



Raising the Bar in School Nutrition Environments

SCHOOL MEALS

LOCAL WELLNESS POLICY

This document is meant to help schools identify and adopt best practices that best suit the unique environment of their school. These best practices are not required and can also help supplement or identify wellness policy needs.

Local wellness policies are important tools parents and schools can use to promote student wellness, prevent and reduce childhood obesity and provide assurances that school nutrition program guidelines meet the minimum federal standards. All schools that participate in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program are required by federal regulations to adopt and implement a wellness policy.

For information regarding wellness policy requirements, please refer to the Administrative Review Manual at SquareMeals.org.



MEALS PERIODS

- Ensure dining areas are attractive, comfortable, well-lit and appropriate to accommodate the age/grade group served.
- Ensure meal periods are scheduled to allow adequate time for students to eat and socialize (15-20 minutes of actual seated time recommended).
- Schedule student recess prior to the lunch meal period in elementary and/or all applicable grades.





MEAL QUALITY AND ACCEPTANCE

FOOD PRESENTATION: Train staff regularly in proper food preparation techniques to ensure attractive high quality meals. Training topic examples include: food presentation on the cafeteria line, how to cook from scratch, how to prepare vegetables, proper food serving temperature, use of garnishes, etc.

RECIPES: Utilize standardized kid-friendly recipes from a reliable source, such as USDA/Team Nutrition, Smarter Lunchrooms, etc.

LOCAL PRODUCTS: Utilize food bid proposals that include language that encourages the use of local vendors for produce and other food/menu offerings.

FOOD SAFETY: Provide annual training on food safety standards to all staff involved in food preparation or food handling of any kind, such as food staff, teachers and other classroom instructors, parents/volunteers.

MENU PLANNING: Plan menus with input from students and include local, cultural/ethnic favorites. Examples of student input include: student surveys, taste testing events, etc.

PURCHASING: Price healthy options comparably to prevent purchase disincentives.

COMMUNICATION

- Provide school menus on the school/district website and ensure they are easily accessible.
- Provide nutritional and allergy-related information for school menus and all a la carte foods on the school and district website.
- Market school meals to encourage students to choose and consume a nutritionally well-balanced meal.
- Provide information that promotes good nutrition and other healthy lifestyle behaviors through various outlets including school and district website, library, events and activities.
- Develop partnerships with community organizations to provide nutrition workshops and cooking demonstrations highlighting healthier food options to parents and families.
- Maintain and distribute information to parents/families on how to access additional community sources of fruits and vegetables. Examples: farmers markets, community gardens, and food banks and pantries.
- Focus advertisements in dining area and/or entire school campus to encourage The 3E's of Healthy Living – Education, Exercise, and Eating Right.



NUTRITION DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

- Ensure food is never used as a reward, incentive or punishment.
- Utilize nutrition education content and lesson plans and incorporate into the classroom curriculum at all grade levels.
- Establish criteria for competitive foods that are stricter than USDA's final rule regarding All Foods sold in Schools (Smart Snacks).
- Actively encourage staff and parents to offer/provide healthy options to students at school events and celebrations during the school day.

OTHER WELLNESS

- Limit fundraising events and activities to non-food related opportunities.
- Establish a farm-to-school program at one or more campuses. Examples: Farm direct purchasing system, school gardens, field trips to local farms, Meet the Farmer and other educational experiences with local farms.
- Encourage broad school participation from across the district on the Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC).
- Provide an annual forum on school nutrition issues for students and families through the SHAC.
- Promote physical activity through structured/ planned events including school/community walks, field days, bike/walk-to-schools programs, and after-school programs.



CHILD NUTRITION DEPARTMENT

- Ensure the staff attends trainings provided by the Education Service Center at least once per year.
- Ensure the staff is properly qualified according to current professional standards as governed by local, state and federal guidelines.
- Train staff annually on how to excel in providing good customer service.



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

This product was funded by USDA.
This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



Food and Nutrition Division
National School Lunch Program



Updated 12/29/2020
www.SquareMeals.org