

No- or Low-Cost Policies to Support a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

Some Even Raise Revenue!

Ensuring that school meals are healthy and in line with current nutrition science is important for kids' health as well as for academics. Research shows that students who do not have reliable, healthy meals in kindergarten are noticeably behind their peers in reading and math by the third grade. Healthy eating helps prevent diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, and helps children grow up to be healthier, more productive members of society.

Here are some ways schools can increase revenue while promoting a healthy nutrition environment:

- Apply for the six cents per lunch reimbursement with your State Child Nutrition Program. To qualify for these additional funds, schools must meet the updated school lunch standards.
- Analyze current paid meal and a la carte item prices to ensure they reflect the true cost of purchasing, preparing, and selling them, including indirect costs.
 - The average school uses revenues from its reimbursable meals to offset the cost of meals for upper-income students and a la carte foods, which drains resources from healthy meals for low-income children. A national meal cost study conducted by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that revenues from non-reimbursable foods (such as foods sold a la carte) fell short of the cost of producing those foods by an average of 29 percent.
- Price a la carte items to ensure the school breakfast or lunch is the best deal for students.
 - By making the reimbursable meal more financially attractive to students, you can increase participation in the school meal programs. When children purchase a meal rather than a la carte, schools receive both cash and commodity reimbursements from USDA (almost extra 50 cents per lunch).
- Increase participation in the school meal programs. If more children eat the reimbursable meal, more federal dollars come into your school.
 - Encourage all students to apply for free meals. By encouraging all students to apply, you increase the number of eligible students applying to receive free and reduced-price lunches and reduce the stigma of submitting the paperwork.
 - Do not have a separate a la carte line in school cafeterias. Placing a la carte items in the regular meal line reduces stigma for students who receive free or reduced-priced meals and exposes all students to the school meals (so they can see the options and see that it is a good deal).



Here are some no- or low-cost ways schools can promote healthy nutrition environments:

- Implement cafeteria practices that promote healthy choices.
 - Look at the set-up of the cafeteria. Are there other cafeteria configurations that would promote better student flow and selections?
 - Change the placement and prominence of healthier choices. For example put fruits and vegetables first in the serving line, place plain milk closer to the students than chocolate milk, have fruit in colorful bowls, etc.
Increase school meal appeal. Present food attractively; cook vegetables to preserve vibrant color; vary the cuts of fruits, vegetables, and sandwiches; use catchy or appealing names, like Zippin' Zucchini or Southwest Chipotle Chicken Sandwich, etc.
- Reduce plate waste. Make sure students not only participate in the meal programs, but actually eat the healthy options.
 - Get students involved. Engage students to be ambassadors for the programs, conduct taste tests, have students vote on their favorite meal options, conduct student-led school food marketing campaigns, hold recipe contests, etc.
 - Engage parents. Send a letter or include messages in the school newsletter or website about the improvements to school meals. Provide tips for how parents can reinforce healthy eating at home, invite parents to eat lunch at school, have taste tests and a school nutrition table at parent nights, encourage parents to participate on a school wellness policy or health committee, etc. Visit www.schoolfoods.org for more tips on engaging parents.
 - Conduct taste tests of new fruit, vegetable, and whole grain offerings to familiarize students with healthy items and help food service determine which options students enjoy most. Ask community groups, food banks, or parents to volunteer.
- Set nutrition standards for foods at school parties and prohibit use of food as a reward.
- Implement a policy to require that recess be held before lunch. Students are more likely to finish their meals and are more ready to learn when they return to the classroom if recess is held before lunch.
- Institute a closed campus policy to support participation in school meal programs and reduce children's exposure to unhealthy foods during the school day.
- Encourage school administrators and teachers to eat a school lunch with the students to model and support healthy eating.



For more resources, visit www.schoolfoods.org/back2school.