

Feed More Kids for School

Lunch Success:

Product and Price



You can get more kids to eat at school and earn more money for your program! Read how it is being done in some California schools.

Better marketing can help. Just use the four Ps to plan how you can do it, too: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. This brochure is designed to help improve the **product** and **price** of your school meals to draw in more customers.

What are your big dreams for the school meals you offer? Make a plan and work with others so you can make these dreams come true. Start with small changes and soon you will have made a big change!

*Product
Price*

Fresh, Popular Product Sells

Start with a good product, then invite your students to lunch. Give kids what they like: fresh, popular food that looks and tastes good! Make sure it meets the nutrition guidelines so that it's good for them. Offering healthful food at school can help children learn to eat right.

MYTH

We do not have the money to make fresh meals that look good.

FACT

School lunches that look and taste great will bring more customers—and more money for your program.

• Keep meals colorful.

Offer diverse fruits and vegetables every day. Make sure each menu includes foods of different colors.

• Perk up the packaging.

Wrap sandwiches in fast food-like paper wrappers, place cut fruits and salads in clear cups to show off their colors, or try a take-out box for Asian foods.

• Focus on fresh.

Prepare and assemble food right before serving time, in front of students, so they can see it is fresh. Canned and frozen foods can fit into menus that look and taste fresh when the food is prepared just before serving.

• Tempt them with taste.

Taste tests reveal what students like to eat. Reflect their preferences in the foods you serve.

• Test the temperature.

Remember the old saying, “Hot foods hot, cold foods cold!” The right temperature not only keeps food safe but also makes food look and taste its best.

Example: In the Folsom-Cordova Unified School District, the food service program sells only reimbursable meals. Students can choose from a number of quality entrées—each assembled fresh at the counter right before service—such as pizza, sandwiches, soups, and salads. With a choice of fresh fruit and milk, each entrée becomes a reimbursable lunch. More schools in California are doing the same and finding that it works!

More Choices, More Sales

People like to have choices. That includes students. When you go to a restaurant, would you rather be told what you are going to eat or choose from the menu? If students have daily entrée choices, they are more likely to choose a complete meal and to eat school lunch more often.

MYTH

We do not have the staff or facilities to offer more menu choices.

FACT

You can boost meal sales by offering more menu choices, often without more staff.



- **Ask students for ideas.**

Which ethnic foods do they like? Do they want vegetarian meals? What would make lunch more appealing and fun to them?

- **Start small.**

Try adding one simple extra choice, such as yogurt or another cold item.

- **Try a self-serve option.**

Think salad bars. While you may need more staff time, the increase in participation can offset this cost.

Example: At Glendale Unified School District, food service staff plan menus with students monthly. Food vendors bring new items for students to taste. The six daily entrée choices at the elementary schools consist of two hot items, three cold items, and a full-meal salad bar. Using Nutrient Standard Menu Planning allows staff to balance higher and lower cost menus.

Price It Right

On-the-go students want quick, tasty food that they can afford. To attract more customers, make the school lunch cost less than lunch brought from home or à la carte snacks. Remember, the cost is not only money—it is time and food quality. Even students who receive meals for free want food that is easy to get and eat quickly.

MYTH

We must sell à la carte foods to fund the school meal program.

FACT

Selling fewer foods and beverages à la carte—or none!—can actually improve your bottom line.



- **Offer high-quality, tasty, and fun choices.**

Combine items so that they make up a full meal.

- **Set full meal costs lower than the same amount of à la carte food.**

For example, sell the burrito lunch that includes a fruit, a vegetable, and milk for the same price as the burrito sold à la carte.

- **Promote full meals.**

Moving from à la carte sales to full meals takes careful planning and smart marketing. Compare school lunch quality and price to fast food, lunch from home, a snack bar, vending machines, or other meal options.

Example: Moreno Valley Unified School District stopped selling food à la carte in its middle schools. Staff asked students to help plan menus and then made sure all students knew about the positive changes. By not selling à la carte items, staff freed up their time by more than 15 hours per day. They now use this time to prepare and present better school lunch choices. Lunch participation grew by 30 percent. Even though

the district lost some money from à la carte sales, its total revenue went up \$415 per day.

Consider Point-of-Sale Computers

Whether you choose a simple or complex point-of-sale (POS) computer system, it can help your school meal program in many ways, such as with tracking participation and taking inventory. Above all, using a POS system can ensure that students who get free or reduced-price lunches are not treated differently.

MYTH

We could never afford a fancy point-of-sale computer system.

FACT

A modern point-of-sale computer system pays for itself in the long run and can help your whole program operate smoothly.

- **Know the needs of your district.**

Consider what you need and the extent of your budget. Contact other districts using POS systems to find out what works for them.

- **Start with the basics.**

Start with just some of the program features, such as checking students in at the point of service. You can add other functions later, such as inventory control and Nutrient Standard Menu Planning.

- **Prepare your staff.**

Assure staff that the new POS system will make their jobs easier and their customers happier and that they will have time to learn how to use it.

- **Work with the technology vendor.**

Pilot test any new system at one school first. Make sure the vendor helps train your staff until they are comfortable.

Example: Before purchasing point-of-sale computers, the Berkeley Unified School District food service staff gave a color-coded ticket to each student while checking off names by hand. Now, each lunch station has a scanner that reads a student's ID card. Lines move faster, students can't tell who gets free or reduced-price lunches, and staff have better records of the entire lunch program.



Resources

- *Fruits and Vegetables Galore*. FNS-365. United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2004. http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/meal_appeal.pdf
- "Erasing the Lines," *School Foodservice and Nutrition* (January 2006), 46.
- "Hardware at Work," *School Foodservice and Nutrition* (January 2006), 74.
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