

Engaging Child Nutrition Programs

Best Practices for Engaging Students, Parents, Teachers, Staff, and the Community in building healthy nutrition environments at school and home!



Updated 2019

The Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit

Beliefs

Nutritious, tasty, affordable school lunches and school breakfasts should be available for all students in Arkansas public schools.

School environments that make available only healthful food choices, provide adequate time for their selection and enjoyment and promote their consumption through pleasant surrounding and positive adult role modeling should be the norm for Arkansas public schools.

Nutrition education in the classroom and the cafeteria to promote critical thinking that will result in the development of healthful eating behaviors, improved learning readiness, health promotion, disease prevention and pleasure in eating should be a priority for all schools.

Local, state and federal commitment for child nutrition programs as integral components of education, evidenced by adequate financial resources effectively managed to provide quality services are necessary for a Healthy School.

Vision

Every Arkansas public school student and staff member will exhibit an understanding of nutrition concepts by selecting healthful meals at school and away from school.

Mission

To foster the service of nutritious meals and the development of school environments supportive of healthful eating behaviors of all students and staff.

Credits

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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A special thank you to Jerry Swope, M.A. and Alex Bradley, RDN, for their expertise in content, design, and layout.

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Striving for Excellence

Have you or your staff been guilty of saying:

*"I am not important enough to make those decisions."
"I am just in Child Nutrition, I can't be part of the team."
"I just do what I am told and don't ask questions."
"I will do what I have to but not any more than that."*

Governor Asa Hutchinson and Commissioner of Education Johnny Key are promoting the plan ForwARd: A New Vision for Arkansas Education. One of the primary messages of the plan is the need for a "mindset shift from compliance to excellence." Both the Governor and the Commissioner promote engagement as the key to success. Child Nutrition must move in this direction as well.

This *Engaging Child Nutrition Programs* guide is designed to move Child Nutrition from compliance to excellence and charges Child Nutrition Directors and Managers with engaging students, families, teachers, administrators, and the community in developing strong school meals programs.

The Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit reimbursed 188 million dollars for school meals across the state in SY 2017-18. The amount of reimbursement has greatly increased in the past few years due to programs like Breakfast in the Classroom and the Community Eligibility Program. More children are enjoying safe, and healthy meals at schools. Child Nutrition Directors are accurately and efficiently determining free and reduced percentages that affect many types of funding and eligibility for grants and awards.

All Child Nutrition Staff must meet USDA Child Nutrition Professional Standards and receive continuing education each year. The meal patterns and Smart Snacks guidelines are scientifically sound and evidence-based. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans continue to serve as the foundation for Child Nutrition and are the cornerstone for nutrition in all sectors across the United States. Professionalism has never been more evident or more important to Child Nutrition Programs.

Mentoring, teamwork, communication, and empowerment are important to building relationships within districts and communities. These relationships support strong and healthy nutrition environments for students as they grow and learn.

The Child Nutrition Unit partners with the Department of Education School Health Services to promote the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Whole Child Model, which shows Nutrition and Environmental Services as just one of the puzzle pieces that must fit together to provide the best outcomes and experiences for all students.

We can no longer make excuses and sit on the sidelines. Child Nutrition is an integral part of the education experience. We must be at the table, making informed and sound decisions, leading our staff, and serving the students and communities with vision and motivation.

Just a thought...
Are you striving for excellence?



Marketing and Engaging Child Nutrition

Marketing is everywhere. You see it on television, on social media, and in print. Driving down the road, at your favorite restaurant, and in the grocery store aisles...marketing is affecting your decisions – especially your decisions about food. Children also are influenced by marketing...both good and bad. As a result, some food marketing has contributed to the childhood obesity epidemic in America. Child Nutrition Programs across the state and nation now have the opportunity to focus marketing in a different direction...towards healthy school meals!

From the United States Department of Agriculture, the Meal Patterns for School Lunches and Breakfasts have refocused meals on variety, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and reduced sodium and fat. The Healthy Hunger-free Kids Act introduced Smart Snacks regulations, Professional Standards requirements, updated accountability systems, and the Community Eligibility Provision that are increasing access to healthy foods and maintaining the integrity of the school meals programs.

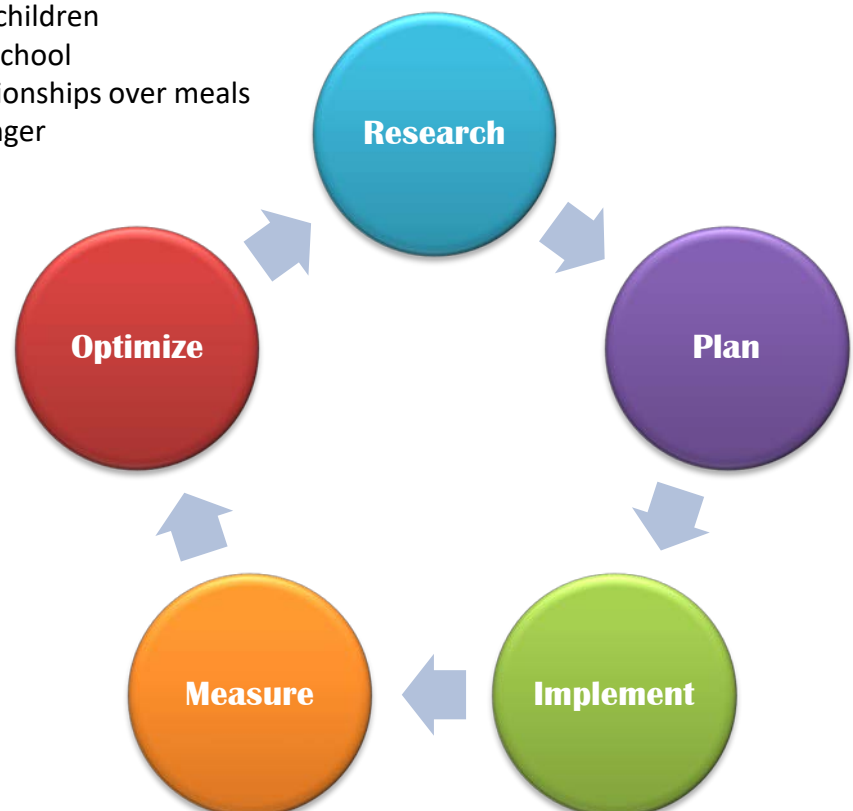
Child Nutrition Directors have the opportunity to engage in local, state, and national conversations around school meals, wellness, and education. Communities have the opportunity to engage in wellness committees, the fights against childhood food insecurity, and nutrition education.

Why should we engage Child Nutrition Programs?

- To improve participation in school meals
- To encourage healthy food options
- To give children the nutrition they need to grow
- To educate about nutrition and foods
- To improve the health of the nation's youth
- To affect long-term health of school-age children
- To reduce childhood obesity
- To serve as healthy role models for children
- To help children focus and learn at school
- To encourage children to build relationships over meals
- To decrease food insecurity and hunger

Let's begin by taking a look at the Marketing Cycle. As you can see, Marketing is a continuous process.

How do we apply this process to Child Nutrition Programs?



Research

Just a Thought...

How do you distribute Free / Reduced Applications? _____

What is your school's free / reduced percentage? _____

Do you have more free/reduced students or more paid? _____

Who are your current customers? _____

Who are your potential customers? _____

What do they want or need? _____

Research is the first step in the Marketing Cycle. Start with your customers! Who are they? What do they want? What influences your customers? And how can you grow your Child Nutrition Program? The most important customer to the Child Nutrition Programs is....CHILDREN! The students in your school are who keep your program running. The Child Nutrition Program's guiding principle is to feed children regardless of their ability to pay. Access to free and reduced price meals when income guidelines are met allows children to enjoy healthy and nutritious meals at a rate their household can manage. Students who do not qualify for free or reduced meals also have the opportunity to enjoy meals at school. More schools across the nation and Arkansas are adopting the new Community Eligibility Provision which allows for all students in areas with high need to eat at no cost to the household.

What is your school's free / reduced percentage? Are you feeding a larger portion of free / reduced students or mostly paid students in your school? Students receiving meal benefits are more likely to eat school meals, but paid students have a greater ability to bring food from home. Knowing this information can help you determine what marketing strategies will work best for you. A school with a high free / reduced percentage may simply need to remind parents and students that school meals are available and why they are cost effective for the family. In schools with lower free / reduced percentages, the Child Nutrition Program will be competing with lunches brought from home and/or fast food delivered by a parent. Marketing strategies may include developing stronger wellness policies that limit or prevent fast food from being delivered or branding and packaging school meals to look more like restaurant products.

Who are your current customers? What percentage of the school's enrollment is eating breakfast? Is eating lunch? Do your teachers eat school meals? If not, what are they eating? Does Administration eat school meals? Why or why not? Do community members, parents, or local government officials visit at meal times? While Child Nutrition is geared toward children, the adults that influence children's behavior, particularly related to food choices, should be a strong secondary customer for school meals. All of these groups are potential customers. How can you engage each group in the growth of your strong Child Nutrition Program?



After considering your current and potential customers, think about how you can engage them in your programs. How do you keep your current customers interested in school meals, and how do you gain the interest of other students, teachers, parents, administration and the community?

Try a survey or focus group. Consider conducting at least one focus group and/or survey each school year. Include students, teachers, staff, parents, wellness committee members, administration, and community members in your focus groups and survey population.

Consider what influences your customers and how their preferences affect your Child Nutrition Program. Your current and potential customers are affected by:

- External influence (marketing in local and national media, parents, community)
- Internal influence (teachers and peers)
- Location / Culture (different parts of the state prefer different foods)
- Economic situation of the community
- Free and Reduced Percentages of the school and/or district

After researching your customer behavior, consider your market environment. Would you eat in your cafeteria? Is the food produced in your kitchen safe enough for your family to eat? Do you have a mission statement? How is the business side of your Child Nutrition Program? Do you run in the black or in the red at the end of each school year? Is your program striving for excellence?

How can your Child Nutrition Program move to the next level of production and performance?

Just a thought...

Has your community's economic situation decreased in the past year? Yes No

Has the school enrollment been stable in the past year? Yes No

Have you completed a "meals per labor hour" worksheet? Yes No

Has your district or school considered a Special Provision for school meals? Yes No

What percentage of your students are SNAP households? _____

What community groups in your area focus on wellness and nutrition?

Use the Engagement Checklist on the next few pages to score your school on both customer behavior and market environment. This will complete the Research portion of your Marketing Cycle, and the results will build the foundation for step two.

Part of the research process will include networking with others, particularly if you are a new Manager or Director. You may need guidance on where to find information and data within your district or school. Completing the Market Analysis may require the input of multiple people within your district. Use this as an opportunity to build relationships and engage Child Nutrition.



Sample Survey – consider surveying students in a classroom or parents during an open house. Use technology as a tool to collect and analyze data.

1. Do you bring lunch from home?

Yes

No

2. Do you eat lunch from the school cafeteria?

Yes

No

3. When you eat lunch from the school cafeteria, do you throw any food away?

Yes If yes, what do you throw away? _____

No

4. Why do you throw the food away?

Do not have enough time to eat

Do not like foods

I am full

I am not sure

5. Are there any new foods you would like for lunch in the school cafeteria?

3. My favorite school lunches are:

4. My least favorite school lunch is: _____

5. Please list your favorite fruits:

6. Please list your favorite vegetables:

7. List any ideas you have for how we can improve school lunch or better serve you!

Sincerely,
The Food Service Staff

Focus Groups

A focus group is a set of 8-12 individuals who can provide verbal feedback on your Child Nutrition Programs. Child Nutrition focus groups should be held at elementary, middle, and high school levels and with parents. You may even consider a focus group with your teachers, wellness committees, or even administration. You can make guesses and assumptions about what others think about your programs, but asking them to share with you in a focus group will give you valuable information about what others truly think and know about Child Nutrition. Be prepared to hear the good and the opportunities for improvement. Listen carefully and be positive. Make the volunteers feel comfortable. They may serve as some of your greatest supporters after they have an opportunity to become engaged in your Child Nutrition Programs.

Tips for Student Focus Groups:

- Need diversity (equal number of boys and girls)
- Include a variety of grade levels
- Should be scheduled during school hours for about 60 minutes
- Work with student organizations to find volunteers
- Get approval from the Principal and teachers to include the students
- Use a scale that students are familiar with (such as A, A-, B+, B-, etc.)
- Ask questions verbally
 - What letter grade would you give for....
 - Our Food
 - Our Service
 - Our Environment (cleanliness, enough room to sit and enough time to eat, noise level)
 - Overall Experience
- Take notes for your records

Tips for Parent Focus Groups:

- Should be scheduled on a Tuesday or Thursday evening at 6:30 or 7pm for about 90 minutes
- Ask questions verbally
 - What is your overall impressions of the school lunch program?
 - What are your children's favorite school foods?
 - What are your children's least favorite school foods?
 - What do you think about the quality of the food served to your children?
 - What do you think about the safety of the food served to your children?
 - How can we improve?
 - Do you come to school for lunch or breakfast with your children?

Best Practices for Child Nutrition

Engaging in the following best practices for Child Nutrition strengthens family and community partnerships, which grow strong school meal programs. Mark the items that apply to your Child Nutrition Program. You may want to complete a checklist for each of the schools in your district, or complete one checklist for your entire district.

APPLICATIONS

- Applications are made readily available to families after July 1 of the current school year.
- Applications are available throughout the school year.
- Applications are given to families who have changes in their financial status at any point during the year.
- SNAP households are identified and all students within a SNAP household receive free meal benefits.
- Families understand all of the benefits associated with completing a meal application, including access to free or reduced-priced meals when determined eligible, access to ACT testing at no cost to the family, access to discounted rates for internet services and other supports.
- Families and schools understand how Enhanced Student Achievement Funding, or state categorical funding, is associated with free and reduced percentages.
- Families and schools understand that schools receive specific educational program funding, such as eRate and Title 1, based on free and reduced percentages.
- Communities work together to distribute meal applications and encourage families to apply.
- Information regarding free and reduced-price meals is available in parent centers, post offices, grocery stores, employment offices, county health units, local nonprofits, and other community buildings.
- Technology, such as call-outs, emails, apps, and websites, is used to remind families that meal benefits are available.
- The district public release is available at the following locations with information about the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and program eligibility:
 - Local Newspaper
 - Local Cable TV Company
 - Local TV Stations (News)
 - Local Businesses / Human Resources Offices / Factories
 - Local Health Department
 - Local Department of Motor Vehicles
 - Local Department of Human Services
 - Local WIC Office
 - Local Churches
 - Public Libraries
 - Local Hospitals
 - Local Housing Developments
 - Electric Service Providers
 - Doctor's Offices

SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT FAYETTEVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Principals visit the homes of students to explain supports that are offered through the school, including access to free and reduced meals. Applications are offered in the family's primary language. Families are reassured about how the information on the meal application will and will not be used by the school.

PARTICIPATION

- 70% or more of the students eat school breakfast.
- 70% or more of the students eat school lunch.
- Club meetings, sports, and other student activities are not scheduled during lunch.
- During the school day, competitive foods (not served as part of the Child Nutrition Program) are not sold until 30 minutes after the last lunch period has ended to encourage school meal participation.
- Before the school day, competitive foods (not served as part of the Child Nutrition Program) are not sold or served at the same time and place as school meals are served to encourage school meal participation.
- School parties and/or fundraisers are limited to the Arkansas Nutrition Standard's "Nine Special Event Days" to ensure students are exposed to healthy nutrition environments.
- Entrepreneurial Student Business Projects partner with Child Nutrition so both are successful.
- Students have physical activity or recess prior to lunch to increase consumption.
- Foreign language translations of the free / reduced application are available when a significant number of persons speaking a foreign language is in the population to increase access to school meals.
- Ethnic preferences are considered in meal planning to encourage participation.
- Student preferences are considered in meal planning to encourage participation.
- The most updated non-discrimination statement is enforced at your facility.
- Students with special dietary needs are accommodated.
- Administration is supportive of your Child Nutrition Program.
- Teachers and staff are partners with Child Nutrition and eat school meals often.
- Parents are invited to enjoy school meals and many participate throughout the year.
- Meal schedules allow all students to participate at meal times.
- Class, bus, and other schedules allow all students to participate in school meals.
- The last student in line has at least 20 minutes (lunch) or 10 minutes (breakfast) to consume the meal after being served as a way to decrease food waste.
- The cafeteria is promoted in other areas of the school and as a partner to education.
- Child Nutrition / cafeteria print materials, website, and promotional items are branded.
- Charge Policies are in place but no child is given an alternate meal or denied access to meal service.
Financial matters are handled between adults in the school and adults within the family.

PRODUCT

- Cycle menus are planned and followed to decrease costs and improve quality of meals.
- Standardized recipes are routinely used by all staff to improve consistency of quality meals.
- Substitutions to the advertised menu are made only when absolutely necessary.
- Seasonal menus (spring, summer, fall, and winter) that include a variety of products are served.
- Menus / Trays / Meals are planned to include a variety of color, texture, and shape.
- Foods/menus support the development of healthy eating habits.
- Menu boards highlight food choices to encourage participation.
- Local foods are incorporated into menus and communities are engaged in the Farm to School Movement.
- Quality foods are purchased.
- Staff are trained on food preparation, cooking, and serving techniques.
- Foods are placed and displayed in ways to encourage the healthiest options.
- Grab and Go options are available for breakfast and lunch.
- Reimbursable meals are encouraged.
- A sample tray / plate with items for a reimbursable meal are displayed at the front of the line.
- Options are available for students to mix and match for a reimbursable meal.
- Clean, eye-appealing serving pans and utensils are used.
- Meal trays are eye-appealing, clean, and free of cracks.
- Hot foods are served hot, and cold foods are served cold.
- Foods are batch cooked and not held for long periods of time.
- Garnishes are used on serving lines and trays.
- Competitive foods (a la carte and second trays) meet Smart Snacks/Arkansas Nutrition Standards.
- Foods are identified with place cards or labels.
- Foods are labeled with Nutrition Fact Information.

PLACE

- Customer service is a priority for all staff.
- Students are directed to food service area by signage.
- Serving and seating areas are kept clean.
- Adequate seating and serving sites are available.
- Social needs of students are considered.
- Trash cans are not overflowing.
- Sneeze guards are in place and working properly.
- The cafeteria has sufficient lighting.
- Cafeteria monitors are friendly.
- Students feel safe in the cafeteria.
- Offer vs Serve posters are easy to read and understand.
- Holiday and special event decorations are used on the serving line and in the cafeteria.
- Decorations are updated at least quarterly.
- Alternate Breakfast is offered in some form (Breakfast in the Classroom, Grab and Go, Second Chance, etc.).
- Cafeteria and classroom connections are made through food and nutrition related lessons.
- Student artwork is displayed in the cafeteria.
- Wellness committees are active and partner with Child Nutrition to promote a healthy school environment.
- Wellness committees support positive Child Nutrition messaging.
- Wellness committees review and provide documented feedback on all Child Nutrition menus at least quarterly.
- Wellness committees assist with competitive foods questions and concerns (a la carte, school parties, fundraisers, etc.).
- Family and Community Engagement stakeholders are engaged in Child Nutrition and support a healthy school environment.
- Schools raise money for "Angel Funds" to cover the costs for school meals when families are unable to pay.



SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT LIGHTHOUSE ACADEMIES CHARTER SCHOOLS

The Child Nutrition Director updated the district charge policy, which is required by USDA, based on requirements outlined in Arkansas Act 428 of 2019. The charge policy now addresses the preferred method for parents to pay in advance for students' meals, when parents will be notified of low balances, procedures for ensuring students continue to receive meals, and that adults in the household are aware of the responsibility to reimburse the district for unpaid meals.

PROMOTION

- The District Child Nutrition Program has a marketing plan.
 - Menus and foods have creative names – *POW! Chicken Sandwich* for a superhero theme, *Bobcat Burgers* for a school mascot theme, *"Sam I am Likes..."* on Dr. Seuss Week.
 - Holiday and special events menus are planned.
 - "Daily Special(s)" are advertised on a menu stand or poster.
 - Menus are read aloud from school bulletins each day.
 - Menus are distributed to classrooms, students, and families.
 - Child Nutrition events like "National School Lunch Week" are advertised on the school marquee.
 - Hallway announcement boards and scrolling marquees include the cafeteria menu.
 - Child Nutrition has its own page on the district website.
 - Child Nutrition is marketed on Social Media.
 - Weekly and/or monthly menus are listed in the local newspaper.
 - School breakfast outreach is conducted.
 - Child Nutrition regularly communicates with stakeholders and partners.
 - Educational and promotional posters on topics like school lunch, nutrition education, physical activity, and wellness are displayed in the cafeteria and wherever school meals are sold or distributed.
 - Student flyers and/or parent flyers to educate about meal patterns and healthy school meals are distributed regularly at open houses, health fairs, community meetings, etc.
 - Cafeteria bulletin boards include positive and healthy messages that are updated monthly.
 - Classroom visits are made by Child Nutrition staff to share a nutrition message to supplement the teacher's curriculum.
 - Nutrition education is included in the curriculum for all grades.
 - Local farmers, County Extension Agents, or other nutrition and physical activity experts from the community are invited for classroom activities, special events, and/or assemblies.
 - The cafeteria is modern and inviting.
 - Staff wear matching uniforms, t-shirts, or aprons.
 - Students are involved in menu planning through focus groups, menu contests, cook-offs, or FACS class projects.
 - The cafeteria is open during Parent / Teacher Conferences and/or Open House.
 - Pictures of each day's complete reimbursable meal are taken and saved to share with parents during open-house.
- Additional opportunities for Child Nutrition are taken:
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grants
 - Options for Special Provisions are considered, including Community Eligibility Provision and Provision 2
 - Summer Feeding
 - Afterschool Snacks
 - School Gardens
 - Procurement of Local Foods (Farm to School)
 - Nutrition Education
 - Equipment Grants
 - Other _____
- The Child Nutrition Director provides an update to teachers and staff during the New School Year Staff Meeting.
 - The Child Nutrition Director, Managers, and Staff are able and willing to professionally and adequately answer questions from students, parents, teachers, staff, the community, and administration.
 - Child Nutrition submits articles and pictures to the local newspaper.
 - Child Nutrition invites local media, including newspaper and television, for events in the cafeteria.

Date Evaluation Completed

Completed By

While finalizing your thoughts on the Research portion of the Marketing Cycle, be sure to keep a few tips in mind:

- Meet with Administration. Find out what their impressions are of Child Nutrition. What plans or goals do they have for your program? This includes your superintendent, school board, and principals. Make sure you are at the table before, during and after plans are made for your program.
- Be sure to have a mission statement...one with students at the center. Without our students, there would be no need for Child Nutrition.
- Engage in student organizations and their goals. Find ways to partner with them to make both their programs and yours successful even when they are selling competitive foods.
- Be familiar with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Whole Child Model*. Schools are using this model to engage families and communities and to ensure each student is supported, challenged, safe, and healthy. "Nutrition Environment and Services" (as labeled in the model) plays a vital part in educating students on healthy eating behaviors - both inside the cafeteria and outside the cafeteria during the school day.
- Our schools, the Department of Education, the Child Nutrition Unit, and the United States Department of Agriculture no longer function with the understanding that one group has its goals and the other group has its different goals. All groups are engaged with one goal in mind: student success!



**SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT
BLYTHEVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Child Nutrition Managers create a display tray each day and take a photo of the complete reimbursable meal. Photos are sent to the Child Nutrition Director who posts them to social media. This keeps the superintendent and parents informed about the amount of food offered and food quality.

Based on your market analysis, what strategies will strengthen your Child Nutrition Program? Be thinking about the answers to this question as you move into the second step of the Marketing Cycle...Planning!

Plan

Developing a plan is the second step of the Marketing Cycle. In the first step, you were able to identify the strengths and opportunities for improvement in your Child Nutrition Programs. Now, you will be able to take that information and identify the steps for moving forward. What is your plan to ensure the strong areas of your program stay that way? What is your plan for improving the weaker areas? How will you engage your families and communities?

When making a marketing and engagement plan, ask yourself...

- **Who** needs to be involved?
- **What** are my goals? What are my action steps for achieving my goals? What is my budget?
- **When** will I implement my ideas?
- **Where** will I implement the plan? At all of the schools in my district...or just one or two? Where will I be most successful? Where do I need marketing the most?
- **Why** should I market? Will my answer justify my marketing plan to my district and school administration?
- **How** will I evaluate the results? How will I show others my success? How will I balance the program's needs and my students needs and wants?

In your brainstorming and planning, refer back to the best practices for Child Nutrition. Notice that the best practices include the Four "P's" of Child Nutrition Marketing:

Participation, Product, Place, and Promotion.

Your programs may have strengths and weaknesses across all areas. Your programs may be really strong in one area with a great need for improvement in another area. Look back at your best practices checklist and evaluate. You will need to decide where to focus your marketing and engagement efforts. Perhaps you want to focus on one area and set 2-4 goals just for participation, for example. Or, perhaps you want to focus on all areas and set one goal for each. You want to avoid creating more than 3-4 goals at one time. Taking on too much at once can spread your efforts too thin and lead to fewer successes. Setting a smaller number of goals at one time will allow you to focus your efforts and achieve more success. Start with the marketing and engagement ideas that you know will work for your students and your school. Then, you will stay motivated and ready to try new and more involved marketing goals. You will have positive statistics from your early marketing successes to share with and engage others in your district as well.

SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Partnered with the City of Little Rock to host the Be Mighty - EAT. PLAY. LEARN. LITTLE ROCK campaign to expand summer and afterschool meals.

School District Marketing and Engagement Plan

Date _____ Contact Person _____

Who will be engaged in marketing the Child Nutrition Programs?

- Child Nutrition Director
- Child Nutrition Managers
- Child Nutrition Staff
- Administration
- Wellness Committee
- Students
- Teachers and Staff
- Parents
- Community Partners
- Food Service Management Company
- Area Specialist or Other State Staff

What are the marketing and engagement goals? What are the action steps to achieving the goals?

1. _____

Action Step 1 _____

Action Step 2 _____

Action Step 3 _____

2. _____

Action Step 1 _____

Action Step 2 _____

Action Step 3 _____

3. _____

Action Step 1 _____

Action Step 2 _____

Action Step 3 _____

4. _____

Action Step 1 _____

Action Step 2 _____

Action Step 3 _____

Tips for Successful Communication and Networking

Throughout the marketing cycle, it will be important to network so others know about your goals and can offer insight and skills for making your plan more successful. Communication will be important in each step of the marketing cycle as well. The more informed everyone is, the greater opportunity for success. The best place to start networking is with your local and/or district Wellness Committee. The committee has representatives from all of the different areas that impact schools, including school administration, school board, parents, students, school food authority, physical education teachers, school health professionals, and public community members. When a Child Nutrition Director or Manager builds a relationship with the Wellness Committee, there is the opportunity to educate at least one person in each of these areas and possibly gain an advocate in each of those areas as well! Networking can extend to other Child Nutrition Directors in neighboring school districts, staff at local educational co-ops, county health departments, county extension agents, local business owners, and many others. Find what fits for your district or school. Communicating with each of these groups includes listening to their needs and concerns, explaining your Child Nutrition Programs, sharing successes and opportunities for improvement, and engaging them in the marketing process.

Tips for Planning a Successful Marketing and Engagement Budget

- Items can be purchased from Child Nutrition Funds using proper procurement methods.
- Focus on those items that will produce the best results.
- Look for opportunities to engage other groups within your school. You both may have the same goal or message in mind and can combine resources. For example, working with the school nurse to plan a booth for the school health fair.
- Students organizations like Future Farmers of America (FFA) may assist with building Daily Special boards or Family and Consumer Science (FACS) students may assist with taste-testing or menu planning.
- Computer Science classes may assist with the design and printing of posters, bulletin boards, menus, etc.
- Engage your community – various groups or businesses may be willing to provide in-kind services (example: the local newspaper, local grocer).
- Develop a marketing budget to share with your principals, superintendent and school board.

Tips for Setting Goals and Action Steps

Goals should be S.M.A.R.T.

S – Specific	What do you truly want to achieve?
M – Measureable	Can you quantify your goal to determine your progress?
A – Achievable	Is your goal realistic?
R – Relevant	Are you willing to do what is necessary to achieve your goal?
T – Time-Bound	What is the time frame for your goal?

Example Goal: We will increase participation by 50 students by the start of the second semester by implementing a Grab-and-Go Breakfast After first period in the high school.

Action steps should be the specific activities that are necessary to achieve the goal.

Example Action Steps for the above Goal:

1. Discuss pros and cons of Grab-and-Go Breakfast with principal. Make arrangements in schedules.
2. Plan Grab-and-Go Menus with High School Manager and Staff
3. Educate parents and student about Grab-and-Go Breakfast



Implement

At this point in the Marketing Cycle, you have completed your research, and you have made a plan for marketing and engagement in your school and/or district. The next step is to Implement all of your great ideas!

Start by sharing your plan and timeline. Get everyone involved, including your students, parents, teachers, and administration. Invite the community to be a part of your Child Nutrition Programs. Adapt and adjust to new ideas and processes. Train your staff, and encourage them to get involved.

Keep everyone on track by sticking to your plan and timeline. Provide updates periodically to your staff and administration.

Create an environment that excites your students, teachers, and staff!

Consider what messages you want to share about Child Nutrition. (See the next page for a list of ideas)

Be creative!

Utilize your resources:

- Your staff
- Your Area Specialist
- Best Practices from the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit
- USDA's Team Nutrition Website
- The Institute of Child Nutrition
- Social Media including Pinterest
- School Nutrition Association
- Cooperative Extension Service
- Look online for companies that sell eye-catching nutrition education materials and displays
- Borrow nutrition education materials from the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit free-of-charge
- Talk to other schools about their marketing and engagement plans
- Visit other districts' websites
- Ask student groups and clubs to volunteer for projects
- Educate and engage parent groups
- Reach out to the Farm to School Lead at Arkansas Children's Hospital
- Apply for grants with No Kid Hungry / Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
- Partner with the Arkansas Department of Education School Health Services and/or your school's School Health Coordinator
- Partner with your school's School-Based Health Center
- Your district's Family and Community Engagement Team



Ask yourself who or what else is missing? The success of Child Nutrition is dependent on the support of many different groups.

This is a team effort!

Suggested Messages to Share with Customers:

- **Describe the benefits of the Meal Patterns**
 - Based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans
 - Provides greater volume and variety of fruits and vegetables to provide students with more vitamins, minerals, and fiber
 - Provides whole-grain rich products that can improve skin complexion, help students feel more full, and promote heart and digestive health
 - Decreased saturated fat
 - Decreased sodium
 - And no trans fat
- **Plan a weekly fruit or vegetable or a monthly whole grain to highlight**
- **Encourage drinking milk for healthier bones**
- **Discuss a monthly topic and relate the message to Child Nutrition:**
 - January – National Mentoring Month (health mentoring and role modeling)
 - February – National Heart Month (heart healthy eating)
 - March – National Nutrition Month
 - April – National Poetry Month (poetry related to food)
 - May – National Physical Fitness and Sports Month
 - June – National Dairy Month
 - July – National Dance Month (dancing to burn calories)
 - August – Back to School Health (immunizations, fitness, nutrition)
 - September – National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month
 - October 16 – World Food Day (cultural foods)
 - November – National Diabetes Month (eating healthy to prevent type 2 diabetes)
 - December – Healthy Holidays (making healthier choices on special occasions)
- **Smart Snacks and Arkansas Nutrition Standards ensure all foods on campus are healthy (based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans).**
- **School parties focus on F-U-N and not just food.**
- **Benefits of School Breakfast, including Alternate Breakfast**
- **Benefits of the Community Eligibility Provision**



**SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT
DREW CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Engages students by hosting the Junior Chef event where students make and eat their own personal pan pizza with the school chef.

Measure

Researching, planning and implementing goals are important. However, to determine your level of success and to engage others in your plan, you must measure your outcomes to have data and information to share with stakeholders.

All of the networking and relationship building you have accomplished in previous steps is just as important in this step of the Marketing Cycle. Those stakeholders, or people who have an interest in Child Nutrition, should be updated with statistics and stories that show what impact your marketing and engagement plan as had within the school and the community.

You may even want to periodically report measurements of your goals to these groups, including your superintendent, school board, students, teachers, and parents. Let them know about your progress. Are you still following your timeline? Have you found new approaches to achieving your goal? Have you changed your plan in any way? Based on the data you have, what do you estimate the future data to look like? Having real numbers and real information to share can keep your stakeholders enthusiastic and supportive of your goals and plan. Seeing real results can empower you and them to look at longer-term goals and strategic planning.

What types of data can be collected in Child Nutrition?

- Acceptance of New Foods – taste testing
- Student Understanding – Offer VS Serve
- Customer Surveys – Students, Teachers
- Child Nutrition Income
- Student Participation
- Popularity of Menu Items
- Administrative Review Data

What if a goal is not measurable? Like a goal to engage the Wellness Committee? While your relationship can not be measured, the amount of engagement you have with the committee can be. You could measure the number of Wellness Committee meetings you attended that year and how many people you reached through involvement with the committee.

Be sure to keep accurate and complete records of your measurements / data, including any statistics and any stories from students, parents, teachers or others. A story or a picture can be just as influential as numerical data.

Just a Thought...

What parts of your Marketing and Engagement Plan can you measure? And how?



Optimize

Optimize is the final step in the Marketing Cycle and is possibly the most important. First, you want to consider your current goals and the outcomes of those goals within your timeline. What measure of success did you find? How can you take that information and move forward? In other words, what is next for your marketing plan? It may be the end of the school year and you can look back and see what an impact your marketing had on your participation. Maybe, you went up 20%. But, does the process stop there? What does next school year look like? Should you continue the marketing strategies you put into place this year, and should you continue to add new ideas? Absolutely! This is an ongoing process...the Marketing Cycle starts over and continues from year to year.

Secondly, optimizing your goals includes reporting on those goals and maximizing the engagement of others in your long-term plan. Be sure to share what worked and what did not work. And, explain what is next. Share your data and stories. Get everyone excited about your progress! Share your ideas in a professional manner...show everyone you are the district's leader in Child Nutrition.

Consider involving the media for special Child Nutrition events. Write an article about the success of your manager who just finished certification training. Give a presentation to your school board or one of the groups listed below:

Focus Groups – they provided information in the research step of the Marketing Cycle. Meet with the group again to give them an update on the outcomes of your goals. Let them know what changes were made because of their involvement. Make them feel appreciated and respected.

Student Government – these are the leaders of your students. Make them feel part of the process and include them in your plans.

Teachers and Staff – meet with this group to share changes, updates, and plans for the future. Be involved in their classrooms and projects.

Wellness Committee – Arkansas law requires this committee to review your menus at least quarterly, but what other feedback can they give the Child Nutrition Program? Make them a part of your overall marketing and engagement plans.

State Meetings – Many opportunities exist for you to share best practices with colleagues at the state level...like panel discussions and mentoring opportunities.



SCHOOL HIGHLIGHT HOPE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Completed the Community Eligibility Provision Estimator Tool and determined this special provision to be a viable option for their district.

Involve the Media

Involving the media is a great way to get the positive messages of your Child Nutrition Programs out to the community. Always let your school and district administration know when you have contact with the media.

Consider all types of media:

- **Newspapers**
- **Newsletters**
- **Magazines**
- **Television**
- **Radio**

Reach out to the media. Have an outline of a story that you want to share and why you think it is newsworthy, timely, or unusual. Tell what impact you believe the story will have and why viewers will be interested.

Tips for Talking to Reporters:

- **Know your subject** – check your facts, prepare for the interview, and do not “wing” it.
- **Be honest** – it is ok to say you do not know the answer to a question. Offer to find out.
- **Be prompt** – adhere to the media’s deadlines.
- **Know your audience** – consider what they will want to know.
- **Stick to messages and be brief in responses** – identify 2-3 key points you want to share. Communicate in short, precise statements.
- **Offer back ground information** – data, graphics, props, quotes, and research will make your story more attractive.
- **Write a thank you note** when a reporter covers your Child Nutrition Program.

Just a Thought...

What events could you invite the media to attend?



Effective Presentations

Child Nutrition Personnel are encouraged to make regular presentations at School Staff Meetings to educate the administration, teachers, and staff about the importance of school meals, updates to regulations, meal prices, and current projects such as focus groups or taste-testing sessions. Additionally, Child Nutrition Personnel may be asked to present information to the Superintendent and/or School Board. Use the information below for creating and delivering a great presentation!

Writing a Great Speech

- Start with a brief introduction
- Focus on 3-4 key points
- Include reliable and proven supporting information for each key point
- Summarize your main points in a conclusion at the end of your speech
- Practice your speech – in front of the mirror or in front of a family member or friend before you address an entire group
- Make yourself notes but do not plan to read your speech word-for-word
- Consider visual aids like a PowerPoint Presentation

Giving a Great Presentation

- Remember, you are the expert in Child Nutrition
- Only you will know if you forget a key point
- Try to relax – breathe, focus
- Maintain eye-contact
- Use your notes or outline as a guide but add your thoughts as you work through the presentation. Do not read a presentation word-for-word.
- Stay within your time limit
- Leave time for questions
- Answer questions to the best of your ability. If you do not know the answer, tell the audience you will get back to them. Then, follow-up in a timely manner.

Writing an Article

Child Nutrition personnel may have the opportunity to write articles for the local or state newspapers or for the “Nutrition News” newsletter published by the Child Nutrition Unit. Use the information below to write an effective newspaper article.

A good article answers the following questions in the order shown:

Who

“The Anytown Child Nutrition Program has been offering students...”

What

“...access to new and improved school meals.”

When

“The new Meal Pattern for School Lunch was launched July 1, 2012, and the new Meal Pattern for School Breakfast becomes effective July 1, 2013.”

Where

“Anytown Elementary, Middle, and High Schools are welcoming more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The school meals also include less sodium, less saturated fat, and no trans fat.”

Why

“USDA updated the Meal Patterns for School Lunches and Breakfasts to be in line with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.”

How

“The President signed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 that required the nutrition standards for school meals to be updated.”

Additional information and descriptions can be written at the end of an article, but if an editor needs more space, this is the information that is most likely to be cut.

Just a Thought...

What articles could you write for the newspaper?



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Warren School District Child Nutrition Director Selected to Attend Regional Training

Warren, Arkansas – April 29, 2015 - The Warren School District is excited to announce that Amanda West was one of thirteen Child Nutrition Directors selected to represent Arkansas at the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) Team Up for School Nutrition Success program. The two-day workshop was held April 14-15, 2015, at the University of Mississippi in Oxford.

With important changes and improvements coming quickly to federal Child Nutrition Programs across the county, Child Nutrition directors at the school district level are facing new challenges that require innovative solutions and creative approaches to topics like meal participation, menu planning, and food safety and sanitation. Team Up for School Nutrition Success brought together Child Nutrition Directors from across the Southwest Region to identify issues and find solutions through participant-mentor partnerships and SMART Goals development.

Amanda West is a Certified Child Nutrition Director and Manager in Arkansas. She has worked for Warren School District for ___ years. Amanda reports gaining valuable insight and lasting relationships from the Team Up for Success program. She says, "I believe it was a great learning experience and eye opening to see that no matter how big or small the district, we are all facing and dealing with the same challenges." Amanda and Warren School District were also selected as the lucky recipients of free on-site training from NFSMI. Several other districts in the area will also be invited to attend.

To learn more about Child Nutrition, contact your local school district's Child Nutrition Director.

Effective Leadership and Professionalism

Child Nutrition Leaders ask their districts for freedom to make decisions, manage hundreds of thousands of Child Nutrition dollars, speak at board and legislative meetings, and promote the mission of Child Nutrition. Leaders in these roles are expected to be ethical and professional. What exactly does that mean?

Appearance

- Be clean and well groomed
- Dress in a way that makes you confident
- Use good grammar and clean language in speaking and writing

Attitude

- Be positive and uplifting
- Be confident
- Be committed
- Be gracious even with criticism

Actions

- Be timely
- Be ethical
- Be reliable
- Maintain poise even in difficult situations

Abilities

- Be well trained
- Be competent
- Seek new experiences often
- Be organized and accountable at all times

Approach

- Include your team and model cooperation
- Avoid labeling and passing judgement
- Expect best practices
- Value innovation

Just a Thought...

Does your appearance make you feel confident?

Is your attitude positive?

Do your actions create an environment of trust?

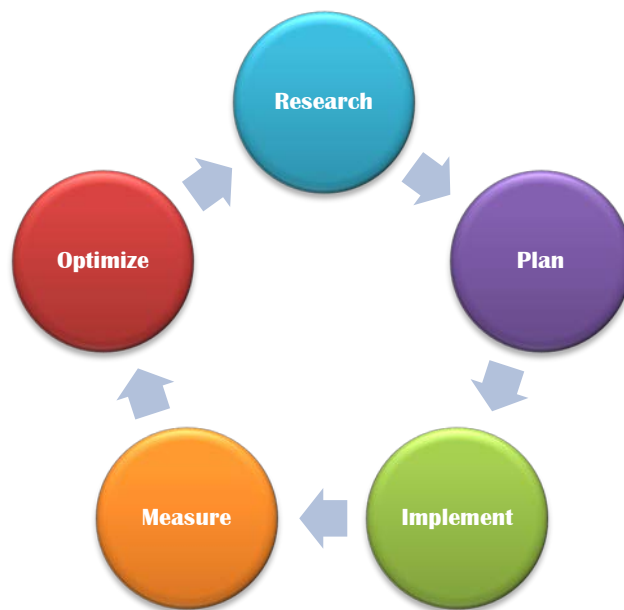
Are you utilizing your abilities and the abilities of your team?

And does your approach engage the whole team?



Summary

- Child Nutrition Programs must strive for excellence!
- Marketing is an on-going process and every school should have a plan that is updated annually.
- Success of Child Nutrition Programs depends on engaging staff, students, teachers, parents, administration and the community.
- Each step of the Marketing Cycle should be considered and implemented.



Your Final Thoughts...



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