

New Meal Pattern Promotion Talking Points

- The new nutrition standards for school meals are great news for our kids. They will help school nutrition professionals build on the work we are already doing to provide more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthier entrees in our school cafeterias.
- The United States Department of Agriculture released new meal patterns for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program in January of 2012. These meal patterns based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines will begin to be implemented in the 2012–13 school year. The new meal patterns feature:
 - an increase in the number of servings and variety of fruits and vegetables
 - specific vegetable subgroups including dark green, red/orange, and legumes
 - an increase in the offerings of whole grain foods
 - a variety of plain low-fat or fat free; or flavored fat free milk
 - calorie ranges based on the age of children
 - a focus on reducing saturated fat, trans fat and sodium
- In xxx school district, we have already made progress toward meeting the new nutrition standards. *Provide a few specific details demonstrating how your program is offering healthier choices. For example:*
 - *We serve fresh fruits and vegetables every day*
 - *We already made the switch to 1% or fat free milk*
 - *Our sandwiches are served on whole wheat bread*
 - *Our cafeterias have introduced lower sodium entrees*
 - *We offer salad/offering bars every day with a variety of fruits and vegetables*
 - *We only serve milk, water and 100% fruit and vegetable juices*
- We encourage the district as a whole to work together to support the success of school meals and ultimately healthy, successful students.
Strategies to ensure the nutritional and financial success of school meals: *Provide specifics that apply to your school, such as:*
 - Promotion of school meals!** *Students respond to the positive view of school meals by all school staff.*
 - Evaluate meal periods.** *Kids need enough time to eat (especially to munch down all those great fruits and vegetables!). Research indicates that 15 to 20 minutes of seat time is needed to consume a balanced meal. Combine that with the time involved in dishing up all those fruits and vegetables leads to a reasonable lunch period of 25 to 30 minutes.*

-Encourage positive adult interaction during meal times. Kids eat better when adults sit and enjoy lunch with them. Work with all school staff (teachers/administrators/aides) to maximize their positive influence by enjoying meals with students.

-Consider scheduling recess before lunch. When students have recess before lunch it improves their nutrition, their behavior in the cafeteria and their focus when they return to the classroom. They also eat more of their lunch and drink more milk and therefore waste less.

- We know how important it is to encourage students to accept and consume these healthier options. Our school nutrition staff has found great ways to get students excited about healthy food choices and we'll continue to work on creative solutions to ensure healthy foods appeal to students. *Provide specific examples of nutrition education initiatives, such as:*
 - *Our farm to school program is bringing fresh, local produce into the cafeteria and teaching students about what foods are grown in their communities*
 - *We have hired/partnered with a chef to introduce some exciting new healthy recipes on our menus*
 - *We host student taste tests to get feedback directly from students and get them involved in the menu planning process*
 - *Our harvest of the month program is introducing students to a new fruit or vegetable every month*
 - *We involved students and parents in getting recipe suggestions to reflect ethnic and regional favorite foods into our menus*
 - *We offer unlimited fresh fruits and vegetables to students*
 - *Students are offered free samples of fresh fruits and vegetables to encourage them to try something new*

- We encourage parents to assist Nutrition Services in supporting healthy school meals. Parents can help their children enjoy and receive the benefits of school meals by:
 - encouraging their child to eat and enjoy school meals.
 - talking with your child about what is available at school meals and choices they make.
 - encouraging nutritious choices at home including a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.