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What Works!

A Superintendent's Companion Book

Engaging Child Nutrition Programs

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



Welcome to Child Nutrition!

Child Nutrition and healthy nutrition environments are vital to the success of students.

188 million dollars of Child Nutrition funds from the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service were reimbursed to Arkansas public schools in school year 2017-2018.

A district's percentage of free and reduced students directly impacts state categorical funding.

Superintendents, Child Nutrition Directors (CNDs), school personnel, and partners collaborate to achieve increased participation, decreased hunger, and financial stability.

The following is a basic guide for starting conversations about the successes and potential barriers in Child Nutrition Programs.



Food Service Management Companies

- *Proper procurement procedures must be followed when districts request proposals and enter into contracts with Food Service Management Companies (FSMC).*
- *Districts must use the approved Request for Proposal (RFP).*
- *Districts must manage the FSMC Contract and are still accountable to the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit as outlined in the Annual Agreement and Policy Statement.*

Best Practices

Districts that work in partnership with FSMCs are most successful when both parties collaborate, plan, and problem-solve together. Staff representing both the district and the FSMC attend trainings together and share a vision for growth and development of the local Child Nutrition Program.

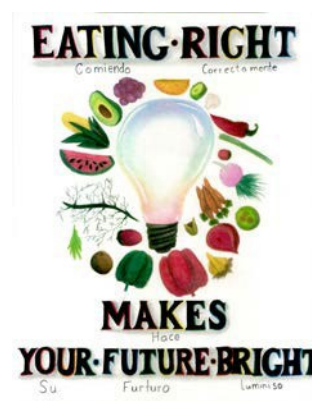
Russellville School District

CND, Kay Haulmark, and FSMC Director, Daniel Connerly, both serve as mentors and speakers at the annual Child Nutrition Team Up Retreat. Both support the mission and vision of their district and share their experiences as mentors to other directors across the state.

Resources

Visit the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit webpage under the "Food Service Management Companies" tab to find:

- ✓ USDA Guidance – Contracting with Food Service Management Companies: Guidance for School Food Authorities
- ✓ Contract Timeline for LEA's, FSMCs, and ADE Child Nutrition
- ✓ A list of registered FSMCs
- ✓ Links to applicable Commissioner's Memos



Administrative Reviews

- *The Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit conducts Administrative Reviews in each district at least every three years.*
- *Administrative Reviews are comprehensive reviews that require on-site and off-site evaluation tools to be completed by both the district and the area specialist.*
- *Procurement Reviews are conducted in the same year as the Administrative Review and focus on the use of federal funds in the Child Nutrition Programs.*

Best Practices

Districts should employ trained and certified managers and directors who learn the specific requirements of the administrative review. CNDs and other personnel who manage different aspects of Child Nutrition should participate in monthly digital learning sessions when each section of the Administrative Review is addressed. CNDs should be familiar with the district’s Agreement and Policy Statement, or contract, with the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit. Required reports should be submitted in an accurate and timely manner, and CNDs should be prepared for reviews by completing the off-site tool, organizing files, and preparing staff to answer questions.

Heber Springs School District

CND, Pam Tamburo, uses the Administrative Review Checklist to ensure all files are complete. She organizes files according to the numbering on the checklist, which corresponds with the questions on the off-site and on-site reviews. This practice allows directors to see what is missing before the review, and it allows area specialists to move quickly and efficiently through the review.

Resources

Visit the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit webpage under the “Administrative Review” Tab for an overview of Administrative Review requirements and a list of resources, including tools for developing a corrective action plan.

Applications for School Meals

- *Families understand all of the benefits associated with completing a meal application, including access to free or reduced-price meals when determined eligible, access to ACT testing at no cost to the family, access to discounted rates for internet services, and others supports.*
- *Communities work together to distribute meal applications and encourage families to apply.*
- *Applications may be distributed after July 1 of each school year.*

Best Practices

Districts should release information regarding the availability of Child Nutrition Programs and how to apply for free and reduced- price meals through local newspapers, cable companies, news stations, businesses, human resources offices, factories, health departments, departments of motor vehicles, departments of human services, WIC offices, churches, libraries, hospitals, housing developments, electric service providers, doctor’s offices, and any other areas that support the public.

Fayetteville School District

Principals visit the homes of students to explain supports that are offered through the school, including access to free and reduced- price 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.

Resources

Visit the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit webpage under the “Forms” tab to find these resources and more:

- ✓ Frequently Asked Questions About Free and Reduced Price School Meals
- ✓ How to Apply Instructions
- ✓ Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals
- ✓ Public Releases
- ✓ Eligibility and Verification Letters
- ✓ Income Eligibility Guidelines
- ✓ List of Safety Net School Districts
- ✓ Translated Applications

Ensuring Reimbursement

- *Districts must submit an accurate, electronic Claim for Reimbursement using the 3-step process to the State agency by the 10th of the each month.*
- *The district must know meal pattern requirements for all reimbursable programs offered.*
- *The district must maintain all documentation and records to support the submitted claims.*

Best Practices

School districts must establish internal controls within the district to ensure accuracy of claims through meal pattern requirements, meal counting procedures, awareness of all sources of reimbursement, appropriate and consistent coding of funds, and the use of current reimbursement rates. There must be three (3) separate people involved in the claim process.

Palestine-Wheatley School District

Palestine-Wheatley is a Provision 2 (P2) district using base-year percentages with total meal counts to complete their monthly claim. Debbie Loewer, District Bookkeeper and Elonda Love, CN work closely to verify meal counts, gather inventories and expenses. Debbie uses the Non-base year Daily Record form to prepare a Monthly Summary Sheet she created for the P2 calculations. The summary sheet contains meal counts by school for breakfast & lunch, free/reduced/paid percentages and has the journal entry accounts at the bottom.

Resources

Visit the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit Webpage under the “On-line Claim for Reimbursement Tab” to find these, among other resources:

- ✓ Link to Child Nutrition On-line Claim Application
- ✓ How to Complete A Claim for Reimbursement (PDF)
- ✓ Helpful Hints for CN On-line Claim Application
- ✓ CNU-18-016 Regulations and Processes Impacting the Payment of the Child Nutrition Claims for Reimbursement

Meal Pattern

- *Keep updated with new meal patterns changes and crediting amounts for food items.*
- *Be proactive by attending state training (annual, monthly digital learning, and technical assistance visits by area specialists) and any available online trainings over meal pattern.*
- *Serve the vegetable sub-groups at least once a week to meet sub-group requirements for all age groups.*

Best Practices

CNDs should actively monitor planned menus for meeting meal pattern. All options provided to students must comprise a reimbursable meal. Multiple options of food components for students to comprise reimbursable meals with food items most liked should be served. CNDs must obtain Child Nutrition (CN) Labels or formulation statements for food items to determine the correct crediting amounts to put on production records and monitor for meal patterns.

Pocahontas School District

CND, Patty Moore, uses the meal pattern certification worksheets each day to ensure that she is meeting meal pattern. By inserting the food items and serving sizes into the tool, she can clearly see where she might not meet meal pattern and if she is serving all vegetable sub-groups. Patty regularly updates all her CN labels and formulation statements to verify the correct crediting amount per serving. When something changes on the meal, Patty plugs it into the certification worksheets to determine if the change still allows her to meet all meal pattern requirements for the week. Patty is proactive in evaluating her menus and meals for adherence to all meal pattern requirements for all age groups.

Resources

Visit the Child Nutrition Unit webpage > Programs > National School Lunch Program > School Breakfast Program for meal pattern resources.

Engaging Stakeholders

- *Develop a partnership within each school district between administration and the Child Nutrition Program to create awareness of regulations and policies regarding nutrition programs.*
- *Collaborate with the community; become aware of local service organizations; seek to be placed on their programs, to share the good things going on in regards to sound nutrition & the development of healthy nutrition environments in the school district.*
- *Collaborate with school boards providing them with valid & continuing information on the nutrition program.*

Best Practices

Relationships should encourage stakeholders to attend events on campus. Activities should encourage all staff to engage in Child Nutrition Programs, build relationships, and start conversations that focus on the overall vision of the school. Examples throughout the school year may include Back to School events, Open House, holiday events, Grandparents Day, etc.

Eureka Springs School District

CND, Sydney High, partners with the district Future Farmers of America (FFA) group to serve district grown lettuce and strawberries in the cafeteria. Students worked together to build the hydroponics facility. Students then harvest the items and prepare them for market. The district Child Nutrition Program has become a loyal customer to the FFA, and students across the district reap the benefits of these locally grown products by consuming meals prepared in the cafeteria.

Resources

Visit the Child Nutrition Unit webpage > Programs > Farm To School for resources and guidance

Procurement

- *Micro-Purchases – Develop specifications → Conduct market research → Contact a vendor and make the purchase → Distribute micro-purchases equitable among qualified suppliers.*
- *Informal Purchases – Draft specifications in writing → Identify and gather at least three quotes from suppliers that are eligible, able, and willing to provide products → Evaluate bidder’s responses to your specifications → Determine most responsive and responsible bidder at lowest price and award contract → Manage the contract.*
- *Formal Purchases – Develop solicitation → Publicly announce the IFB/RFP → Evaluate bidder’s response to your specifications → Award contract to the most responsive and responsible bidder at the lowest price → Manage the contract to ensure compliance.*

Best Practices

School Districts must comply with 2 CFR 200 and USDA program regulations (7CFR part 210, Part 215, and Part 220) including the Buy American Provision set forth in 7 CFR 210.21(d) for the purchase of all agricultural goods purchased for Child Nutrition Programs. Districts should utilize small, minority and women's businesses, enterprises and labor surplus firms when soliciting responses to bids and purchases. Procurement Reviews are conducted in the same year as the Administrative Review and focus on the use of federal funds in the Child Nutrition Programs.

Northwest Arkansas Buying Group

One way some districts across the state have tackled procurement is by forming a buying/purchasing group with neighboring schools. The ability to order products at a higher volume helps districts get better prices and more options to choose for their students. The Northwest Arkansas Buying Group was created to offer more buying power to smaller regional schools. There are currently multiple buying groups across the state. This buying group includes: Farmington, Prairie Grove, Greenland, West Fork, Huntsville and Eureka Springs. Wendy Burrus, CND at Farmington School District says “Working in the buying group has helped these schools work together in trying new products, creating specifications, and gain more buying power through a higher usage of products.”

Resources

Visit the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit webpage > Procurement to find procurement memos, sample solicitations, guidance on upcoming procurement reviews, and more.

Increasing Meal Participation

- *The Child Nutrition Program provides a healthy balanced meal for students that follows the USDA meal pattern.*
- *Students are able to focus better on a full stomach, which leads to higher test scores, decreased discipline, and improved student engagement.*
- *Developing a marketing and advertising plan will help promote the districts child nutrition program.*

Best Practices

Districts should market and advertise their Child Nutrition Program to parents, students, and the community. CNDs and staff should get to know and engage their students; plan menus based on their preferences; try new menu items, solicit student feedback, and coordinate menus with the seasons, holidays or special events. Networking with other districts across the state is a great way to share ideas and tips for increasing participation.

Mayflower School District

CND, Krista Stephens, alters her cycle menus throughout the year and tests new recipes to keep her students excited about what is cooking in the cafeteria. This year the nutrition staff made campfire sauce to serve with their chicken tacos. The sauce mimics a sauce served in a popular restaurant that the students love. After getting to know the students and their preferences, she was able to produce a product that helped boost their participation.

Resources

Visit the following websites for great resources:

- ✓ The Institute of Child Nutrition: Marketing Your School Nutrition Programs
- ✓ Schoolnutrition.org
- ✓ Smarterlunchrooms.org



Managing Debt

- *Ensure effective control and accountability*
- *Provide accurate, current, and complete disclosure of financial and accounting systems as required.*
- *Operate under specific written procedures for determining the allowability of costs.*

Best Practices

Districts should have the ability to accurately track all revenues and expenditures for the nonprofit school food service account separately from all other transactions. Internal control procedures must be in place to ensure that only allowable costs are charged to the nonprofit school food service account. Districts should also complete the Paid Lunch Equity tool each year to evaluate its need to raise its paid lunch prices for students.

Benton School District

CND, Martha Nehus, uses her point of service software system as a means to set up email notifications when the student's cafeteria account gets low. Emails are sent twice a week to the households and also manually calls and texts the families to notify them of the balance. This practice allows the district to stay on top of unpaid meal charges that often lead to large amounts of debt for the district.

Resources

Visit the Arkansas Child Nutrition Unit webpage under the "Guidance" tab to find financial management resources and the "Important Information" tab to access information on paid lunch equity and non-program foods. In addition, the Institute of Child Nutrition has online training materials that cover all areas of financial management and procurement.