



## CH.7

# Marketing School Meals for Success!



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*You have worked hard to plan and serve quality meals and you know they are the best in town—for nutritional value as well as taste. How can you be sure your customers know that, too? Bottom line: You need to market your school nutrition program.*

**This chapter will focus on using effective marketing techniques to increase participation in your program. You will learn about:**

- The role of marketing in school nutrition programs
- How to develop, implement, and evaluate your marketing plan
- Why it is important to involve the school community, starting with your staff
- Ways to reach out to your stakeholders—teachers, parents, school administrators, and the community
- Initiatives and promotions such as Team Nutrition, Farm to School, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program
- How to use promotions and merchandising to get students' attention.

Your marketing plan is an investment in the future success of your school nutrition operation. You can use marketing principles to benefit your students. By putting the needs of the student first, the school nutrition program provides nutritious meals that enhance academic performance and encourage the development of lifelong healthy eating habits.

### INTRODUCTION

You face stiff competition in your school nutrition program, ranging from the traditional bag lunch from home to restaurant chains. Your students have choices, whether there is an open or closed campus, or whether they qualify for free, reduced-price, or paid meals. Through marketing, you *can* influence students' choices to eat the meals you prepare.

Marketing also helps you create a positive image of your program with the adults that can sway students' choices. These include administrators, teachers, parents, the local media, and even your own staff. Start with quality meals and quality service, combine these with good marketing and effective promotions, and you have a recipe for success!

### The Role of Marketing in School Nutrition Programs

You may be familiar with the traditional four Ps of marketing: Product, Price, Promotion, and Placement. However, this model doesn't emphasize the customer, and that is why a fifth P has been added to the mix: People! Today, marketing has shifted to focus on the customer, or rather, the relationship with the customer.



Let's take a minute to review the five Ps as they relate to school nutrition:

1. **Product** – Product refers to a product *or* service. In school nutrition, it is not just the food, but how it is served.
2. **Price** – This not only includes the actual price, but the perceived value in comparison to price.
3. **Promotion** – Promotion communicates the benefit and availability of products and services. School nutrition promotion examples include events, taste-testing, newsletters, posting menus online, contests, social media, posters, etc.
4. **Placement** – Placement is about making sure your product or service is in the right place at the right time. Examples in school meals include fast, convenient service for short lunch periods, breakfast grab-and-go kiosks, and strategic placement of food items on the service line to influence student choices.
5. **People** – People is all about relationships. Building and maintaining positive relationships in school nutrition is dependent on outstanding customer service.

In your school marketing mix, the customer drives the entire marketing plan. Let's take a step back and think about what "customer" means in the school nutrition setting. Your school nutrition program has many internal and external customers. Another way to think of customers is as stakeholders: people or organizations with an interest in your program. These include students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others in the community who are interested in the well-being of children. The student is the primary customer, while the other stakeholders are considered secondary customers. The main focus of school nutrition is to meet the dietary needs of each student customer during the school day.

What does a student customer expect? Today's children eat out more often than those in previous generations. Changes to the National School Lunch Act have helped schools gain control over the outside influences of marketing and advertising to children and adolescents in the school setting. However, students have access to more forms of media than ever before outside of school.

These external influences are a form of competition in that they set expectations. Students expect the food, atmosphere, staff, and service line to be similar to what they experience when eating out in a commercial restaurant. They have grown to expect quick service, receive value for their money, and be greeted by a pleasant server. They want to see food that is attractive, convenient, and fresh. In other words, students expect the same dining experience *you* expect to receive. For customers to be satisfied, school nutrition programs must provide outstanding customer service.

While competition and external influences are not the only reasons to market your school nutrition program, you need to consider the impact of the external environment. Marketing can also set or reset stakeholders' perceptions of school meals. Marketing can positively influence your staff's attitudes about their work. When the outcome of marketing is increased participation, students *and* your bottom line reap the benefits.

### Required Marketing

At minimum, every school food authority (SFA) must make a public announcement near the beginning of each school year that the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and/or Special Milk Program (SMP) are available in the school or school district. This notice must include the eligibility criteria for free and reduced-price meals and/or free milk. It must be provided to the local news media, the unemployment office, and any major employers who are contemplating large layoffs in the attendance area of the school. Some State agencies may prepare this public release on behalf of SFAs. While you are required to make this announcement, it's just one of many elements to include in a marketing plan.



### Where To Start

Maybe you have a marketing plan, or you have done promotions in the past. Or maybe you are looking at marketing for the first time. No matter what your experience, now is the perfect time to look at marketing with a fresh set of eyes. So where should you begin?

Make sure you have a solid understanding of marketing as it relates to school nutrition. Marketing is a discipline in and of itself. For someone without specific training or skills in marketing, it can seem like a really big challenge. However, you do not have to be an expert to build and implement a solid marketing plan for your school nutrition program.

Fortunately, many educational resources and tools are available to help you do this. These include the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) resources as well as many USDA tools. These resources will be examined in greater depth later in this chapter.

Explore options for marketing assistance within your school district and community. Your district may already have a marketing, business, or

communications expert who may be able to give guidance or help facilitate the process. Experts in the community may be willing to volunteer their time, or marketing students at a local university may be available. You could also consider hiring a marketing consultant.

Marketing may cost money, but it is an important activity to achieve your goals. Plan ahead and include marketing in your budget. As marketing increases your participation, you will see the return on investment in your bottom line.

Even more important, marketing is an investment in children's health. By increasing customer participation, you are increasing the number of times a student eats a nourishing meal.

Creating, implementing, and evaluating your school nutrition program's marketing plan takes time, so be sure to plan ahead. The rest of the chapter will guide you through the process. Your marketing efforts help ensure increased and sustained school meal participation.



## Facility Upgrades Increase Customer Satisfaction and Participation

All successful businesses know that a major key to gaining and retaining customers is to provide an inviting, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing environment. Federal Way Public Schools Nutrition Services department made a few key changes in one of its school kitchens that demonstrate this principle in action. The Sacajawea Middle School lunchroom badly needed an upgrade. The kitchen looked dingy, old, and uninviting. Challenges such as exposed piping, old cabinetry, a yellowed ceiling, and combination concrete/tile flooring had rendered previous remodeling attempts unsuccessful. Although multiple tactics and treatments had been tried, the area retained the same unsightly appearance. The school is located in a low-income neighborhood with 64 percent free/reduced eligibility, and the district and school understood the importance of making improvements to increase student meal participation. The district:

- Hired a graphic artist to create branded signage for the main serving line and snack bar areas
- Removed the exposed piping and old cabinetry
- Installed a stainless steel splash guard
- Painted the ceiling with a basic, white paint
- Installed new epoxy flooring.

The Nutrition Services budget covered the costs of the renovation, using employees for labor, with the exception of the floor and graphic design. The new epoxy floor cost \$11,650. The graphic design was \$3,900, including design ownership rights. Now the graphics are available for use in the district's 36 school kitchens, as well as to the USDA, allowing them to share the design with other school districts. It is evident the marketing efforts paid off. A study of participation in Sacajawea's lunch program over a nearly 60-day period before and after the upgrades demonstrated 2.7-percent increase in participation.



**School District:**  
Federal Way  
Public Schools

**Located:**  
Federal Way,  
Washington

**Enrollment:**  
21,800

**Website:**  
[www.fwps.org](http://www.fwps.org)



Sacajawea Middle School branded signage for the main serving line

## CREATE YOUR MARKETING PLAN

In the previous section, you learned about the importance of customer relationships in marketing. It will come as no surprise that creating a successful roadmap or plan for marketing is best accomplished as a group effort, rather than a solo act. Use the following four steps to develop a solid marketing plan. They focus on involving people in your school community who can make a difference in whether students choose to participate in your nutrition program. The steps are:

1. Engage stakeholders.
2. Conduct market research.
3. Draft your plan.
4. Communicate the plan and timeline to stakeholders.

Let's look at each step in more detail. Best practices are built into each step to help ensure success.

### Engage Stakeholders

Building relationships with your customers is critical to successful marketing. Consider all of the stakeholders who may influence school meal participation, and engage them in your marketing planning. Here are suggestions:

- Obtain administrative support early in the process.
- Involve your staff throughout the process.
- Gather a small group of key stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, administrators, school nutrition program staff, and community representatives – for input at checkpoints in research and planning. Consider establishing a Student Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC).
- Involve your school wellness committee. Find ideas at (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn>).
- Connect with high school business teachers to involve students in the marketing plan as part of a class project.
- Engage classroom health and physical education teachers to reinforce curriculum and cafeteria experiences.

- Create incentives and other methods for buy-in from stakeholders. For example, you could hold a districtwide competition for brand development, promotional themes, or artwork.

### Conduct Market Research About Your School Nutrition Program

Marketing research focuses on understanding your current program's strengths and weaknesses, customers, and competition. Your research doesn't have to be complicated or expensive.

First, identify strengths and weaknesses in your school nutrition program from a marketing perspective. Take advantage of free self-assessment tools to determine areas needing improvement such as:

- ICN Best Practices for Marketing the School Nutrition Program (<https://theicn.org/>); includes a web-based, self-assessment checklist covering six marketing practice categories.



### Best Practices for Marketing the School Nutrition Program

You can apply marketing principles to benefit the health and well-being of your students. To help you build or improve your marketing plan, the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) has created a research-based, self-assessment tool. The *Best Practices for Marketing the School Nutrition Program* (<https://theicn.org/>) resource was developed with the assistance of School Nutrition (SN) professionals from across the country. This tool is based on ICN research indicating that SN marketing initiatives can be successful if key practices are implemented.



### Self-Assessment Tool

Based on feedback from SN professionals, the resource was designed as a Web-based, self-assessment checklist. The tool includes six practice categories of marketing initiatives:

- Development
- Implementation
- School Nutrition Staff Involvement
- Communication
- Stakeholder Support
- Advantages for Students.

Under the 6 practice areas are 16 goals and 73 best practice statements.

When using the self-assessment, review each statement. Then rate the status using a four-point scale by checking the current status block. The four response options include “Elements in Place,” “Majority of Elements in Place,” “Few Elements in Place,” and “No Elements in Place.” Complete “Notes for Action Plan” to address any best practice identified as one that requires further attention.

Once you complete the assessment, you can create an

### SECTION 1

### DEVELOPMENT

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on developing the marketing initiative.

**Goal 1: Marketing strategies are identified to update the school nutrition program.**

BEST PRACTICE STATEMENT	CURRENT STATUS				NOTES FOR ACTION PLAN
	Elements in Place	Majority of Elements in Place	Few Elements in Place	No Elements in Place	
Encourage the planning for comfortable dining furniture that is age appropriate and promote social interactions among customers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Offer a variety of food choices to accommodate the ethnical and religious/cultural diversity of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Portion of the Development section from the Self-Assessment Tool from *Best Practices for Marketing the School Nutrition Program*, p. 11



action plan to address those practices needing attention. Schedule an annual review for your action plans and implementation process. You can use this tool to develop and maintain a successful marketing initiative for school nutrition programs.

The practices featured in this resource are measurable practices that define achievable and effective strategies for school nutrition professionals. You can use this best practice resource to identify:

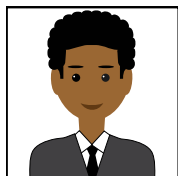
- essential practices to implement in your school nutrition program;
- the role of school nutrition staff and other stakeholders;
- resources needed for planning, developing, and implementing policies and procedures related to marketing practices; and
- training needs of school nutrition staff specific to marketing activities.



## Menu Chat

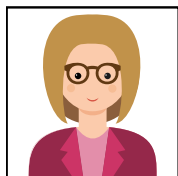


## Hello friends!



Tyler

I want to start doing more marketing and nutrition promotion; how do you get others to help? I know I need help to accomplish our goals.



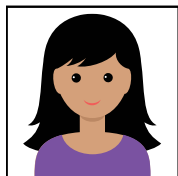
Megan

I have learned to ask for help. When I tell the parent group or wellness committee about a project I want to complete, I usually have a few people willing to help. Wellness committees have to monitor and report progress each year; our projects help meet that goal.



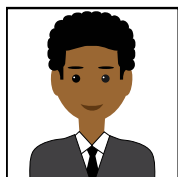
Lin

I let the advisors and student groups that are interested in community service projects know about the many different opportunities to volunteer in our program. One year a journalism student helped write monthly media releases. I kept copies and now have a template to update each year.



Elena

I spoke with a local business leaders group about strategies. They decided to partner with us on a small project to help showcase our Farm to School produce. This has worked out very well.



Tyler

**THANK YOU**

You have so many great ideas! Thank you for sharing with me. I am energized!

Obtain valuable insight about your current program, customers, and competition by surveying stakeholders. Your district communications office may be able to assist. Low-cost informal options for obtaining stakeholder feedback include:

- Online survey tools
- Social media
- Staff discussions and surveys
- Lunchroom and classroom surveys.

Review your school district's strategic plan. Consider how your school nutrition program fits within the school district's mission, goals, and long-range plans.

Look for State and national initiatives that you might be able to implement at the local level (for ideas, see Effective Strategies, Initiatives, and Promotions section later in this chapter). If your State has already developed resources and outreach, you may need fewer local resources to extend an initiative in your district. Check with your State Nutrition Action Plan and Cooperative Extension contacts. You may also want to tie in community, professional, and commodity organization campaigns.

By now you have a clear picture of your program's strengths and weaknesses, customers, competition, and existing resources. You have stakeholder buy-in to develop a marketing plan. So, now let's take a look at how to draft a plan.



**School District:**  
Blue Valley Unified  
School District 384

**Located:**  
Randolph, Kansas

**Enrollment:**  
200

**Website:**  
[www.usd384.org](http://www.usd384.org)

### District Website Features Menus with Photos

In Blue Valley School District, Food Service Manager Stormy Brandt combined her nutrition expertise with technology to teach K–12 students about nutrition and the revised school meals. To illustrate the school meals each day, she started creating a sample meal on a tray to display in the hall by the cafeteria. There, students could look at the display and decide whether they wanted that day's reimbursable lunch. A student with a camera as well as the district's communications and information technology staff took notice. Now the district's website features photos of all standard lunch offerings along with menus! When parents and students check the food service calendar, they can see the listings and what the lunch and breakfast trays will look like. The photos are particularly helpful for younger kids who may remember that they like stromboli when they see it, even if they don't exactly remember the name! The photos also help generate discussion. Brandt said,



Blue Valley School District displays and photographs sample meals to post on the district website along with menus.

“Students are very interested in how we choose what to serve, and it gives us a chance to talk about nutrition in a positive way.” Brandt has retired from the district but the website continues to stay updated.

*Connection to Best Practice Research: Institute of Child Nutrition research shows communication, stakeholder support, and advantages for students are three best practices for marketing school nutrition.*



### Draft Your Plan

A marketing plan includes clearly defined goals, target audience, strategies with supporting measurable objectives and action steps, a budget, and evaluation. Fortunately, you and your team do not need to start from scratch to write a marketing plan! Several excellent resources exist.

### ICN Best Practices

You can use the ICN Best Practices checklist as a starting point to create your own plan. That will ensure that you build all six best practice areas into your plan.

### USDA School Breakfast Marketing

Another resource is the USDA's School Breakfast Marketing toolkit (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/marketing>), which includes ideas for developing a marketing strategy. While the resource is specific to breakfast, many of the ideas also apply to lunch, including defining your objectives and audience as well as creating your image.

### Build in Marketing Strategies

Incorporating promotional strategies can help encourage children to make healthy choices. Strategies include:

- Manage Portion Sizes
- Increase Convenience
- Improve Visibility
- Enhance Taste Expectations
- Utilize Suggestive Selling
- Set Smart Pricing Strategies

These strategies are covered in more detail later.

Later in the chapter, we will showcase effective initiatives and promotions that you can incorporate into your marketing plan. Also, keep in mind that school nutrition marketing efforts cross over into education and communications, all promoting the health and well-being of students. Be sure to think about how these aspects will be integrated:

- Food-Safe Schools
- Local School Wellness Policies
- Farm to School
- Team Nutrition resources for cafeteria and classroom



***Each local educational agency (LEA) needs to establish a comprehensive Local School Wellness Policy. The LEA has legal and administrative***

***control of the school district and is responsible for the policy and its implementation, monitoring, and publicity. SFAs should have an active role on the Wellness Committee(s) and should make their stakeholders aware of the ability to participate in the committee. The wellness policy is a general area of the Administrative Review (Section V: General Areas, Module: General Program Compliance – Local School Wellness Policy).***

Your marketing plan should also include evaluation. All your marketing objectives should be measurable and have a timeframe. A good framework for writing objectives is to use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Phased). To learn more about writing SMART objectives, see Appendix 7.A. Utilize baseline and periodic sales and purchase records as well as survey data.

You and your team have created a marketing plan. The last step before implementing the plan is to communicate it to key stakeholders.

### Communicate the Plan and Timeline to Key Stakeholders

Before you implement your new marketing plan, let your customers know about it. You can share the entire plan with your small stakeholder group and summarize it for various school community audiences. Build excitement and buy-in for the changes in your program that will result from your marketing plan.

### IMPLEMENT YOUR MARKETING PLAN

Now it is time to put your researched and communicated marketing plan into action. Here are key aspects to implementing your marketing plan:

- Build marketing costs into your budget.
- Train your staff and make sure they understand your plan and brand image.
- Collect baseline data for evaluation.
- Implement program changes.
  - Small changes can be done overnight or over the weekend; for example, putting fruit in a new, conveniently located display.
  - Other changes may require more time and can be done over break; for example, rearranging the layout of the lunchroom to nudge students toward healthier choices.
  - Campaigns and initiatives may require several months to implement, especially if you are developing new marketing materials, making changes to procurement agreements, or modifying menus and recipes.
- Implement your marketing by communicating with stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

Use messaging and communications vehicles that work for each stakeholder audience. This communications strategy is used throughout the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating your marketing plan. The USDA Marketing School Breakfast online toolkit provides excellent tips for tailoring messages and marketing methods by audience (see *Take a Closer Look: Tailoring Messages and Marketing Methods by Audience*).

### EVALUATE YOUR MARKETING PLAN

According to your plan, you will be evaluating your marketing efforts over a certain time period. You can again use the ICN Best Practices checklist as a guide for evaluating your program. Collect sales and purchase records for the marketing plan timeframe and compare against your baseline information. You can also resurvey your stakeholders and compare differences. Use this information to make improvements to your future plan.

So far this chapter has covered planning, implementing, and evaluating marketing plans for your school nutrition program. Now it is time to take a look at some proven marketing strategies, initiatives, and promotions that you can consider for your own marketing plan.

### EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES, INITIATIVES, AND PROMOTIONS

When it comes to marketing strategies, initiatives, and promotions, you can find plenty of tested concepts. The remainder of the chapter provides successful marketing examples. You do not have to start from scratch; check out these ideas. Sometimes what works for others will work well for your operation.

#### Build on Effective Initiatives: Make School Meals a Movement

Get your students excited about school meals! Consider the creative initiatives below. Also, check with your State office to learn about other efforts occurring in your area.

#### Implement Marketing Strategies

These strategies can help move children toward nutritious food choices. The goal of these strategies is to create sustainable lunchrooms that guide smarter choices.



The principles introduced in the marketing planning section promote healthful eating. Schools are achieving great results with low-cost or no-cost techniques. Let's look at each of these principles in a little more detail. Keep in mind, these changes are designed to guide students to make healthier choices.

**Manage Portion Sizes:** This principle focuses on guiding students to manage portion sizes. Tactics include using pre-portioned packages as well as using smaller bowls, plates, and serving spoons for self-serve foods. Use this strategy for self-serve items that are not required components, such as olives on salad bars.

## Menu Chat

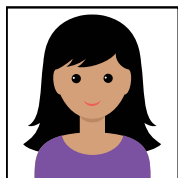


Hi all!



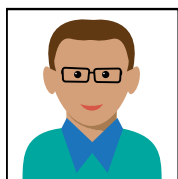
Lin

I want to engage students in my plans to promote our meal programs and the efforts to increase access to healthy food. What has worked well for you?



Elena

I talk with my teachers and find common connections to our promotions and classroom curriculum. For example, nearly every grade level is interested in data collection and analysis as a way to apply math skills. We have many areas of data collection and analysis we need help with, such as measuring decreases in plate waste after an education outreach or surveying students of favorite menu ideas. Engaging the students helps improve our evaluation outcomes.



Dylan

Our high school marketing class has helped us with promoting our meal programs in a way that is of interest to students. The students are creative and they know how to engage other students.



Lin

### THANKS!

You are right—most of the ideas you have shared sound like valuable learning opportunities for students.



## ***Tailoring Messages and Marketing Methods by Audience***

Different audiences may be concerned with different aspects of school meals. Be sure your messages are tailored to engage each stakeholder audience and use the marketing methods most likely to reach them. You may want to check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Health and Academic Achievement* ([https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf)). The following ideas for marketing school breakfast are adapted from the USDA Marketing School Breakfast toolkit at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/marketing-strategy>.

### ***Students***

What's Important to Students:

- **Food That Tastes Good.** Find out what types of foods your students like to eat.
- **Having Fun.** Make sure activities that promote school breakfast are age appropriate and varied.
- **Being Healthy.** Your students (especially teenagers) are interested in the benefits of a healthy diet.

Marketing Methods:

- Teacher encouragement
- School posters
- Assemblies
- Peer nutrition educators
- Contests
- Events (e.g., lunch with local celebrity/chef or high school football players (if at elementary school or middle school level)
- Advertisements on school computer screensavers
- Surveys about food preferences
- Articles in school newsletters
- Social media.

### ***Parents and Guardians***

What's Important to Parents and Guardians:

- **Convenience.** Mornings can be hectic. School breakfast takes one thing off of the morning "to do" list.
- **Value.** Breakfast at school is inexpensive. Many families that already participate in the National School Lunch Program are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast.
- **Nutrition.** Parents can be sure their child is eating a healthy breakfast. School breakfast is guaranteed to meet one-fourth of the recommended daily intake of nutrients.



- **Link to Positive Academic Performance.** Research shows that students who eat a healthy breakfast are more attentive, have better memory recall, and perform better on standardized tests than those who do not eat a healthy breakfast.

Marketing Methods:

- Flyers
- Articles in the school newsletter
- Automated messages on school phone lines (attendance line, “on hold” messages)
- Presentations at Parent Teacher Association meetings
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Special event (e.g., breakfast with parents)
- Public service announcements (PSAs).

### **Teachers**

What’s Important to Teachers:

- **Strong Academics.** Students who eat a healthy breakfast perform better academically than students who do not do so.
- **Healthy Students.** School breakfasts provide approximately one-fourth of the recommended daily intake of nutrients for students.
- **Instruction Time.** School breakfast does not have to interrupt the school day. Breakfast in the classroom can be an opportunity for nutrition education or a short, scheduled “nutrition break.”
- **Student Behavior.** Eating breakfast is linked to better student behavior and fewer absences.

Marketing Methods:

- Principal leadership
- Research on the academic and behavioral benefits of breakfast
- A “trial run” of breakfast in the classroom
- Information about breakfast in the classroom (handout in the toolkit)
- Invite teacher participation on school breakfast decisions.

### **Administrators**

What’s Important to Administrators:

- **School Performance.** School breakfast can help improve academic performance for those students who otherwise would not eat a healthy morning meal.
- **Behavior.** Students behave better in class when they have eaten breakfast.
- **Healthy Students.** School breakfast gives students approximately one-fourth of their daily recommended intake of nutrients.
- **Cost-Effective Strategies.** Administrators need to know that School Breakfast Programs can be cost effective.

**Marketing Methods:**

- PowerPoint presentation (sample included in the toolkit)
- Letters (samples included in the toolkit)
- Other administrators' letters of support
- Invitations to school breakfast events
- Research detailing the academic benefits of a healthy breakfast
- A well-thought-out breakfast expansion plan
- Cost calculations (use calculators included in the toolkit).

**Communities****What's Important to the Community:**

- **Strong Academics.**
- **Healthy Students.** Healthy children help to make a healthy community. Eating a healthy breakfast is an important part of a healthy diet.
- **Help During Difficult Economic Times.** Families whose children are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches are also eligible for free or reduced-price breakfast. The School Breakfast Program can help families that are trying to make ends meet.

**Marketing Methods:**

- Through PSAs
- Inviting local politicians to share a school breakfast meal with students
- Inviting local celebrities to participate in a school breakfast.

**Other Considerations****Specific Ages and Grade Levels:**

Marketing to a 9-year-old and a teenager is very different. Analyze what your school's students are interested in and try to use it to your advantage. Is there a TV character that they like? Which local heroes or local celebrities/chefs or favorite teacher do they admire? Can a favorite teacher or staff person help champion/promote school meals? Do teenagers have growing concern about nutrition and are they aware of all the benefits offered by breakfast?

**Cultural Identity:**

If you are targeting a diverse group of students, you might consider foods from a variety of cultures for breakfast. In the United States, we typically associate waffles, pancakes, cereal, and certain fruits with breakfast. Try researching breakfast recipes from the many cultures that make up your student body. Better yet, ask students to share favorite breakfast menu ideas from their families' recipe books and incorporate them into the breakfast rotation.

**Language**

Many students may come from homes where English is not the primary language. Promoting your programs in a variety of languages will help you to reach the widest audience.



**Make Healthy Foods More Convenient:** Put healthy choices in places that are convenient for students and allow quick access. By making healthy foods more convenient, people are more likely to take them. Here are some ideas:

- Put healthy food by the cash register.
- Precut and bag healthy foods for grab-and-go service.
- Create a healthy convenience line. After creating a healthy convenience line, one school saw a 35 percent increase in consumption of healthy choices and increased overall sales.

- Locate your salad bar in a convenient location. In one school, moving the salad bar resulted in a 200 to 300 percent sales increase in 2 weeks.

**Improve Visibility:** The most visible foods are chosen more often than those less in view. Place healthier items within reach or in high-traffic areas. Add signs or colorful displays to attract attention.

**Enhance Taste Expectations:** How food is presented or displayed can lead to higher taste expectations. Describe your menu items in language that appeals to students.

## Grab-and-Go Breakfast Kiosks Increase Breakfast Participation

In Liberal Unified School District 480, high school breakfast participation was not only low, but extremely low. So Child Nutrition Program leaders knew they would have to approach the situation in a unique way. Of the 70 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals, only 11 percent were taking advantage of the breakfast program for various reasons. The solution would have to be extremely efficient, not cause tardiness or class disruptions, and would of course have to meet the USDA nutrition standards for school breakfast. Child nutrition staff developed grab-and-go breakfast bags and customized kiosks placed in the most heavily trafficked common areas at the school. These “Second Chance Breakfast” kiosks allow students to quickly purchase or pick up a bag that includes a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, sausage biscuit or muffin, plus squeezable yogurt or string cheese, and milk, juice, or apple slices. At the beginning, participation did



In the Liberal School District, conveniently placed grab-and-go kiosks have resulted in increased breakfast participation.

increase, but a promotional campaign really put the campaign over the edge. The school’s graphic arts and video production students created posters and videos. Within 8 weeks, the Second Chance Breakfast kiosks were selling 300 meals daily, compared to the 28 meals when the program initially launched. The school still offers traditional breakfast, and those participation numbers have not decreased, so the grab-and-go program has increased overall participation in breakfast.



**School District:**  
Liberal Unified  
School District 480

**Located:**  
Liberal, Kansas

**Enrollment:**  
4,700

**Website:**  
[www.usd480.net](http://www.usd480.net)

**Utilize Suggestive Selling:** Cafeteria staff and other adults can affect students' food decisions, especially healthier choices. Use signs and verbal prompts. Make direct eye contact with students while encouraging the consumption of healthful foods.

**Set Smart Pricing Strategies:** People like to get a good deal for their money, which can have both positive effects (such as sticking to a budget) and negative effects (like prompting impulse purchases because treats were on sale, or **bundled**). Use the power of **smart pricing** to give healthy foods the edge!

### USDA's Team Nutrition Initiative

Team Nutrition is an initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) that supports the Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). To accomplish this work, Team Nutrition utilizes three behavior-focused strategies:

1. Provide training and technical assistance to child nutrition professionals so that they can prepare and serve nutritious meals that appeal to children;
2. Deliver nutrition education to help children gain the knowledge, skills, and motivation to make healthy food and physical activity choices as part of a healthy lifestyle; and
3. Build support for healthy school and child care environments that encourage nutritious food choices and physically active lifestyles.

Team Nutrition provides free resources and materials to schools that participate in USDA Child Nutrition Programs. FNS also provides competitive Team Nutrition Training Grants to State agencies that administer Child Nutrition Programs at the State level. These grants offer agencies funding to support their programming efforts. For more information, please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition-training-grants>.

### Farm to School: Get the School Community Excited About Local Foods

Promoting local foods used in your program can be a valuable part of marketing your school nutrition program. Call attention in your menu to all local foods, in addition to fruits and vegetables.

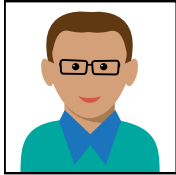
Activities like school gardens, farm visits, taste tests, culinary instruction, and classroom-based lessons about food and agriculture can increase children's acceptance of new foods. Then when these foods appear on the lunch menu, children are more apt to try and like them.

School gardens are a great way to help students learn where food comes from and encourage them to try new fruits and vegetables. TN curricula include strategies to connect gardens with nutrition messages in the classroom and cafeteria, and at home. These messages are consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The materials include colorful visuals, games, and activities that are age-appropriate and fun. Collaborate with teachers and volunteers coordinating your school garden to make connections to your cafeteria. See *Take a Closer Look Farm to School: Promoting Your Program* on page 231 for more ways to promote your school nutrition program through local foods. Learn more about procuring local foods in chapter 5.

## Menu Chat

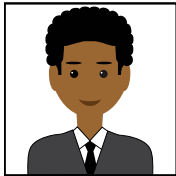


## Hello!



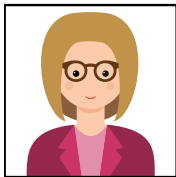
Dylan

I'm looking for suggestions. How do you fit nutrition education into your busy schedule?



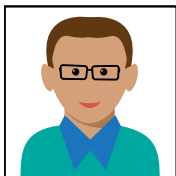
Tyler

We don't have as much time to assist with nutrition education in the classroom as we would like. I contribute to promoting nutrition education by sending a weekly email that highlights a resource, usually from Team Nutrition, to our teachers. I am viewed as a valued source of quality nutrition education materials and teachers like that the materials are designed to meet education standards in math, science, and language arts. Working with teachers, I display the "Dig In" posters in the cafeteria. On our website, we support the program's parent material messages to reinforce foods we offer in the cafeteria.



Megan

I modified a lunch planning activity from Team Nutrition's *Popular Events Idea Booklet*. We offer the learning activity to our 4th grade classrooms every year. The students enjoy the hands-on experience, and it helps us to get student input for the next menu year. Those 4th graders will be our 5th grade school leaders next year. And, it is rewarding and worth the effort.



Dylan

**THANKS**

I am going to check out Team Nutrition resources today.



**School District:**  
Seabrook School  
District

**Located:**  
Seabrook, New  
Hampshire

**Enrollment:**  
700

**Website:**  
[www.sau21.org](http://www.sau21.org)

## See-Through Root Garden

With multiple school garden beds, Seabrook School District connects students to nutrient-dense fresh foods and the science of cultivating foods. Students participate in classroom and hands-on education and experiments utilizing the gardens. Harvesting fresh foods and utilizing them in the school cafeteria reinforces concepts of fresh, seasonal foods.

Chef Kimberly Adkins, district school nutrition director, worked with the maintenance team and a local Master Gardener to redesign a raised garden bed to make the walls transparent. They installed transparent acrylic glass on the sides of this garden so that students can see seeds sprout, root, and grow long before the plants breach the soil into the sunlight. This garden bed, named a “root garden,” is basically built like a large see-through ant farm. Along with this “root garden” bed, the team built two raised beds that are easily accessible for students in wheelchairs, so that they may fully participate with classmates.

Two of the raised garden beds are being used to conduct an experiment of heirloom seeds and genetically modified seeds. The students will gather data through classroom exercises and curriculum to establish plant growth, disease and pest resistance, constitution of the health of the plants, and the yield. The Seabrook Farm to School gardens connect students to earth sciences and the community. *Connection to Best Practice Research: USDA supports school gardens as a proven tactic for improving children’s attitudes and consumption of produce, and for incorporating experiential nutrition and agriculture education into the school curriculum.*



In Seabrook School District, a raised garden bed with transparent acrylic walls allows students to learn about plant growth in the soil.



## Farm to School: Promoting Your Program

If you are looking for ways to promote local foods as part of your school nutrition program’s marketing efforts, check out the resources compiled by the USDA Farm to School Program (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S-Planning-Kit.pdf>). The site provides links to videos, communications tips, graphics, calendars, recipes, menus, and other ideas for promoting your farm-to-school efforts. These great resources come from Cooperative Extension, school districts, and nonprofit organizations.



## Team Nutrition Education Resources



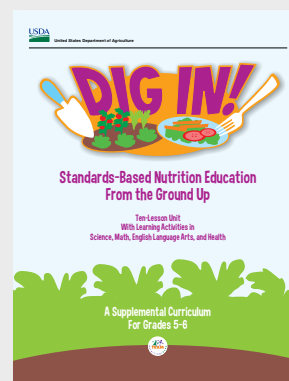
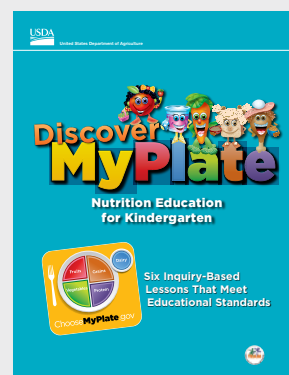
Team Nutrition (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/team-nutrition>) offers a variety of resources for nutrition education and physical activity in schools, from event ideas to classroom materials. Classroom materials available to help teachers promote healthy eating and physical activity range from standards-based curricula to informal activities. The resources are available for schools that participate in Federal Child Nutrition Programs. Here is a snapshot of materials available for order or download.

*Discover MyPlate* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/discover-myplate-nutrition-education-kindergarten>) fosters healthy food choices and physical activity during a critical developmental and learning period for children: kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers can meet education standards for math, science, English language arts, and health using the six interactive lessons.

*Serving Up MyPlate: A Yummy Curriculum* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/serving-myplate-yummy-curriculum>) is a collection of classroom materials to help elementary school teachers integrate nutrition education into math, science, English language arts, and health. This “yummy” curriculum introduces the importance of eating from all five food groups using the *MyPlate* icon. Students also learn the importance of physical activity to stay healthy.

*Great Garden Detective Adventure: A Standards-Based Gardening Nutrition Curriculum for Grades 3 and 4* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/great-garden-detective-adventure>) is an 11-lesson curriculum. Students discover what fruits and vegetables are sweetest, crunchiest, and juiciest. The lessons connect the school garden to the classroom, school cafeteria, and home.

*Dig In! Standards-Based Nutrition Education from the Ground Up* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/dig-standards-based-nutrition-education-ground>) is a 10-lesson curriculum for 5th and 6th graders. The unit encourages students to eat more fruits and vegetables and understand how these foods are grown.





If you want to hold an event at your school to promote nutrition and physical activity, check out the *Team Nutrition Popular Events Idea Booklet* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/team-nutrition-popular-events-idea-booklet>). The publication includes 20 themed event ideas for elementary and middle schools, ways to team up for success, handouts, templates, and other event support resources.



*Offer Versus Serve (OVS) Materials* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-versus-serve-national-school-lunch-program-posters>) are to be used to educate students and your staff about Offer versus Serve. The OVS Posters for Breakfast and Lunch can help students more quickly select the foods in the breakfast and lunch line that make up a reimbursable meal. The tip sheets provide an overview of OVS and may be used to provide training to your staff about the OVS requirements at breakfast and lunch.



*Fueling my Healthy Life* (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fueling-my-healthy-life>) is a digital nutrition education program for grades 6, 7, and 8. The program includes lesson plans, informational texts, interactive applications, videos, and classroom activities. The materials for each grade have a specific nutritional focus and are designed to raise awareness of the importance of healthy food choices, ultimately leading to positive behavior change.

### **Salad and Theme Bars:** Create Enthusiasm for School Meals

Providing choice increases the likelihood students will select a variety of food items. Salad bars and theme bars can present familiar or new foods in appealing ways. Benefits of utilizing salad bars and theme bars include:

- Increasing lunch participation
- Empowering students to make healthy choices on their own and to try new items
- Decreasing labor costs
- Decreasing food waste
- Helping schools meet USDA school meal patterns.

Research supports salad bars in schools as a means to offer a wider variety of fruits and vegetables. Allow students the opportunity to create their own fresh, crisp salad starting with a bowl of dark leafy greens. Offer a variety of food items, like kidney beans, cherry tomatoes, bell peppers, and whole grain croutons.

Offering other types of food bars can also refresh interest in longstanding menu items. Surprise students with a Latin American-themed taco bar. Offer students warmed whole grain-rich tortillas or taco shells with their choice of pulled Cuban-style pork, Peruvian-flavored chicken, chipotle seasoned tofu, or reduced-fat cheese, and a host of toppings like black beans, lettuce, and fresh salsa. This allows students the opportunity to be creative and helps decrease waste, because students are more likely to choose only what they want to consume. Train your staff to encourage portions that meet reimbursable meal requirements in a positive way.

Remember food safety is critical. Refer to chapters 2 and 3 for more information on produce and salad bar food safety.

### **Salad Bars Increase Fruit and Vegetable Consumption**

In Rockaway Township Schools, Copeland Middle School showcases a “Fitness Friday” salad bar and fitness stations. It is a collaborative effort between the Food Service Department and the Physical Education Department. Starting at the cafeteria, students visit stations throughout the school, where school nutrition staff and gym teachers encourage students to be active and to partake in healthy eating practices. The main lunch option is a very popular, colorful, and beautifully displayed salad bar. The main entree selection on Fitness Friday swells from 60 to 70 meals to 125-150 with students lining up out the door! By combining this grand presentation of healthy food choices with physical activity, the district encourages students to have healthier lifestyles both in and out of school.



**A colorful salad bar is a central feature of “Fitness Fridays” at Rockaway Township Schools.**



**School District:**  
Rockaway  
Township Public  
Schools

**Located:**  
Rockaway, New  
Jersey

**Enrollment:**  
2,300

**Website:**  
[www.rocktwp.net](http://www.rocktwp.net)

### Join the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy School Program

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program (HSP) (<https://www.healthiergeneration.org/>) takes a comprehensive approach to school wellness. HSP's website offers many tools for school nutrition programs, from recipes to promotion ideas. The program supports development of wellness policies and provides strategies for:

- Increasing physical activity opportunities before, during, and after school
- Enhancing nutrition education
- Establishing school employee wellness programs.

Joining the HSP encourages stakeholders to work together to achieve success in all areas of wellness. HSP supports schools through professional development, such as on-demand and live trainings, success stories, and hundreds of science-based resources.

### Communicating With the School Community to Create a Culture of Food Safety

Are you a food safety leader in your school community? You can be! As you have learned in this chapter, building relationships in the school community is a critical part of marketing. In earlier chapters, you read about the *Food-Safe Schools Action Guide* (Action Guide) (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Food-Safe-Schools-Action-Guide.pdf>) and creating a culture of food safety. The partnerships you build in your marketing efforts dovetail with creating a culture of food safety. The Action Guide includes an entire section filled with strategies, tips, and resources to effectively communicate your food safety messages and efforts to other school community members. For example, offer to provide allergy awareness training for teachers, administrators, parents, and other school partners. By reaching out to partners, you will improve food safety in your school community and succeed in creating a culture of food safety. Through those same efforts, you will be marketing your school nutrition program.



**School District:**  
Liberty County  
School System

**Located:**  
Hinesville, Georgia

**Enrollment:**  
10,400

**Website:**  
[www.liberty.k12.ga.us/](http://www.liberty.k12.ga.us/)

### Build Your Salad/Sub Bar

Liberty County School System increased fruit and vegetable consumption by creatively offering a "Build Your Salad/Sub Bar." These food bars offer a variety of vegetable choices that rotate to accommodate a variety of tastes. Production records showed Lewis Frasier Middle School salad consumption rose from 8 to 10 a day to over 75 salads a day. Students increased fruit and vegetable consumption throughout the following school year. Thereafter, Lewis Frasier Middle School averaged 90 salads per day!



In Liberty County School System, preportioned lettuce is at the start of the "Build Your Salad/Sub Bar."





### Making the Most of Your Menus (and Website)

When it comes to marketing, menus are your best marketing tool. Your customers read these every day in printed copy or on the school's website. In fact, students often decide to purchase lunch based solely on the day's menu or the promotions announcing it.

Menus also communicate information about the program to parents, teachers, and school administrators. Because menus list selling prices of lunches and a la carte items, this is your best opportunity to show that the complete lunch is the best buy. Here are some other tips:

- Send menus or fliers promoting online menus home with students. Include your email address and phone number, and let parents know that they can contact you.
- Put activities on the back of printed menus. Reward students for completing the activities at home with their parent/guardian.
- Use menus or other promotional fliers as tray liners. Include nutrition facts and activities on tray liners to promote menus and behaviors that contribute to overall health – like eating more legumes and suggestions for physical activities.
- Tell why school meals are a healthy choice. Target information to parents about the nutritional value of the meals you are offering. Parents may be more interested in nutrition than students. Target your messages to your audiences.

Go ahead and brag! Let your customers know about recognition that you have received for your efforts to serve healthy meals through initiatives such as the HSP, Farm to School, Team Nutrition, and Salad Bars to Schools.

### Planning Successful Promotions

Promotions can be big or small, short or long, and can reach many different audiences. Begin by identifying *what you want to achieve* and *whom you want to reach* with a particular promotion.

For example, you might plan a short promotion for back-to-school night targeting parents. Showcase why school meals are a smart choice with an attractive display. To interest students, you might plan a series of festive meals, complete with costumes for your staff or classroom tasting parties.

A promotion provides an excellent opportunity to introduce new menu items. However, don't overdo it. Show only one new food item at a time. A total of two or three in a month is plenty! Here is how to ensure success:

- Make the new food item sound appealing on the printed menu.
- Conduct a taste test to generate interest for an upcoming menu item.
- Display TN's colorful posters that show foods in exciting ways. These can be ordered for free at <https://pueblo.gpo.gov/TN/TNPubs.php> or via email at [TeamNutrition@usda.gov](mailto:TeamNutrition@usda.gov).

Your efforts to get students' attention need to be ongoing. It is easy to get busy with other program needs. Be sure to budget time to make promotions happen. Your customers will come to expect the promotions and be disappointed if there are none. See Appendix 7.B for more promotional tools and ideas.



## CONCLUSION

Put aside a set amount of your budget, time, and staff resources to plan, implement, and evaluate marketing efforts each year. Build on previous successes. Use existing research and resources, your imagination, and ideas from community-wide partnerships. Make your cafeteria *the place* for great food and fun.

Let's summarize some key points of this chapter:

- The marketing mix includes Product, Price, Promotion, Placement...and People!
  - Today, marketing places an emphasis on the relationship with the customer.
  - School nutrition programs must provide outstanding customer service to satisfy customers.
  - Involve school community partners to help influence students to choose your nutrition program.
- Many educational resources and tools are available to help you develop a marketing plan for your school nutrition program, including:
  - Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN)
  - Resources at the State, district, and community level.
- Marketing includes planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- Marketing strategies to encourage children to make healthy selections by providing them with a full spectrum of choice:
  - Manage Portion Sizes.
  - Increase Convenience.
  - Improve Visibility.
  - Enhance Taste Expectations.
  - Utilize Suggestive Selling.
- Take advantage of initiatives and promotions such as Farm to School, Team Nutrition, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy School Program.

Your marketing plan is an investment in the future success of your school nutrition operation. Use marketing principles in your school nutrition program to benefit your students. Be sure to revisit and evaluate your program at least annually to maximize effectiveness.

Start small and build according to your successes. Invest in marketing—the rewards to your program will be great!

Menu planning is a continual process. You can revisit this resource to evaluate and make continual improvements in all aspects of menu planning, from menu development to documentation, production, procurement, food safety, and menu accommodations in addition to marketing.



**Review and answer each of these questions. You will find the answer key at the end of the Menu Planner.**



1. The marketing mix includes five Ps: Product, Price, Promotion, Placement and \_\_\_\_\_? Explain why the fifth P is so important.
2. What are the four steps in creating a marketing plan?
3. What is a free resource you can use to assess your school nutrition program's marketing efforts?
4. Name at least three marketing strategies that encourage children to make healthy choices.
5. What are SMART objectives?

**If you got the answers right, great job! If you missed any, review that section of the chapter.**

### LINKS TO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program ([https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take\\_action/schools/](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/)).

Institute of Child Nutrition, Best Practices for Marketing the School Nutrition Program, University, MS (<https://theicn.org/>).

Institute of Child Nutrition, Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership, University, MS (<https://theicn.org/>).

Institute of Child Nutrition, Focus on the Customer, 2022, University, MS (<https://theicn.org/>).

Salad Bars to Schools (<http://www.saladbars2schools.org/>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Farm to School Program (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/farm-to-school>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Food-Safe Schools Action Guide, Alexandria, VA (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Food-Safe-Schools-Action-Guide.pdf>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Marketing School Breakfast (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/marketing>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study IV, Vol. I: School Foodservice Operations, School Environments, and Meals Offered and Served, by Mary Kay Fox, Elizabeth Condon, Mary Kay Crepinsek, et al. Project Officer, Fred Lesnett, Alexandria, VA (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-nutrition-dietary-assessment-study-iv>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP07-2015, Assessing Proposed Nutrition Education Costs in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, November 2014 (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/assessing-proposed-nutrition-education-costs-nsip-and-sbp>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Team Nutrition (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/team-nutrition>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Team Nutrition, Print Materials Order Form (<https://pueblo.gpo.gov/TN/TNPubs.php>).

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Team Nutrition, School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy-outreach-toolkit>).

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health and Academic Achievement. Atlanta, GA ([https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf)).

## APPENDIX ITEMS

**Appendix 7.A** CDC SMART Objectives

**Appendix 7.B** School Promotion Ideas and Tools