



Principal Toolkit

Getting the Most

out of the

CPS School Meal Program

Created in Partnership with Chicago Public Schools + Healthy Schools Campaign

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Introduction

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) have been working together for the past decade to transform the district's school meal program. CPS and HSC know that students who eat healthier at school and at home have better attention spans, better class participation and higher test scores. This is why CPS, HSC and other partners have been working together to ensure that positive change for school food in Chicago is meaningful, sustainable and in the best interest of the students whose health and learning it directly affects.

Parent voices are key to this work. Through HSC's Parents United for Healthy Schools program, parents develop the knowledge and skills to help bring about health-promoting changes at their children's schools and reinforce healthy eating habits at home. Since 2006, Parents United has been at the forefront of helping make Chicago schools healthier places for their children. Parent leaders were instrumental in championing the Breakfast in the Classroom program at individual schools and at the district level. Parents have also tirelessly advocated for healthier school menus and supported schools' successful efforts to achieve the USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge, which later inspired the Healthy CPS School Indicator.

In 2013, CPS and HSC piloted and launched a series of School Food 101 workshops to raise awareness of the new changes to the school meal program, increase understanding of school meal basics and hear about how those changes are being implemented at the school level. We asked elementary school parents to survey their kids about the school meals they were receiving. From this learning process, CPS and HSC launched a comprehensive school meal survey for parents in

the fall of 2014. The results from this survey made it clear that parents and school administrators needed more resources and information and ways to share their feedback. It's with that need in mind that CPS and HSC partnered to create new resources around school food.

Because principals and schools play such an important role in providing students with healthy food and educating them on healthy behaviors, we created this toolkit in partnership with Chicago Public Schools to give you a guide to making sure the school meal program is working as best as it can for your students.

This toolkit includes ideas and strategies to help create a school environment that is supportive of the school meal program and students' efforts to eat healthy.

The toolkit contains sections on:

- Promoting Healthy School Meals
- Making it Work for Your School
- Improving the Dining Center
- Getting Others Involved

This toolkit is just a start and will point you to more resources and contacts that can help improve the dining experience for all of your students. In conjunction with this toolkit, we also developed a Frequently Asked Questions document and a toolkit for parents. You can access all of these resources at healthyschoolscampaign.org/school-food-resources.

Dear Principal

Providing students with access to nutritious food and knowledge of healthy habits helps ensure they're ready to learn and on a path to success. School meals are extremely important in Chicago because more than 85 percent of Chicago Public Schools students are low-income and qualify for federally subsidized meals. As you probably experience on a daily basis at your school, many students rely on schools for most of their meals. At the same time, more than 43 percent of Chicago students are overweight or obese, making healthy school food a critical component of Chicago's overall effort to address the childhood obesity epidemic.

As the school principal, you play an important role in making sure the school meal program works for your students and their families. Schools can and do play a powerful role in shaping students' lifelong habits and behaviors. Schools can create environments supportive of students' efforts to eat healthy and be active by establishing a school culture that supports and provides opportunities for students to learn about and practice these healthy behaviors. Districtwide Wellness Policies provide a jumping off point for schools to support student's wellness efforts.

Read on to discover strategies and ideas to customize the school meal program specifically for your school to ensure that all of your students are eating healthy food and are ready to learn.



About the CPS School Meal Program

CPS' meal program is the third largest K-12 food service in the U.S. and serves annually 75 million meals to over 400,000 students through its 665 food campuses.

Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, CPS adopted new nutrition standards for school meals that included increased servings and a greater variety of fruits and vegetables; increased amounts of whole grains; improved standards for breakfast cereal; the elimination of doughnuts and pastries at breakfast; and a limit on potatoes, nachos and other less healthy items. In fact, the nutrition standards meet—and, in some cases, exceed—the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) HealthierUS School Challenge Gold standard.

In the fall of 2012, CPS passed a new Local School Wellness Policy and a Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy. The snack policy establishes nutritional standards for food available to students outside the school lunch program, including a la carte items sold in the cafeteria, vending machines, fundraisers and school stores. This policy is necessary because these “competitive foods” include snacks high in sugar, salt or fat, and students often will choose these foods instead of the school lunches that adhere to nutritional standards.

Promoting Healthy

School Meals

Sometimes students need a little nudge in order to get excited about the nutritious meals that are offered in your school cafeteria. We've included several ideas to pump up the excitement and promote the great things that are happening in the CPS school meal program—from highlighting local food items to encouraging students to invite their parents to lunch.



Highlight Local Food

CPS has made a commitment to offer students more foods that are grown within 250 miles of Chicago. CPS indicates which items are local by placing an “L” next to the menu item. Each monthly menu features locally sourced fresh frozen items once each week, locally sourced fresh unfrozen items twice each month and local chicken raised without antibiotics twice each month.

One great way to get students excited about school food is to do a morning announcement promoting the local food item in the meal program. The morning school announcement can include fun facts like the farm’s name, the nutritional benefits of the item and more. You can find interesting facts about the food and farms at cpsfarmtoschoolmarket.com.

All schools will receive posters featuring that month's local foods that are to be placed in the dining center. Along with the larger posters, all local menu items will be highlighted on the service line through farmer specific marketing materials. School Dining Managers and Aramark Area Managers will be responsible for placing these materials on the line.

Eat Lunch with Your Students

Students look up to their teachers and principals in many ways. One of the ways you can take advantage of that and help promote healthy behavior is by eating lunch with your students on a regular basis and making healthy food choices. If students see you choosing low-fat milk over soda and fresh fruit over a sugary dessert, they are more likely to make those choices themselves.



Make School Menus Accessible

Students and their families certainly can't get excited about food if they don't know what's being served. In an effort to save paper and supplies, CPS has moved to posting school menus electronically. Menus are posted prior to the first of the month at cps.edu/menu. Principals will also be sent monthly e-mails with the menu attached.

Making sure the menus are accessible and highly visible to students and their families is key to ensuring students are taking advantage of the school meal program. Here are few ways to make sure the menu is accessible:

- Post the menu in a highly visible area, especially at the school entrance that is most frequently used by parents. Schools should have a designated bulletin board with all pertinent information including the cps.edu/menu website.
- Post the menu on school specific websites.
- Send the menu to the school's parent/guardian e-mail list.
- Have teachers post the menu in the classroom for students to review.
- Have your School Dining Manager post a menu at the beginning of the serving line and the dining center and update monthly.



Celebrate, Fundraise and Reward in Healthy Ways

Healthy food and habits aren't important just in the school cafeteria. Birthday parties and holiday celebrations at school provide a unique opportunity to make healthy eating fun and exciting to students.

The CPS Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy limits the use of unhealthy foods for student celebrations. Specifically, the policy sets the following standards:

- Schools are allowed up to two school-wide unhealthy food celebrations that must be submitted to the Network Chief and the Office of Student Health Wellness.
- Classroom celebrations should focus on fun not food.
- Dining staff should never be prevented from preparing meals.

As a principal, you can do your part by encouraging your teachers to celebrate with non-food activities or healthy foods. Popular celebration ideas include:

- Creating a crown, badge or sash for children to wear on their birthdays
- Bringing in a child's favorite book to read to the class
- Celebrating special days with a festive dance party
- Taking a field trip to a local farmer's market where children can meet farmers and learn about local fruits and vegetables

If a celebration or party needs food, you can cater from CPS to make sure the food, treat or snacks meet the nutritional guidelines. Call 866-209-0025 to place a catering order. You can find more ideas in the CPS CelebrateWELL Toolkit at bit.ly/CelebrateWELL.

Making it Work for Your School

The CPS meal program can be customized for individual schools in several ways, from requesting nut-free menu options to addressing scheduling and facility needs.

Special Menu Options

As the principal, you have the ability to request special menu options based on the needs of your students and school.

If you have students with peanut allergies and would like peanut-free menu options for your school, please contact your Aramark Area Manager.

Reducing or getting rid of chocolate milk may reduce the calorie and sugar consumption of your students. As principal, you can request that only white milk be served during meals. Alternatively, you can keep chocolate milk but request to have white milk be more visible by keeping white milk in all beverage coolers; making white milk at least a third of all visible milk in the cafeteria; putting white milk in front of other beverages; and bundling white milk with all “grab and go” meals as the default beverage. To request a change, please contact the Aramark Area Manager for your school.



School Breakfast Options

In 2011, CPS adopted universal Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC), an initiative that offers all elementary students, regardless of household income, a free breakfast when they arrive at school. This program was implemented after a pilot at 200 schools, many of which were active members of Parents United for Healthy Schools. An extensive body of research shows breakfast consumption positively influences students' cognitive functioning, focus, attention and emotional well-being. The Chicago Board of Education voted to expand this initiative districtwide, making CPS the first large urban school district to offer free breakfast to all elementary students.

CPS understands BIC is not a one-size-fits all solution. There are several options for serving breakfast to all students, and principals can work with CPS to create a customized approach that works for their school's specific challenges and constraints. Creating a program that works for your schools ensures your students get breakfast and are ready to learn when the school day starts. Contact food@cps.edu for more information.





Schedule Recess Before Lunch

As a principal, you can make changes in the school scheduling that allow for healthier meal times. Recess Before Lunch (RBL) is a practice that is simply a change in the traditional scheduling order of lunchtime and recess. As it implies, RBL allows students to go to recess first, and then eat lunch. While it sounds simple in theory, schools often find that this policy change requires careful planning and efficient communication, as well as a strong commitment from school administrators, educators and food service staff to make the change successful. If it's not possible to schedule all grade levels to have recess before lunch, then at least try to target a few grade levels that can most benefit from this practice.

Schools have found the effort in making the change is beneficial to the students and staff in creating a better eating environment: one that is conducive to improved eating through a "more relaxed" eating experience. Students are more settled upon returning to the classroom after lunch, and they are focused and ready to learn.



Edible School Gardens

An edible school garden can awaken students' natural curiosity; help increase fruit and vegetable consumption; and engage faculty and parents across the curriculum and community. To serve the produce from your school's garden schools, CPS has developed the Eat What You Grow school garden food safety program which provides protocols, guidance and certification to schools to eat garden produce with their students. The program involves an orientation to food safety, a comprehensive food safety manual, technical assistance and follow-up support. To register for the next training, please contact studentwellness@cps.edu.



Summer Access to School Meals

A significant portion of CPS students are at-risk for not receiving nutritious meals outside of school, as well as for eating unhealthy food that can lead to summer weight gain. To fill the gap and to ensure that children continue to receive nutritious meals throughout the summer months, CPS offers the Summer Food Service Program. The program provides free breakfast and lunch at schools to students attending summer programs, as well as to all community children ages 1-18, even those not currently enrolled in CPS. As a principal, you can help promote the program through marketing materials in the cafeteria or on morning announcement. You can also apply for your school to be a host site during the summer. For more information, contact studentwellness@cps.edu.



Improving the Dining Center

Reducing Lunchroom Waste

Reducing the amount of waste created by the school meal program is a priority for CPS, and participation in programs is helping to do just that. The FoodShare program redistributes uneaten fruit and non-perishable food items to food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. To get your school involved in the FoodShare program contact studentwellness@cps.edu.



Creating Calm in the Dining Center

For students, lunchtime is a necessary break from the physical and mental demands of a typical day at school. Plus, students may gain cognitive, emotional and social benefits from the mealtime experience. But lunchtime can be a tricky time of the school day to manage. Feeding hundreds of students in a short window of time requires great organization, but lunch is also a time when principals are torn between giving students the opportunity to relax and socialize and the need to keep an orderly environment.

As a strategy to quiet down the cafeteria, making board games accessible can result in a significantly quieter and more pleasant cafeteria and also get students to expand their circle of friends. Staff can also experiment with adding calming music and other activities to engage students.

Nutrition Education

A growing body of research shows that kids are more likely to take and eat new foods when they are described in a positive and exciting way and when they see older students and adults model healthy food behaviors. The dining center can be a great place to integrate nutrition education and extend classroom learning goals. Below are three great ways to enhance the cafeteria as a learning space.

- 1. Signage.** This can include hanging posters, incorporating children's artwork and spotlighting certain foods of the menu. For example, dining center staff can work with teaching staff to display posters; feature a food of the month or menu item of the week; and partner with classroom teachers to focus a lesson or two on the featured food item of the week. The lessons can be art-inspired, science and health-based or focus on literacy goals. For example, art teachers can collaborate with dining staff to create a festive bulletin board or art focused on the specific school meal items. Plus, CPS Wellness Champions receive posters every month highlighting a healthy message, make sure to take advantage of this resource.
- 2. Events.** This can include hosting events such as trips to the school's kitchen, take your parent to lunch day, taste tests, school garden tours, cafeteria-wide themed days and providing rewards such as being able to sit at a special table in the lunchroom. The Wellness Champion, School Dining Managers and Aramark Area Managers can work together to plan and promote such events.
- 3. Healthy Role Modeling.** This can include food service staff promoting fruit and vegetable consumption, adults and lunch aides modeling healthy behavior and creating a buddy system that pairs older and younger children. For example, there can be a place in the cafeteria that identifies favorite healthy foods of teachers or staff and students may be more inclined to select them. Or the school can plan for a "celebrity appearance" and have a special guest, such as a chef to do demonstrations during lunch.

Getting Others Involved

Enlisting Volunteers

Having volunteers help in the dining center can help make meal time go smoothly and also encourage kids to eat their fruits and vegetables. Volunteers can help transition students from class to the dining center, help maintain appropriate noise levels and most importantly volunteers can walk around and encourage students to try new food items. For example, depending on grade level, volunteers can encourage students to eat their fruit and veggies by naming a student a “food explorer” or “veggie-in-chief.” In order to influence healthy eating behavior in children, volunteers should use positive communication. For example, instead of asking, “Did you finish your milk,” volunteers should instead ask, “Are you still thirsty?” Or instead of saying, “You didn’t eat enough of your lunch,” ask, “Did you get enough to eat today?”



Inviting Parents to Eat School Lunch

Inviting parents to come to school to dine with their children and other students is a great way to encourage students to try new foods. In order to allow parents to come in for lunch, you have to coordinate with your Area Manager to plan how much extra food to make. Parents have to pay the going rate for meals regardless of their child's free and reduced status. Planning in advance is the best route.

Who to Contact

If you would like to share feedback about your school's cafeteria, share suggestions for school meal ideas, or have concerns about the operations of the school meal program please contact the Office of Nutrition Support Services (NSS). This CPS department is responsible for all school meal programs, point of sale machines, and overseeing the Aramark foodservice management contract. Please email concerns in writing to food@cps.edu. NSS promises to respond within 24 to 48 hours. You may also want to contact your Area Manager (AM), who is an Aramark employee who provides oversight to the dining services in several schools in a common geographical area (typically between 12-20 schools). AM's supervise all dining staff.

If you would like assistance implementing the district wellness policy or would like to implement health promoting programs in your school (ex. Edible school gardens, waste reduction and nutrition education programming), please contact the Office of Student Health & Wellness. The mission of OSHW is to remove health related barriers to learning such that students may succeed in college, career, and life. OSHW is charged with providing support to schools in implementing the districts health promoting policies, including Wellness, PE, and Healthy Snack & Beverage Policies. For more information contact studentwellness@cps.edu.

If you would like to implement a Take Your Parent to Lunch day, or other special events around the school meal program, please contact your school's Area Manager, and involve the school Wellness Champion, if appropriate. If you don't know who your AM is please contact Nutrition Support Services at food@cps.edu.



Healthy Schools Campaign is the leading voice for people who care about our children, education, and our environment. We teach and empower people to advocate for children to have fresh air, healthy food and physical activity to shape their lifelong learning and health. As an independent, not-for-profit organization, we help facilitate collaboration between parents, teachers, administrators and policy makers. Our goal is to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change at the school, district, state and national levels.

healthyschoolscampaign.org