

10 Things You Always Wanted to Know About Your School Nutrition Program But Were Too Afraid to Ask

Let's Go! asked 11 School Nutrition Directors what they wanted school staff to know about the School Nutrition Program. This document is intended to help facilitate discussion between School Nutrition Programs and other members of the school.

- 1: "Every school day school nutrition professionals must meet differing local, state and federal nutrition standards; provide quality, safe and healthful meals that kids enjoy; accommodate special dietary needs and food allergies of a diverse student body; all for less than \$2.57 per meal," said Dr. Katie Wilson, president of the School Nutrition Association.
- 2: Your School Nutrition Program offers as many whole grain products as possible. In many cases, pizza crust, French toast sticks, pancakes, waffles, breadsticks and pasta contain whole grains.
- 3: Your School Nutrition Program purchases as much locally grown fruits and vegetables as possible. For example, many districts purchase apples and potatoes locally when available. Many schools are also starting to grow their own vegetables.
- 4: Your School Nutrition Program offers a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Students who eat school meals have the opportunity to get at least 4 of their "5-a-day" at school.
- 5: When menu planning, the School Nutrition Program follows very specific guidelines. They are required to provide 1/3 of RDA of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, calcium, and calories -- no more than 30% of calories are to come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat.
- 6: Your School Nutrition Program has to keep track of everything: what days each student ate lunch, what the menu was, how much food was purchased, how it was served, what was the temperature of the meal, how each student's lunch got paid for - and be able to provide it up to 3 years later.
- 7: Your School Nutrition Program operates under strict federal and state guidelines. Cafeterias have a state review every 5 years to ensure their program's meals meet nutrition standards and have annual health inspections.
- 8: Your School Nutrition Program has to be self-supported. They have their own budget, separate from the school. They have to pay salaries, benefits, buy food, purchase and repair equipment, as well as buy paper and non food supplies.
- 9: A USDA study revealed on average, School Nutrition Programs operated at a break-even level in 2005-06, with revenues equal to costs.
- 10: Students receiving free and reduced lunch are kept confidential and are not identified in the lunch line. Students can apply for free and reduced meals any time during the year. Applying for Free/Reduced actually benefits the school district as a whole by increasing funding from many sources in different departments. Many sources of funds require that a particular participation percentage level be met.