

Food Service Facts

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24. Parent & Student Involvement

A plan for involving students and parents in the School Nutrition Program is required in the National School Lunch Program regulations. Student and parent involvement improves the overall acceptance of school meals and increases participation levels. Student and parent involvement activities may include menu planning, enhancement of the eating environment, program promotion and related community support activities.

Assess Current Activities

Before designing a program of student and parent involvement, identify existing activities. Are any of the following or similar activities currently being conducted in your school?

- ◆ Are menus distributed to students and sent home to parents?
- ◆ Are students and/or parent advisory committees participating in planning food service activities?
- ◆ Do food service personnel speak at parent, teacher, student and/or school board meetings?
- ◆ Are surveys conducted to determine students' food preferences?
- ◆ Is nutrition education taught in the classroom?
- ◆ Is the food service department used as a "learning laboratory" for science classes, etc.?

Determine Needs

Determine if current activities are adequate to involve students and parents in the Child Nutrition Program or if additional activities should be planned. It may be helpful to form a committee of interested parties to assist in assessing the need and planning future actions.

Resources

There are many resources available for parent and student involvement activities. Among these are:

- ◆ **Student, parent and other school and community organizations**
 - Parent-Teacher Organizations
 - Student Council
 - Site Council
 - Rotary
 - Lions Club

Nutrition education and promotional materials

- Eat Smart, Play Hard Video Newsletters
Child Nutrition & Wellness had developed several segments of “Eat Smart, Play Hard” video newsletters. Each segment highlights Kansas schools and their successful activities in promoting nutrition, nutrition education and physical activity. Each edition of the video newsletter includes a healthy recipe that families can make at home. These newsletters can be accessed by students, parents and the community via www.eatsmartplayhard.org. Local sponsors can link to ESPH on their local website.
- USDA distributed “Changing the Scene – Improving the School Nutrition Environment” to all sponsors in 2000. This publication is available for download at www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/changing.html. This kit provides suggestions for examining your school’s nutrition environment, developing a plan for improvement and putting the plan into action. Information from the kit is excerpted in Chapter 21, The Healthy School Nutrition Environment.

◆ School and community health and nutrition professionals

- School nurse
- Food and Consumer Science Extension Agents
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment or county health departments

◆ Allied Health and Professional Organizations

- American Heart Association
- American Cancer Society
- American Dietetic Association
- School Nutrition Association
- National Food Service Management Institute

◆ Media

- School newspapers and websites
- Local radio and TV stations
- Local newspapers

◆ Agricultural Producer Organizations - See Chapter 31 for contact information.

- Dairy Council
- Kansas Beef Council
- Kansas Wheat Commission

Plan for Involvement

Establish objectives and goals for a program to promote student and parent involvement that are realistic and consistent with the identified needs. The plan of action should be designed to use existing resources and meet the established goals and objectives. The plan could include:

- ◆ Description of activities to be performed
- ◆ List of resources needed to carry out the activities
- ◆ Description of how to use existing resources
- ◆ Timetable for implementing each activity
- ◆ Person(s) responsible for each activity
- ◆ Evaluation procedures to determine the effectiveness of the activities

In order to effectively implement a program of student and parent involvement, it is essential to:

- ◆ Establish communication with all groups who will be affected and/or directly involved
- ◆ Present the plan to these groups
- ◆ Gain approval and support

The approval and support of local school officials are vital links to an effective program of student and parent involvement. The attitudes and acceptance of Child Nutrition Programs by local school administrators often have a direct impact on students' and parents' attitudes.

Activities to Involve Students & Parents

Many activities can be implemented to promote student and parent involvement. Activities can be very simple or complex. Work to develop a comprehensive plan consistent with local needs and abilities to involve students and parents in all aspects of program operations. Try some of the activities listed below to involve students and parents in the program.

1. Design creative menus to post in the school and distribute to parents and students. Advertise the days' menu on attractive menu boards. Print menus in the school or local newspaper and include on the school website.
2. Prepare articles and/or pictures for use in the local newspaper, student newsletter and/or school website. Articles might feature menus, meal statistics, special activities or nutrition information.
3. Conduct guided tours of the kitchen and serving area for students and parents.
4. Allow classes to plan menus. Before the menu is planned, visit the classroom to discuss requirements and good nutrition principles.

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5. Provide program information in student and parent handbooks or other enrollment materials.
6. Serve as a resource person for food and nutrition subject areas. Provide and/or present information on the Child Nutrition Programs and nutrition to classes.
7. Sponsor food and nutrition fairs and exhibits with school and community health professionals and/or teachers. Students and parents can assist in planning and organizing, providing publicity or designing and staffing exhibits.
8. Establish a nutrition education resource center in cooperation with the school librarian and make materials available for checkout to students and school personnel.
9. Establish a student advisory committee to help with planning activities – menus, nutrition education, decorating and improving the cafeteria environment, etc.
10. Form a parent advisory committee from within the local PTA, PTO, or site council.
11. Use the food service department as a learning laboratory for science classes in relation to food and food handling.
12. Discuss the CNP and nutrition at student assemblies, PTA/PTO meetings and other meetings of students, parents and teachers.
13. Invite a guest speaker, such as a local health professional, to speak to the student body on nutrition and health.
14. Have students complete a nutrient analysis of the school lunch menus. Provide a nutrient analysis of the school lunch menus to parents.
15. Sponsor contests to improve school lunch participation, nutrition awareness, etc. Contests could be held to select the best student-made nutrition poster; ideas for cafeteria design, recipes, etc. Use rewards that promote good nutrition.
16. Conduct taste-testing parties to evaluate new products and recipes. Students, parents and teachers could serve on the taste-test panel.
17. Write news items for school and local newspapers stressing some specific nutrition education item for the week or month, or assist students in writing such articles.
18. Supply weekly or monthly news bulletins to parents on the school menus, suggestions for home meals, recipes, marketing and nutritional tips. These bulletins could be placed in local newspapers or printed on the back of lunch menus sent home to parents.
19. Sponsor a student advertising campaign to increase participation in the Child Nutrition Program.
20. Provide a special training table for athletes.

21. Celebrate special occasions such as holiday meals, ethnic meals, National School Lunch Week, National School Breakfast Week, Kansas School Lunch Week, Kansas School Food Service Employee Day, etc. Coordinate ethnic meals with language studies, social studies, and/or history classes. Have students participate by decorating the cafeteria, designing costumes, providing music, etc.
22. Have students invite parents and grandparents to eat at school.
23. Sponsor a Parents' Night and invite families to enjoy a school meal.
24. Create a dinner theater by serving a meal to accompany a school theatrical production.
25. Have students or parents complete a food preference survey to determine their likes and dislikes. On the next page are some ideas to help in developing a preference survey.

How to Develop a Food Preference Survey

Design the Survey

- ◆ Identify the topics on which you want the students' opinions. Possibilities include the variety of food offered, quality of food, attractiveness of food on the serving line, friendliness of servers and atmosphere in the cafeteria.
- ◆ Phrase questions carefully to avoid prompting either a positive or negative response.
- ◆ Use a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions.
- ◆ Ask the students to identify their age, gender and whether they do or do not regularly participate in the food service program in question.
- ◆ Ask for opinions on only those things that the program is willing to implement. For example, do not ask students if they want a particular food available daily if it is not a realistic possibility.

Administer the Survey

- ◆ If necessary, secure approval and support from administrators, teachers and parents.
- ◆ Select the most appropriate setting by asking yourself which will reach the broadest group of students and encourage them to take the survey seriously.
- ◆ Consider the month, day and time that the survey is to be administered.

Collect and Combine the Results

Get help if possible. Some sponsors have equipment available to scan computer surveys. Consider asking a math or science class to combine the results as part of a project. Have students interpret the results and make recommendations for solving any problems that they identify.

Share the Results

Report the results to the students so that they know you heard them. Let them know what you plan to do with the new information.

Plan for Improvement

- ◆ Meet with the food service staff and administrators if appropriate to plan a few changes.
- ◆ Make changes gradually.
- ◆ Tell the students when you make a change that they recommended just in case they don't notice.

See Form 24-B for a sample customer satisfaction survey for middle and high school students. The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) also has a variety of surveys available at reduced prices. Access information at www.nfsmi.org.

Use Form 24-A to record student/parent involvement activities each year. Make additional copies of the form as needed and keep these forms on file. Review the success of current activities when planning future activities.