



Activities and Resources for Increasing School Meal Participation

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) suggests the following ideas to help increase participation in school meals.

“One school district in a nearby state served meals to nearly 80 percent of the students this past year. Student participation was achieved by asking students' opinions, monitoring food quality, redesigning menus, increasing staff morale, providing a pleasant cafeteria atmosphere, and sponsoring nutrition programs.”

Ideas for Food Service Directors:

- Conduct a financial analysis of your operation.
- Share results of the financial analysis and providing training to staff.
- Meet with your managers to discuss:
 - concerns and current participation levels; and
 - future plans to generate higher participation numbers.
- Design goals and initial action steps to increase participation.
- Monitor outcomes of established goals.

Ideas for individual schools:

Engage parents, teachers, and administrators:

- Inform parents that Meal Benefit Applications can be filled out at any time during the school year! Make the forms easily accessible and confidential.
- Distribute “Rising Lunch Prices Fact Sheet for Parents” (can be turned into a letter for parents) and/or “The Value of School Lunch Customizable Fact Sheet in Word.” These can be found at: <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=2398>.
- Provide the value of school meals message to: parents, teachers, and school administrators by using:
 - emails and listservs, your school’s website, your school’s newsletter; mailings to parents; and attending school assemblies, PTA meetings, Back to School nights, parent events, school concerts.
- Invite teachers and administrators to eat school meals with the students.
- Incorporate schools meals in the classroom (art, writing, math, science, nutrition).

Engage students:

- Ask for student feedback by:
 - involving students in writing menus; and
 - creating a customer survey or comment box.
- Make it “cool to eat at school”: change packaging, look, presentation, or delivery methods.
- Hold student contests: art featuring school meals, wood shop building cool school meals props, writing - what do you like about school lunch or school breakfast?
- Create an inviting atmosphere in the cafeteria. Change the “look” of the cafeteria to make it more exciting—use student artwork, play music, make lunch fun!
- Choose one day a month to eat with the children at a “Managers Table” to better understand the students’ perspective of the school meals program.

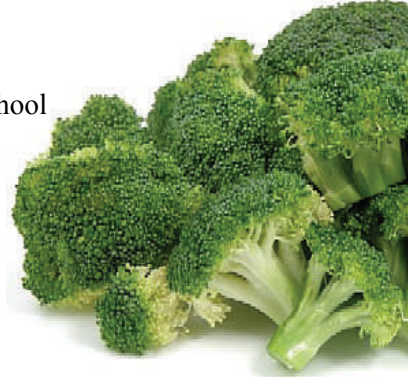
Engage School Nutrition Professionals:

“An NFSMI report identified one barrier to promoting eating healthy was that food was of poor quality and lacked visual appeal.”

- Enhance food quality by:
 - reviewing correct cooking, holding, and serving procedures with all staff and providing training when necessary; and
 - adjusting cooking methods to meet the needs of each kitchen.
- Enhance food presentation by:
 - using a variety of shapes and colors of trays, service utensils, eating utensils, napkins, plates, cups, and packaging. (Changing packaging was VERY successful for increasing milk consumption.);
 - investigating salad bar and deli bar options; and
 - decorating sneeze guards, menu boards, walls and service areas with positive food or nutrition messages using dry erase markers.

Resources:

1. A fabulous resource that the California Department of Education created to assist schools in increasing lunch participation:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/feedmorekids.asp>
2. “Students Can Have Their Breakfast and Eat It Too: A Guide to Expanding School Breakfast in Maryland”:
<http://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pubs.shtm>
3. The updated USDA School Breakfast Tool Kit:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/expansion/default.htm>
4. Strategies for increasing school breakfast participation:
http://frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/SBP_outreach.htm
5. *Fruits and Vegetables Galore, Helping Kids Eat More*, FNS 365, USDA.
http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Resource_Cafe/Resource_Details.php?ID=700
6. *Healthy Cuisine for Kids*, (2003). National Foodservice Management Institute.
http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Resource_Cafe/Resource_Details.php?ID=154
7. USDA Menu planner for Healthy School Meals.
<http://teamnnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/menuplanner.html>



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