

School Nutrition and Food Services

**Healthful diets help children grow, develop,
and do well in school.
They enable people of all ages to work productively
and feel their best.**

*— U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
Nutrition and Your Health, 2000*



**Only 23% of Maine high school students reported
having eaten the recommended five or more servings
of fruit and vegetables per day.**

— Maine YRBSS Results, 2003

School Nutrition and Food Services

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DEFINITION

Nutrition and Food Services include school food services and other available food and snacks offered at school. Nutritionally balanced meals and snacks based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* should be provided at school. All students should have affordable access to varied and nutritious foods. Adequate time to eat should be a priority, because it promotes the establishment of healthy food practices. Students who are hungry or who do not get a balanced diet will be less attentive in the classroom. A healthy diet for students and staff promotes good health and well-being and can help reduce the occurrence of chronic disease.

RATIONALE

The link between nutrition and learning is well documented. Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being.

Foods offered to students in the cafeteria, in other areas of the school, and at school events, send a powerful message about what is considered acceptable dietary behavior by school leaders. As role models, school personnel can help to bring the nutrition education learned in the classroom to real-life situations in which students must decide between a wide range of food choices, many of which are not healthful.

Healthy eating is demonstrably linked to reduced risk for mortality and development of many chronic diseases in both children and adults. Schools have a responsibility to help students and staff establish and maintain lifelong healthy eating patterns. Education decision-makers should not be driven by financial pressures to compromise the larger purpose of nutrition service programs, which is to promote academic achievement and good health. A well-planned and well-implemented school nutrition program is an essential aspect of the school's educational mission and has been shown to positively influence students' eating habits.

GUIDELINES:

1. Integrate the school's food service program into the overall school experience.
2. Promote healthy eating by creating school policies that encompass the entire school environment requiring that all food and beverages sold or served to students, including those available outside of the school meals program, meet the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.
3. Hire qualified staff that are adequately trained in food service and nutrition, and ensure that food service staff, facilities and equipment meet applicable local and state health standards for food preparation, food handling and storage, drinking water, sanitation and workplace safety.
4. Implement a nutrition program that is designed to influence students' eating behaviors.

School Nutrition and Food Services

5. Adopt school policies aimed at promoting lifelong healthy eating among students and school staff.
6. Promote healthy eating to students and staff, and prepare staff to recognize obesity, eating disorders, and other nutrition-related health problems and to refer them to appropriate services.

GUIDELINE 1: Integrate the school's food service program into the overall school experience.

RATIONALE

The purpose of a food service program is to:

- Supplement the family's responsibility to feed the child.
- Ensure that all students have affordable access to the varied and nutritious foods they need to stay healthy and learn well.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice healthy eating on a daily basis.

The program is an essential educational and support activity, and budget neutrality or profit generation must not take precedence over the nutritional needs of students. However, the food service program should aim to be financially self-supporting.

INDICATORS

- A. The school food service program operates in accordance with the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1996 (reauthorized in 2004).
- B. During each school day, the school food service program offers breakfast and lunch, as well as snacks for students in organized after-school education or enrichment programs.
- C. Adequate space is provided for students to eat meals in pleasant surroundings, and students have adequate time to eat, relax and socialize: at least 10 minutes after sitting down for breakfast and 20 minutes after sitting down for lunch.
- D. The school employs a food service director, who is properly qualified and certified according to current professional standards, to administer the school food service program and satisfy reporting requirements.
- E. Menus are planned with input from students, family members, and a diversity of school personnel, and should take into account students' cultural norms and preferences.
- F. Food pricing strategies are designed to encourage students to purchase nutritious items.

School Nutrition and Food Services

GUIDELINE 2: Promote healthy eating by creating school policies that encompass the entire school environment requiring that all food and beverages sold or served to students, including those available outside of the school meals program, meet the 2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

RATIONALE

School policies can help shape social norms that influence the dietary habits of students and staff. State regulations that currently exist dictate that minimal nutrition standards must be met during the school day. However, these standards do not assure compliance with the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

INDICATORS:

- A. Nutritious and appealing foods, such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy foods and whole-grain products, are made available wherever and whenever food is sold or otherwise offered at school.
- B. Nutritious foods are always available as an affordable option whenever food is served or sold.
- C. Students have limited opportunities to eat food high in fat, sodium or added sugars.
- D. Competition with nutritious meals served by the school nutrition program is not allowed.
- E. School policies are adopted to promote the availability of nutritious food choices during school and after-school activities.
- F. Food pricing strategies are designed to encourage students to purchase nutritious items.
- G. School policy prohibits entering into an exclusive contract for products that do not meet the *2005 Dietary Guidelines*.

GUIDELINE 3: Employ qualified staff and provide ongoing professional development in food service and nutrition, and to ensure that food service staff, facilities and equipment, meet applicable local and state health standards for food preparation, food handling and storage, drinking water, sanitation and workplace safety.

RATIONALE

Food service personnel are responsible for providing healthy and safe food. Appropriate continuing education for school nutrition personnel can help to assure a safe food environment in which classroom nutrition education is reinforced.

School Nutrition and Food Services

INDICATORS

- A. The school employs a food service director who is properly qualified and certified according to current professional standards.
- B. All food service personnel have adequate training and regularly participate in professional development activities that address strategies for promoting healthy eating behavior, food safety, and other topics directly relevant to the employees' job duties.
- C. School nutrition personnel have education and skills development sessions in cost- and labor-efficient food purchasing and preparation; customer service and student and family involvement; financial management and record keeping; marketing healthy meals; personnel management; sanitation and safe food handling, preparation, and storage; planning menus for all students, including those with special needs and students of diverse cultural backgrounds; and principles of nutrition education.
- D. School nutrition program personnel play an active role on Schoolsite Wellness Teams and in implementing local School Wellness Policies.

GUIDELINE 4: Implement a nutrition program that is designed to influence students' eating behaviors.

RATIONALE

Nutrition education programs that focus on influencing students' eating behaviors are much more likely to help students adopt healthy eating habits than the traditional fact-based approach.

INDICATORS

- A. The food service program is closely coordinated with the school's nutrition education program and other components of Coordinated School Health Programs (CSHP).
- B. Nutrition education topics are integrated with the school's comprehensive health education program and taught at every grade level, pre-kindergarten through grade twelve.
- C. The nutrition education program utilizes MyPyramid to help students gain an understanding of food choices, serving sizes, and dietary proportions.
- D. The nutrition education program engages families as partners in their children's education.
- E. Staff involved in nutrition education, including coaches, school nurses and school nutrition staff, is adequately prepared and regularly participate in professional development activities to effectively deliver the nutrition education program as planned.
- F. Nutrition education on students' eating behaviors should be consistent with the health education standards included in the Maine *Learning Results*.
- G. School staff model healthy eating behaviors.

GUIDELINE 5: Adopt school policies aimed at promoting lifelong healthy eating among students and school staff.

School Nutrition and Food Services

RATIONALE

The school environment can powerfully influence students' attitudes, preferences, and behaviors related to food. Established policies communicate school priorities and clearly justify guidelines to staff and the community. Such policies ensure that students receive nutrition education messages that are reinforced throughout the school environment.

INDICATORS:

- A. Students have limited opportunities to eat food high in fat, sodium or added sugars.
- B. School policies are adopted to promote nutritious food choices available during school and after-school activities.
- C. School administration promotes opportunities for and encourages students to make healthy food choices.
- D. The school nutrition program makes effective use of school and community resources and equitably serves the needs and interest of all students and staff, taking into consideration differences in community/cultural norms.
- E. A school policy ensures adequate time to eat, relax, and socialize: at least 10 minutes after sitting down for breakfast and 20 minutes after sitting down for lunch.
- F. Schools should consider a "recess before lunch" option to improve student behavior and increase nutrient intake.
- G. A school policy stipulates food-pricing strategies designed to encourage students to purchase nutritious items.
- H. Financial considerations from the school administration do not restrict adoption of a nutrition services related policy.
- I. School personnel do not offer food as a performance incentive or reward, nor withhold food from students as punishment.

GUIDELINE 6: Promote healthy eating to students and staff, and prepare staff to recognize obesity, eating disorders, and other nutrition-related health problems and to refer those students to appropriate services.

RATIONALE

School personnel can play a positive role in recognizing nutrition-related health problems among students, their families, and school staff, and helping individuals to access appropriate nutrition programs, community services, and/or medical treatment. Some students and staff might have

School Nutrition and Food Services

psychologically-based eating disorders and need immediate professional treatment. Other potential nutrition-related problems that merit attention relate to obesity, physical disabilities, poor oral health, and pregnancy.

INDICATORS:

- A. The primary provider of school-based nutrition services is a qualified nutrition professional.
- B. Coaches, athletic aides and other school staff actively discourage students' use of dietary supplements to enhance athletic performance or personal appearance
- C. School health care providers, counselors, psychologists, and social workers participate in training activities that address eating disorders, obesity and other nutrition-related problems.
- D. All school staff participate in first-aid training for emergency response to choking, CPR, and allergic reactions.
- E. Modified meals are prepared for students with food allergies or other special food needs based on a physician's written request.

School Nutrition and Food Services

MAINE RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

School Food Service Information	Gail Lombardi Department of Education Tel: 624-6876 Fax: 624-6841 E-Mail: gail.lombardi@state.me.us
School Nutrition	
Summer Food Service Program	
Maternal & Child Health Nutrition Program	Janet Leiter Department of Health and Human Services Tel: 287-5366 Fax: 287-5355 E-Mail: janet.l.leiter@state.me.us
Diabetes Control Program	Cindy A. Hale Department of Health and Human Services Tel: 287-2907 Fax: 298-4631 E-Mail: lucinda.a.hale@state.me.us
School Nutrition Education for Classroom and Cafeteria	Judy Gatchell Muskie School, IPSI Tel: 626-5273 Fax: 626-5210 E-Mail: judy.gatchell@state.me.us
School Nutrition Environment	

NATIONAL RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov/

- Healthy Schools, Healthy Youth: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/index.htm
- School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide: apps.nccd.cdc.gov/shi/default.aspx

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn: www.nasbe.org

National Dairy Council

www.nutritionexplorations.org

National Food Service management Institute

Reverse the Trends: Create a Healthy School Nutrition Environment for Students: www.nfsmi.org/

School Nutrition and Food Services

US Department of Agriculture

www.fns.usda.gov/tn/

- Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment:
www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/changing.html
- How Social Trends Affect Children's Nutrition: Implications for Schools:
www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/service/learnpub.htm/

REFERENCES

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2000) *Changing the Scene: Improving the School Nutrition Environment*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2005) *Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office