolls*

1 Prepare the hash browns according to the package directions.
2 Combine the Buffalo sauce and ranch dressing in a large bowl and mix until blended.
3 To assemble: Place ½ cup hash browns in each bowl. Top with ½ cup shredded chicken, ½ cup romaine, ¼ cup carrots and ¼ cup celery. Drizzle with 2 Tbsp. Buffalo-ranch sauce and serve with a whole-grain roll.*

*Notes: Idahoan Fresh Cut Hash Browns can be used in this recipe. Specific roll will affect meal pattern calculation.

Recipe and Photo: Idahoan Foods, LLC, www.idahoanfoodservice.com
Nutritional, Meal Pattern and Cost Analyses: Rebecca J. Polson, CC, SNS, Instagram: @ChefRebeccaK12
Raspberry Creamsicle Oat Bowl

For Oats
25 cups oats, rolled, quick
2 gal. water
1 gal. milk, 1%, unflavored
1 cup orange juice
2 cups mandarin orange juice reserved from canned mandarins
2 Tbsp. vanilla extract
1 Tbsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. salt
2 cups raspberry puree, prepared*

For Topping
12 1/2 cups raspberry crumbles*
12 1/2 cups mandarin oranges, canned, drained (reserve juice for oats)
6 1/4 cups vanilla yogurt
6 1/4 cups granola

1 Add water and milk to a kettle or tilt skillet. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
2 Add oats, vanilla, cinnamon and salt. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally to keep from sticking.
3 In the last five minutes of the cooking process, add both orange juices to the oats. Cook the oats to a minimum 145°F.
4 Hold hot at 135°F until ready to assemble and serve.
5 Just prior to assembly, stir in the raspberry puree.
6 To assemble: Start with 1 cup (#4 scoop) of oats-raspberry mixture in a bowl. Top with 1/4 cup (2-oz. spoodle) of raspberry crumbles. Top with 1/4 cup (2-oz. spoodle) of mandarin oranges. Top with 1/8 cup (#30 scoop) of yogurt. Finish with 1/2 cup (1-oz. spoodle) granola.

*Notes: Washington Red Raspberry Pasteurized Seedless Puree can be used in this recipe; the amount can be increased to deliver a deeper color. Washington Red Raspberry IQF Whole and Broken Crumbles also can be used in this recipe. If there are leftover oats, cool properly and save for Raspberry Creamsicle Parfaits (recipe available at www.schoolnutrition.org/snmagazine bonus.)

Nutritional, Meal Pattern and Cost Analyses: Rebecca J. Polson, CC, SNS, Instagram: @ChefRebeccaK12

Focus Food
Hayes is a champion at using social media to identify trends, discover ideas and showcase progressive districts with innovative approaches. She’s intrigued by a few bowl combinations seeing successful rollouts in schools. For example, Gwinnett County (Ga.) Schools started serving spiced yogurt bowls featuring trend-forward spices like turmeric and ginger blended in the yogurt and then paired with a fruit puree, such as mango or blackberry. Students see yogurt as a safe go-to food, making it a perfect carrier for introducing a less familiar flavor.

Another next-level K-12 bowl that excites Hayes is a Shrimp Taco Rice Bowl available at Holland (Mich.) Public Schools. Marinated shrimp is served over a bed of Mexican rice, along with black beans, corn, sautéed peppers and onions, tomato, shredded cheese and a lime wedge. The bowl format makes it an easy grab-and-go option for high school students.

What’s next? Hayes has no crystal ball, but she predicts that a poke-style bowl (minus the raw fish) may be something that forward-leaning school cafeterias begin to offer. Many commercial restaurants have created vegan variations on the Hawaiian favorite, sometimes using watermelon, which is an approach that seems a great fit for K-12 operations. Another version, with crunchy fish tenders, developed by USA Rice, is available at HealthySchoolRecipes.com. School chefs also might take inspiration from the bibimbap, a
**Very Veggie Chipotle Chicken Bowl**

1 Bring water to a boil in a saucepan. Add rice blend and salt, reduce heat, cover pan and simmer for 45 minutes until rice is tender. Fluff the rice, add 2 Tbsps. chopped parsley or cilantro. Set aside.

2 Heat 1 Tbsp. of olive oil in a sauté pan. Sauté corn and black beans together, heating to 165°F. Keep chicken warm and set aside.

3 Heat 1 Tbsp. of olive oil in a sauté pan. Add in and lightly toss the diced chicken and ground cumin, heating to 165°F. Keep chicken warm until bowl assembly.

4 To assemble: Divide rice blend into four bowls. Top each with 3 ozs. chicken, 1/2 cup corn-black bean mixture, ¼ cup diced red pepper and 2 Tbsps. diced tomato. Drizzle with chipotle ranch dressing. Garnish with remaining cilantro or parsley.

*Serves 4*  
**Per Serving** See Notes*  
**Meal Pattern** See Notes*  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 cups water</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup rice blend*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/4 tsp salt</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Tbsp olive oil, divided</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 oz. cooked chicken, diced</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup corn kernels (thaw if frozen)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup red bell pepper, diced</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup black beans, canned, drained, rinsed*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/2 cup diced tomatoes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/4 cup chopped parsley or cilantro, divided*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tsp ground cumin</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/2 cup chipotle ranch dressing, prepared*</td>
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*Notes:*
- Recipe is scaled for family-style quantity. Adapted from Ruby Wild Blend™ Chipotle Chicken Bowl for K-12 school meal programs, posted on Tips for School Meals That Rock Facebook page (click on Files and scroll to September 9, 2021) or search HealthySchoolRecipes.com.
- Instead of a prepared rice blend, dish can be made with leftover rice, cooked grains (such as farro or barley) or quinoa (which cooks up very quickly).
- Consider changing beans for a different color and flavor profile.
- Consider your customers in deciding between cilantro or parsley; the latter has a milder flavor.
- Add other vegetables, such as summer squash or edamame, and even fruits like pineapple or mango, as they are available or desired.
- For a vegan bowl, swap the chicken with tofu.
- If a prepared chipotle ranch dressing is not available, it’s easy to spike regular ranch with some chopped up chipotle peppers in adobo sauce.

**Recipe and Photo:** Jeanne Reilly, NDTR, SNS, and Dayle Hayes, MS, RD, for Fruits & Veggies—Have a Plant, www.fruitsandveggies.org

Recipes published in *School Nutrition* have not been tested by the magazine or SNA in a school foodservice setting, except for certain “Kitchen Wisdom” selections, which are evaluated by a volunteer pool of operators. When available, nutrient analyses are provided by the recipe source. The specific brands used may make a difference in nutritional breakdown, meal pattern crediting and cost analysis. Required ingredients, preparation steps and nutrient content make some recipes more appropriate for catering applications or adult meals. Readers are encouraged to test recipes and calculate their own nutrition analyses, meal patterns and HACCP steps.

Patricia Fitzgerald is Editor of School Nutrition.
READ THIS

*The Power of Fun* | CATHERINE PRICE | For anyone who feels that life has become mired in drudgery, *The Power of Fun: How to Feel Alive Again*, from journalist and screen/life balance expert Catherine Price, helps readers understand that genuine happiness lies in the everyday experience of fun. It is an important part of a fulfilling life—not a trivial indulgence. She weaves together scientific research with personal experience to reveal the benefits of fun and offers a practical plan to attract more fun. *Available at major retailers.*

CHECK THAT OUT

*Meal Delivery Cart* | CRESCOR | If you’re serving meals to classrooms, kiosks or other areas far from the school kitchen, the Quik Delivery Cart Hold & Serve heated cabinet from CresCor is a solid transport option. It holds packaged meals hot up to 140°F and features a push/pull handle for easy maneuvering, plus heavy-duty swivel casters (two with brakes). Custom graphics are available for the top, back and sides of the unit. An optional plexiglass shield offers protection for servers and customers. Visit www.crescor.com, click on “New Products.”

CHECK THAT OUT

*Birthday Cake Bar* | ZEEZES | Imagine you could let your students enjoy the confetti fun of birthday cake all year long! The 1.3-oz. Birthday Cake Soft Baked Bar in the ZeeZees brand lineup from National Food Group is a whole-grain treat that proves good nutrition can look and taste indulgent. The bar features colorful, all-natural sprinkles, zig-zag icing and a vanilla flavor. It’s Smart Snacks compliant and credits as a 1 grain serving for reimbursable meals. It’s also produced in a peanut- and tree nut-free facility, making it a good option for students with food allergies. www.zeezees.com/food service/products

ENTER THIS

*Save Your Kitchen* | ITW FEG | The next deadline is coming up for the *Save Your Kitchen campaign sweepstakes* from ITW FEG, which gives school nutrition professionals four chances throughout the year to win premium equipment from Traulsen or Hobart for their foodservice kitchens. The next drawing is timed to coincide with *School Lunch Hero Day* (May 6), with remaining drawings scheduled during SNA’s *Annual National Conference* (July) and *National School Lunch Week* (October). Visit www.saveyourkitchen.com to submit your entry.

CLICK THIS

*Child Wellness Resources* | ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS | Find all kinds of digital and printable tools for improving child wellness in the easy-to-search *AFHK Resource Library*. There are more than 250 activities, videos, tip sheets, downloads and other resources that focus on addressing not only physical health through activity and nutrition, but social and emotional health, as well. The library features a filtered search function to narrow down resources by topic, audience, resource type, language (English and Spanish) and location. Visit www.actionforhealthykids.org, click on the “Resource Library” tab at the top of the page.
DOWNLOAD THIS

Photo App | FOCUS | iPhone and iPad Pro users can explore new ways of snapping and editing professional-quality pics with Focus, a free photo app. Thanks to the app’s large aperture, you’ll get images, including those with popular bokeh effects, that look like you shot them on a DSLR camera, plus more powerful 3-D lighting. Available through Apple’s App Store.

CHECK THAT OUT

Cereal Pouches | POST FOODSERVICE | Breakfast products that students can pick up and carry to class or eat on the run are essential menu items for schools. Post Foodservice has several 1-oz. Cereal Pouches available for SY2022-23. Each counts as 1 grain equivalent. Choose among three Honey Bunches of Oats varieties (Granola, Honey Crunch and Vanilla) and three Malt-O-Meal varieties (Marshmallow Mateys, Honey Graham Toasters and Cinnamon Toasters). www.postconsumerbrands.com/food-service

CHECK THAT OUT

Cooked Eggs | SUNNY FRESH | Short on prep kitchen staff? Every little shortcut can help. Consider Eggs Asap!® from Sunny Fresh. These hard-cooked, medium-sized peeled eggs are available in a grab-n-go-ready two-pack. They are among an extensive lineup of K-12 products for SY2022-23, including egg bake bites, omelets, frittatas, egg patties and more solutions for a time-pressed school foodservice operation.

Garden Grant Winners | SCOTTS MIRACLE-GRO FOUNDATION/KIDS GARDENING | A promising 150 programs received a collective $90,000 from the Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation and KidsGardening as part of their GroMoreGood Grassroots Grant program, which seeks to empower communities across the country to raise gardens and green-spaces, bringing their benefits to 10 million children by 2023. Find a full list of the 2022 winners, which includes several schools and districts, at www.tinyurl.com/grassroots-SNmag

CHECK THAT OUT

Frozen Fruit Pops | WAWONA FROZEN FOODS | Wawona’s frozen fruit pops are easy to open and contain a half-cup of fruit in each individually packed serving, so you can count on them for convenience just as much as for nutrition. Available in three flavors—strawberry, peach and mixed berry—the healthy treat features fruits processed from the USDA Foods list. The novel, push-up packaging is sure to grab attention. www.wawona.com/market-segments/schools

LOOK AT THAT

Plant-Based Foods Resources | THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF AMERICA | Incorporating more plant-based foods into your menu is significantly easier thanks to K-12 digital resources from Forward Food, an initiative of the Humane Society of America. The K-12 Toolkit features a bevy of recipes, ideas for applying farm-to-school, harvest-of-the-month and wellness initiatives, and extensive guidance for conducting culinary training. www.tinyurl.com/forward
FOOD & NUTRITION SERVICES COORDINATOR » HAMILTON COUNTY (FLA.) SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Q** What is the best advice you’ve ever received?

**A** Always do your best and be true to who you are.

**Q** What’s your favorite way to spend a day off?

**A** Staying in comfortable lounge clothing, watching television and reading. My favorite literary genre is romance. Give me a good love story and I’m satisfied! For TV, I love investigative shows and will happily watch reruns of “The Closer,” “CSI,” “CSI: Miami” and even Perry Mason and Matlock. (You can probably sense a pattern here.) I’ve also watched nearly every episode of “NCIS”—Mark Harmon as Jethro Gibbs is a classic!

**Q** Why did you choose school nutrition as a career and what do you love about it?

**A** My mother worked as the manager of my high school cafeteria—and she was more than a great manager, she was a great role model! I’ve been working in this profession and a member of SNA for 25 years. Technology is my favorite part of the job. It’s really changed the scope of school nutrition. As a director, I have to ensure all systems are go every day. Nutrition Services doesn’t outrank the classroom for IT assistance, so everything I can do to understand the technical aspects of our operation, the better I can help staff feel at ease when there’s a glitch. But a word to the wise: Train staff on how to do everything manually in case of power outages.

**Q** My knife skills! Chef Cyndie Story was my first teacher. Now, I’m regularly learning more techniques by watching different TV cooking shows. But I haven’t put my skills to use in creating food art—yet!

**Q** What is a bucket list vacation destination?

**A** France. I have always loved the French language, and I would love to visit places that I studied in high school and college.

**Q** What does a life without right now?

**A** My prescription glasses! I’ve been near-sighted since age 13. I tried contacts once, but I could not get used to them. I kept wanting to reach for my glasses whenever something was a little off.

**Q** Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your 18-year-old self?

**A** Enroll in the high school’s culinary program to learn foodservice basics. Research all the different career possibilities available by earning a nutrition degree.

**Q** If a genie granted you three wishes, what would they be?

**A** Cure my granddaughter’s cerebral palsy; allow me to give all my grandchildren the finances to attend college and/or technical school and grant me a conversation with my late mother.

**Q** If any activity or skill could be turned into an Olympic sport, which would earn you a gold medal?

**A** My knife skills! Chef Cyndie Story was my first teacher. Now, I’m regularly learning more techniques by watching different TV cooking shows. But I haven’t put my skills to use in creating food art—yet!

**Q** Name three foods you could happily subsist on if marooned with a lifetime supply.

**A** Bananas, carrots and Ritz crackers.

**Q** Who would be among your dream dinner party guests?

**A** My mother and my sister, who are both deceased. They were great influences in my life.

**Q** If a genie granted you three wishes, what would they be?

**A** Cure my granddaughter’s cerebral palsy; allow me to give all my grandchildren the finances to attend college and/or technical school and grant me a conversation with my late mother.
Street Cart Chicken

6 lb. chicken, cooked, frozen, diced
1/2 cup lemon juice
2 Tbsp. lemon pepper seasoning
106 oz. white cheese sauce*
2 Tbsp. oregano
1/4 cup coriander
4 Tbsp. parsley
15 cups brown rice, dry
7 1/2 qt. water
2 Tbsp. turmeric
1/2 cup tomato, diced
Cilantro, optional
Sriracha, optional

Serves 60 (1/2 cup rice, 1.6 ozs. chicken, #20 scoop sauce)

Per Serving 307 cal.,
18 g pro., 9 g fat,
37 g carb., 2 g fiber,
410 mg sod.

Meal Pattern 2-oz.-eq.
meat/meat alternate,
1/2-oz.-eq. whole grains

1 Combine the chicken with 1/4 cup lemon juice and 2 Tbsp. lemon pepper seasoning. Cover and steam until the mixture reaches 165°F.

2 Combine the white cheese sauce with the remaining 1/4 cup lemon juice, oregano, coriander and 2 Tbsp. of the parsley. Cover and steam until the mixture reaches 165°F.

3 Combine the rice, water, turmeric and the remaining 2 Tbsp. parsley. Steam until the rice is tender and the liquid is absorbed.

4 To serve, place 1/2 cup rice in a serving dish. Top with 1/2 cup (#12 scoop) seasoned chicken and 1.7 oz. (#20 scoop) cheese sauce. Garnish with diced tomato and, if desired, cilantro and sriracha.

*Note: Land O'Lakes Ultimate White Cheese Sauce can be used in this recipe.

Recipe, Photo, and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Land O'Lakes Foodservice, www.landolakesfoodservice.com

For more holidays and promo ideas, SNA members can visit www.schoolnutrition.org/promocalendar