

Developing a School Nutrition Policy

The following information is a guide for beginning a discussion about nutrition in your school or school district. All schools and systems are different, and therefore all School Nutrition Policies look a little different. The recommendations provided are to be used as a guide, and you and your working group will have to pick and choose those items that are important to you, and are consistent with your goals and objectives.

Getting Started

School districts need to eliminate barriers that prevent students from coming to school ready and able to learn, and must consider implementing strategies and philosophies that improve student health, student knowledge about health and diet, and nutritional status.

Implementation of programs takes time and requires the involvement of teachers, school administrators, food service personnel, students, parents and the community. There are various ways in which to inform the community that the district is moving in the direction of substantial change:

- Public meetings to which all members of the community are invited
- Presentations at PTA meetings
- News releases
- Presentations at staff meetings
- Educational programs for students designed to enhance their knowledge of nutrition and encourage healthier choices

Although it is best for the school system to work toward implementation of a comprehensive program, step-by-step, incremental change is usually more manageable.

The following guidelines can be used in creating a nutrition policy for a classroom, school or school system.

Establish Proper Nutrition as a Priority

Set goals for the school/district's nutrition program.

Adopt policies that result in all foods and beverages available at or through school or school personnel being consistent with the nutrition policy.

Develop a realistic plan of action that will accomplish the desired change.

Provide training to school personnel and food service employees that offers an understanding of both the nutrition policy and its plan for implementation.

Provide information to parents, students and community members to encourage "ownership" of the program.

Develop a plan for monitoring the program and evaluating results, that includes accountability for those charged with implementation.

Define the Nutrition Policy

All foods and beverages made available on school premises during the school day shall comply with this policy.

No candy, soft drinks, chewing gum, ice cream, donuts, pastries and “junk food” will be served during the school day.

No foods containing refined sugar, trans fat, coloring agents, MSG, artificial sweeteners, the preservatives BHT or BHA, or caffeine, will be served during the school day.

Juice products must contain only juice and no added sugar.

Bottled water should be available in vending machines, in the cafeteria, or in water coolers, and the consumption of water should be permitted and encouraged throughout the school day.

In addition to complying with USDA requirements, lunch offerings should include fresh fruit, vegetables, salads, meat alternatives and non-dairy beverage alternatives.

Whole grains should be offered.

A la carte items offered in the cafeteria should comply with these guidelines.

School Stores

School stores offering food for sale must offer items that meet the criteria outlined in the nutrition policy.

Vending Machines

Vending machines offering items that do not comply with the school nutrition policy should be off-limits during the school day.

Vending machines can offer bottled water, juices, and foods that are in compliance with the nutrition policy at any time.

Rewards

Teachers are encouraged to use either healthy items in compliance with the nutrition policy, or non-food items as reward for improved performance, recognition, etc.

Parents should be made aware of the nutrition policy so that food items supplied to classrooms for birthdays and other occasions can be in compliance. Smoothies, fruit-juice sweetened cookies, fruit salads, wraps and other healthy alternatives should be encouraged.

Exceptions

Exceptions to the nutrition policy can include food and beverages sold at athletic events, student gatherings off-campus, local field trips and school-sponsored long-distance trips.

Fund Raising

Food items sold as fund raisers should be in compliance with the nutrition policy or be limited to non-food items.

Education

Education is a vital part of successful implementation of a school nutrition policy, and should endeavor to involve all members of the community and gain their support.

Programs can include:

- Education for parents about why food policies are changing and how they can assist in the success of the program

- Education for teachers about proper nutrition for children and how they can help in implementing the policy
- Classroom education about healthy foods that includes hands-on activities, such as food preparation, field trips to farms and natural food stores, gardening, programs that make students aware of cultural differences in eating habits, food sampling
- Development of plans to incorporate health and nutrition related curriculum in many types of classes, including but not limited to physical education, sports, history, etc.
- Encouraging a closer relationship between students and food service personnel. Food service workers can offer cooking classes, and students can volunteer to assist in the cafeteria
- Education for school staff and administrators about proper nutrition and the nutrition policy

Dining Areas

The dining area should be clean, and arranged in a way to encourage conversation during meals

Staff and teachers are encouraged to eat with students

Noise levels should be controlled

Adequate time for meal consumption should be allotted

In primary grades, recess should be scheduled before lunch, rather than after

Misc.

Healthier foods can be offered at lower prices, while prices are increased on unhealthy options to discourage their consumption.

Student committees can be appointed to assist in the choosing of healthier options and the development of promotional campaigns to encourage their consumption.

Promotion of unhealthy options should be prohibited.

Offering students an opportunity to taste foods before they are offered promotes their consumption.