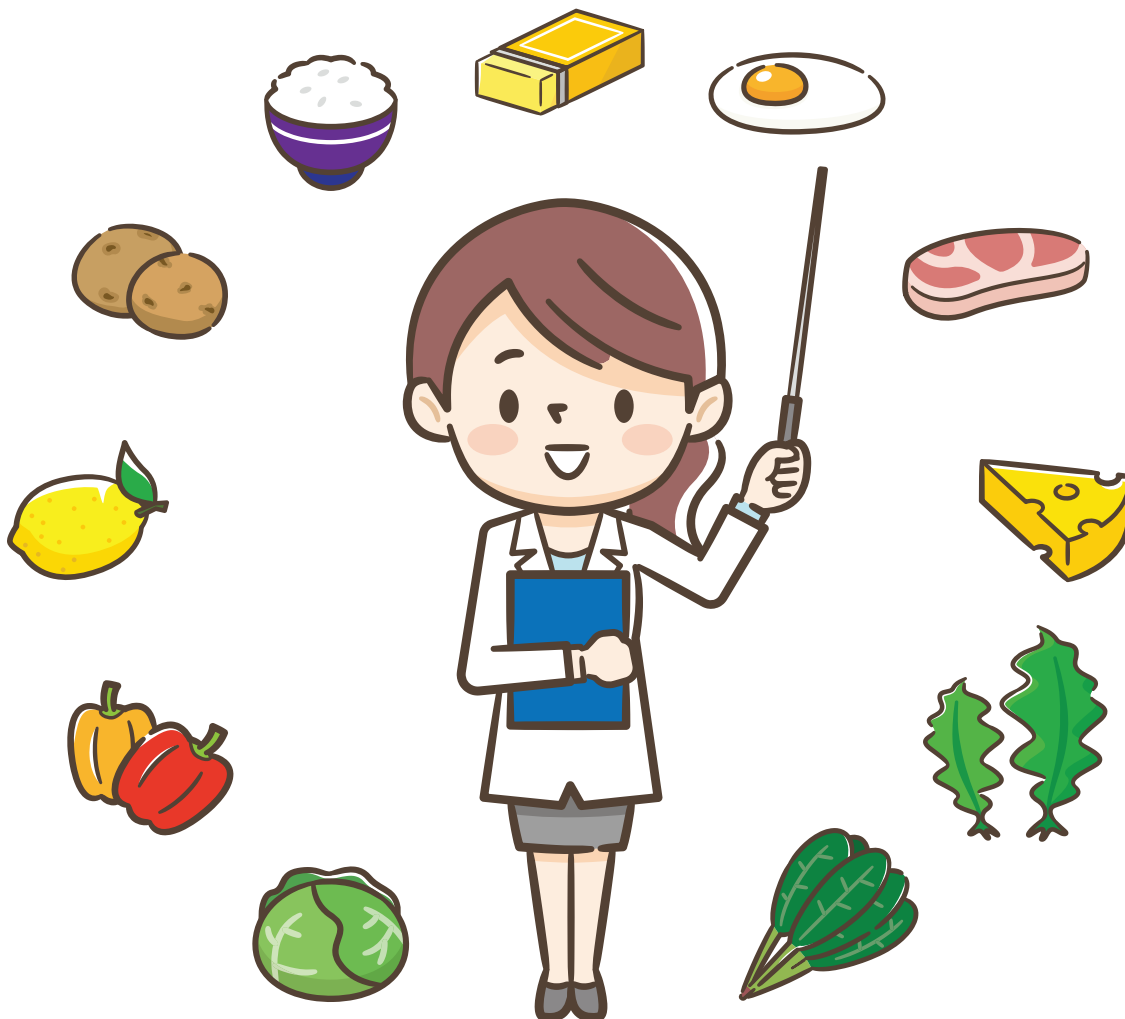




CREATIVE Use

of School Food Service Programs

School food and nutrition services has really changed in the past ten years. Programs have expanded and many districts are offering a wide variety of services to offer diverse options and help customers stay financially stable.

Once you have a well-equipped kitchen and a knowledgeable person running your program, the sky is the limit on program options and participation.

PUT THE RIGHT PERSON IN CHARGE

Hire the right person to run your food service program. While you were in school working on your degree in education or finance, other students were working on degrees in nutrition or food service management. It makes a difference to have a person in place that knows how to manage and motivate others, understands the business end of the position and can understand and work within the government regulations imposed on the program.

To the degrees mentioned, your district's food service director/manager should work to be credentialed as a "school nutrition specialist" and be a member of the School Nutrition Association and the Illinois School Nutrition Association. All employees working in school food service have a set amount of continuing education hours that they must reach yearly and having your director/managers be members of these organizations will make that easier.

Get Help Navigating Procurement Regulations

With many federal dollars supporting school meal programs, the procurement regulations are very stringent. Within the last couple of years, a new procurement audit of school meal programs has been developed. Joining a purchasing cooperative can help you to navigate all these regulations. There are multiple cooperatives across the state and ISBE Nutrition and Wellness Division can provide you a list of cooperatives in your area. The largest cooperative in the state is the Northern Illinois Independent Purchasing Cooperative; this group has been around for over 25 years and is run by food service directors. They stay on top of all current regulations and have a strong knowledge of the food industry and distribution issues.

Cooperatives bid multiple items, not just basic groceries and supplies. Many have also branched out and also bid milk, bread, vending items and other beverages. Procurement is a large part of a director/manager position so your district's

staff member will need to attend meetings and be active in the cooperative. As a result, your district will reap the benefit of time savings, higher quality food products and the comfort of knowing all regulations are being met.

Consider Use of Reimbursable Programs

For many years school were only offering lunch and breakfast programs. That has exploded into the need to make multiple decisions on what programs would best service the students in your district. When making decisions on these programs you must know your break-even point, what the nutritional and service requirements are and the cost of labor hours to staff the operation. It is not always the right decision to take part in every reimbursable program. Sometimes the needs of your district's community are better met without a reimbursable program. There may be other funding available to you from your community that would not have such stringent regulations.

Understand Your Program Options

There are several reimbursable programs to choose from (please note: some programs you must participate in if your district falls into a certain percentage of low-income students).

LUNCH

- **Standard lunch line** – Really there is no standard to a lunch line; middle schools and high schools are offering custom stations where students can select items made to their liking. Many schools now offering pasta, fiestas, smoothies, subs, panini and Asian stations. Oak Park River Forest High School has a station where cooking is done right in the serving line.
- **Grab and go meals** – These come under many different names such as Bistro Box, Bento Box and On the Run. These are items grouped together to make a meal and are often placed in a convenient location so students do not have to wait in the regular lunch line.
- **Order ahead online** – Monthly, weekly, daily – there are companies that offer special software and kiosks to use in the building. Some high schools have ordering for daily meals right on their website. Pickup is not always in the cafeteria; it may be in the hallway or a different floor so students do not have to wait.
- **Full meals from vending machines** – It is now possible to use student ID numbers and tie into your POS system.
- **Food supplied by local vendors that will meet requirements** – Many schools are ordering items that students love like pizza and subs from local businesses. Schools experience large participation on those days and often see that students will choose brand name items over school-made products.

BREAKFAST

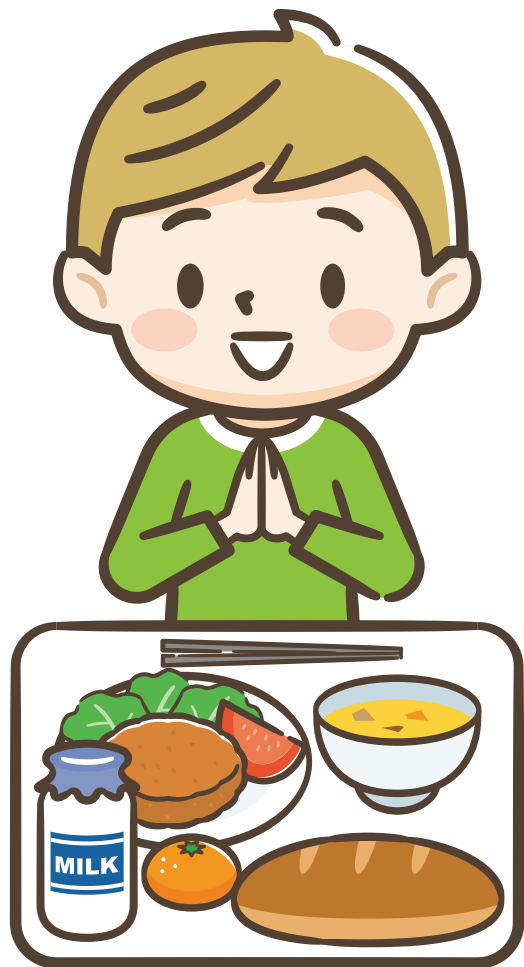
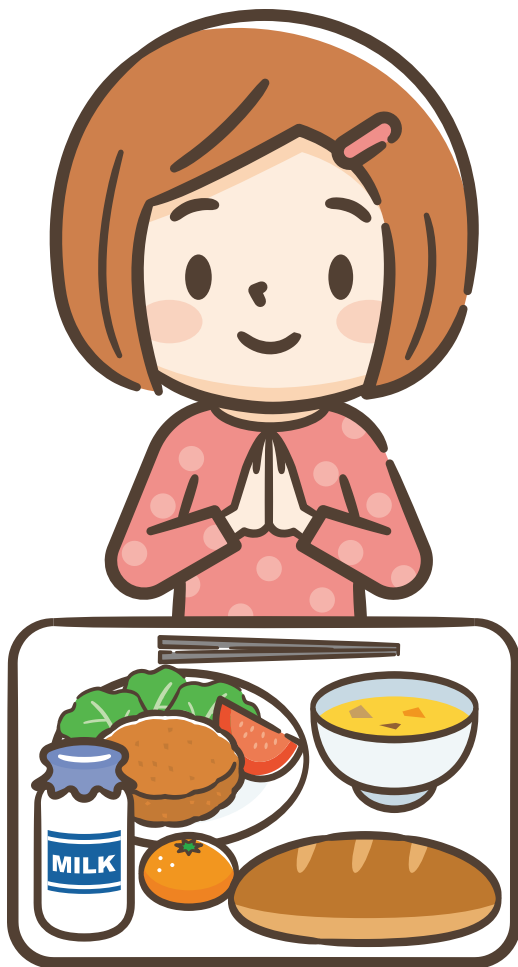
All research shows that breakfast for students makes a difference and there are many different ways to offer breakfast.

- In the cafeteria
- In the hallway
- In the classroom
- Second chance breakfast

AFTER SCHOOL SNACK

- Supper programs
- Early childhood snack
- Fruit and vegetable snack
- **Seamless Summer Option** – This program must be offered if you are over 50 percent free and reduced and operating a summer educational program. You can do one or two meals/snack offerings per day.
- **Summer Food Service Program** – If you are in community with a high percentage of low-income students, you should be participating in this program. You can do it on location or around the community. There is a good reimbursement rate and you really should support your families with this offering.





GROW YOUR PROGRAM

Once your district food service program is doing everything it can to service the students in your district during the school day and doing it well, it is then time to decide how to grow your program to benefit your district and your community. It would be the same thought as running a for profit business and wanting to do the best for your stockholders. Your community are the stockholders of your school district.

All food supplied by the food service department for any reason needs to be priced to cover the cost of food, labor for preparation and a markup to be credited back to the food service accounts.

Some ways to expand your business and bring extra revenue into your program include, but are not limited to:

- Intergovernmental agreements with other districts to run their programs** – The State of Illinois is made up of many small school districts. You need to decide if it is best to run your own food service, use the service of a management company or join forces with a neighboring district that has a knowledgeable director. Intergovernmental agreements, if written correctly, can be a win-win for both districts. Marquardt School District 15, Oak Park River Forest High School District 200 and Arlington Heights School District 25 all have intergovernmental agreements with neighboring districts.
- During the school day, more than school lunch** – Do you have a staff dining room? If not, you can still offer special, more adult-style meals. A boxed salad menu or a soup and salad menu is usually well received by staff. Special promotions could include offering pies or boxes of school baked cookies for sale around holidays. When supplying food for staff appreciation days or administrator meetings, it is a good policy to have most of the food used in the district purchased from the food service department when possible. Journal transfers can be done, and the money made stays in the district.
- In-School coffee shop** – More high schools are offering in school coffee shops. These spaces are created to be fun and provide fast service. In addition to beverages, reimbursable meals and ala carte items can be offered from these spaces.
- Concessions** – If your district has been struggling to find volunteers for the athletic booster program, let the food service program run the concessions. Your food service staff know how to forecast needs and the correct way to price items to make profit. The food service program at Oak Park River Forest High School SD 200 runs the concessions at their home football games.

ARTICLE / School Food Service Programs

- **Catering for out-of-district groups in-district** – In many communities the school is the largest gathering space in town. If you offer your building for rental space, include catering in that contract. Your food service staff knows how to prepare large volumes of food and many staff members would welcome some additional hours to make extra income.
- **Out-of-district catering** – Does your community need district services for their events? It is a nice way to partner with your community and build goodwill. Look to your city council, park districts and senior centers. Arlington Heights School District 25 provided the catering services for the Senior Center golf outing for many years. It was a nice partnership that help build a good relationship between senior population and the schools.
- **Day care centers, non-public schools, adult day care** – Most towns have an array of these type of facilities that need to provide food. Could your team do a better job for them? Would some of your food service staff like to be full year-round employees? Once you start transporting food, you should use your equipment to the max. Arlington Heights School District 25 has provided food for different day care facilities and adult day care facilities. Marquardt School District 15 has provided for non-public schools in their area.
- **Partner with your PTA/PTO** – Your food service department can help your in-school organizations raise funds that they need to make your student experience better. Many events are too small to cover the cost of having food service staff work, but the food service department can work with the chair of the event to provide food items that they carry in the operation at a better price than can be found elsewhere. For example, if your middle schools and high schools carry a large array of snack items that they sell as à la carte food during the school day, they can let the school organization use those items at snack bars for special functions. The food service department would make a mark up on the product and the organization would only need to pay for what they use. A win-win for everyone!

FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY

Schools meals are often in the news. Recently, the issue of negative school lunch accounts has been covered. This has sparked an interest from outside groups who want to help. I have been contacted this year by multiple local churches and other organizations, asking how they can help. I keep a list of different items I would like funding for and make suggestions to the groups in amounts that they are able to cover. We are receiving funding that covers the 40 cent charge for all students qualified for reduced price meals as well as funding for a summer breakfast program. Marquardt School District 15 receives funding for a weekend backpack program and the Valley View Consolidated School District 365 works with community partners who so far have generously donated funds to pay off all student debt in FY19-20.

In addition, there are grant opportunities from many different organizations interested in hunger issues. For example, Arlington Heights School District 25 receives grant funding for a summer lunch program served on a sidewalk. In the past they received a grant for a fitness facility in one of their middle schools.

A well-run food service program can provide great support to a school and a whole community. Always strive to provide the best.

