



**Menu Planner
for
School Meals**

Planning
Preparing



Serving
Marketing

Healthy School Meals



United States Department of Agriculture

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Overview

As a school nutrition professional, you are a vital link to children.

You can help children live healthier, now and in years to come. You and your school nutrition colleagues are part of a long and proud tradition. Since 1946, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) has provided financial support and USDA Foods to help schools and residential child care institutions safeguard the health and well-being of America's children through nourishing meals. Many schools have also joined the School Breakfast Program (SBP) to offer morning meals that help children be ready to learn.

While these programs have always been a partnership between the Federal Government, States, and local communities, you and your colleagues in schools have been—and still are—*the vital link* to children. Today, your role is even more important than ever. Research shows *crucial* relationships exist between nutrition and health, and nutrition and learning.

Since the early days of school lunch, students' eating habits and lifestyles have changed significantly. In the 1940s, diets lacking in nutrients were common. Today, Americans typically consume more calories than they expend, which leads to overweight and obesity. Such a lifestyle is linked to chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. While many U.S. children eat healthy diets and engage in physical activity, significant numbers are food insecure, obese,

and/or sedentary. Americans also tend to eat more saturated fat, sodium, and *trans* fat than is recommended—and too few whole grains, vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, and fat-free and low-fat dairy foods.

The *Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs* (nutrition standards) address today's nutrition concerns for students by aligning school meals with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The nutrition standards use a Food-Based Menu Planning (FBMP) system that helps increase the availability and intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free and 1% (low-fat) milk, and reduce saturated fat, sodium, and *trans* fat.

You can make a difference. In fact, you're in a special position to show children what it means to eat for good health. This *Menu Planner for School Meals* (Menu Planner) is designed to help you plan, prepare, provide, and market great-tasting, nutritious, and safe meals that meet the requirements in the nutrition standards.

You and your colleagues across the country play a huge part in our Nation's battle against hunger and malnutrition. You make a difference in the lives of millions of children. The food you provide prepares your students to learn, and the choices you offer help them to develop healthy lifestyles.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Chapter 1 gives key highlights of the nutrition standards, from a child nutrition and food safety perspective.

Today's school meal patterns include flavorful fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and fat-free and 1% (low-fat) milk. They also incorporate dietary specifications that ensure meals contain important vitamins and minerals, are sufficient in calories, and limit saturated fat, sodium, and *trans* fat. In this chapter, you will find an overview of:

- Food-Based Menu Planning (FBMP) including grade groups, meal components, and dietary specifications
- The science behind these regulations in the context of health outcomes for today's children
- School-related food safety laws and regulations as well as the concept of fostering a culture of food safety in your schools.

Chapter 2 covers FBMP, including meal components, meal patterns, and dietary specifications, in more detail.

FBMP helps you serve economical meals that are varied, balanced, safe, wholesome, and health promoting. In this chapter, you will learn about:

- The benefits of FBMP for your students, your program, and your community.
- Important FBMP features such as the:
 - Five meal components
 - Meal patterns and dietary specifications for each grade group (K–5, 6–8, and 9–12) for lunch and breakfast
 - Requirements for a reimbursable meal by meal component.
- Food safety concerns for each meal component.
- Ideas for using seasonal foods.
- Program serving options of Served and Offer Versus Serve and their impact on reimbursable meals.
- Using the *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG) and the *Whole Grain Resource for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs* (Whole Grain Resource).

Chapter 3 explores successful menu development for school meals.

Before meals can be prepared and served, careful planning needs to take place. This chapter explains how to:

- Apply the nutrition standards for school meals as a planning tool.
- Use existing planning resources such as records from past menus and additional resources such as templates with built-in checks for program requirements and cycle menus focused on seasonal foods.
- Develop a lunch menu from main dish to milk, including how to offer all vegetable subgroups with a salad bar.
- Understand and incorporate district-level choices into all menu planning.
- Evaluate meals for variety as a key principle of successful menu planning.

Chapter 4 is all about meal preparation documentation and why it is so critical to the success of your program.

Production records, standardized recipes, and written Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety standard operating procedures (SOPs) ensure your customers receive nutritious, safe, high-quality meals that not only meet nutrition standards, but also taste good. In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Production records, including
 - Required information on all production records
 - Two-step process for completing a production record.
- Standardized recipes
 - Required information on all standardized recipes
 - Three phases to develop standardized recipes.
- HACCP food safety program
 - SOPs
 - Staff training and Active Managerial Control
 - Process approach to HACCP.

Chapter 5 addresses procurement and inventory management.

Procurement and inventory management support school nutrition program goals to provide nutritious, great-tasting, and safe food to your students and other customers in a cost-efficient manner. In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Procurement
 - Forecasting, sourcing, and soliciting, including specifications and bids
 - USDA Foods – variety, menu options, and available resources
 - Buying locally – Farm to School and geographical preferences
 - Documenting – Child Nutrition labels, Product Formulation Statements (PFS), and Nutrition Facts labels.
- Inventory management – Ordering, receiving, storage, recall management, and food-safe practices.

Chapter 6 covers meal modifications to accommodate students with disabilities.

Using the information in this chapter, you and your staff can modify menus with confidence and provide for the special nutrition requirements some students need to grow and thrive. In cases of disabilities that restrict the diet, schools are required to provide for special dietary needs. Program regulations permit schools to provide meal accommodations in nondisability situations. Key points in this chapter include:

- Federal laws and regulations related to disabilities that restrict diets
- Required modifications and associated documentation
- Differences between a food allergy and a food intolerance
- Menu development, food preparation, food safety, and other considerations for disabilities that restrict the diet, and other medical or special dietary needs.

Chapter 7 focuses on using effective marketing techniques to increase participation in your program.

Your marketing plan is an investment in the future success of your school nutrition operation. You can use marketing principles in your school nutrition program to benefit your students. 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
- Proven initiatives and promotions such as Team Nutrition, Farm to School, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s Healthy Schools Program
- Promotions and merchandising ideas designed to get students’ attention.

How to Make the Most of This Menu Planner

This Menu Planner has been developed to help you as a school nutrition professional in providing nutritious, wholesome meals that support students’ health and learning. You understand the needs of your district, schools, and students. That’s why flexibility is built into planning school meals that meet the Federal requirements. This resource has been developed with flexibility in mind so you can use it to fit your needs.

If you’re new to school nutrition, you will probably want to read the entire Menu Planner. If you are an experienced school nutrition professional, you can review the Menu Planner and spend more time with certain chapters. Each chapter is designed to stand on its own (with references to other chapters for details), so you can go right to your topic of interest.

OVERVIEW

The Menu Planner integrates several important topics that are key aspects of successful school nutrition programs. You will find information on these topics throughout this resource:

- Nutrition
- Food safety
- Farm to School
- USDA Foods
- Seasonal foods
- Marketing
- Administrative Review

Chapter Features

Each chapter is full of useful features to help you implement FBMP. Here is what you will find:

- Overview and recap at the beginning and end of each chapter
- Sidebar features called *Take a Closer Look*, and charts with more detailed information about regulations, procedures, and resources
- School spotlights from school districts throughout the country to give you some ideas for improving and promoting healthy meals in your school nutrition programs

Please note that while school spotlights are great ideas and suggestions, there may be minor differences in implementation or State/local requirements that could affect compliance during the review.

- *Menu Chat*, a fictional online discussion room among school nutrition professionals that helps illustrate flexible implementation of FBMP and other tips for success
- Short quizzes with answer keys so you can check your knowledge
- Numerous resources with hyperlinks so you can easily find detailed information, training materials, and forms.

If you are using this resource in its printed format, full references can be found at the end of each chapter.

- Appendixes
- Graphic icons that highlight important issues.

Guide to Graphic Icons

Throughout the Menu Planner, you will see these graphic icons. Here is what they mean.



While this icon is included to help you prepare for a review, this resource is not all encompassing and your State agency can provide you with additional information on what is needed during an Administrative Review.



This icon calls out practices that help create a culture of food safety; in other words, practices that show the school community values food safety.



The Check for Crediting icon draws attention to required foods, amounts, and/or nutrients that need to be met for credit toward reimbursable meals.



This graphic identifies district School Spotlights that may give you ideas for improving your own school nutrition program.



The Take a Closer Look icon calls out sidebar features that provide more detailed information about regulations, procedures, and resources.



The end of each chapter includes a short quiz with an answer key to help assess the knowledge learned. Each quiz is marked with the Check Your Understanding icon.

NOTE: For ease of reading, the Menu Planner refers to age/grade group as grade groups.



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