

CYRPRESS-FAIRBANKS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Featuring member Katie Barckholtz, MPH, RD, LD



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Katie Barckholtz, MPH, RD, LD

Marketing and Special Diets Coordinator

Katie Barckholtz, MPH, RD, LD works as part of the Cy-Fair Nutrition Services team as the Marketing and Special Diets Coordinator. She manages district-wide marketing and promotion efforts, and food allergy and dysphagia diet accommodations for students. Katie's career in food and nutrition began at The Methodist Hospital in the Houston Medical Center, where she worked as a clinical dietitian caring for patients from intensive care to rehabilitation. She moved to Dairy Max, the local dairy council where she collaborated with schools and health professionals to encourage healthy and active lifestyles for students and the community. Upon joining Cy-Fair Nutrition Services, Katie worked as a Field Supervisor for several elementary, middle and high school cafes before moving into the Marketing and Special Diets position.

Cy-Fair Menus & Education

Power Up Cafe's Mission

Cy-Fair Nutrition Services Power Up Café's marketing mission is to nourish, educate and engage the bodies and minds of our students, parents, community and partners with nutrient-rich meals and tools for healthy living at school and at home. We recognize the numerous opportunities we have as nutrition professionals in a school district to interface with our customers and provide nutrition education in creative ways, from menu development and sign placement, to school and district wide events.

Power Up Café continually strives for quality improvement with all current menu items, while innovating new menu items to meet the ever changing and expanding palates of our diverse 116,000+ member student body. Menu item development, from idea to cafeteria, is a process comprising multiple team members and several weeks. Our menu planning team includes our Nutrition Education Coordinator, Chef, Supervisors, Quality Assurance Coordinators, Food Production staff Purchasing Department members and school café staff. We glean inspiration for new menu items from popular food trends, fellow school districts, industry food shows and student feedback. Creating items that are appealing and attractive while adhering to strict school lunch and breakfast program guidelines is a challenge eagerly met by our team. We also must consider the size of our schools and length of their lunch periods – many of our high schools serve between 1500 and 2000 meals over three 30-minute lunch periods – so we must also design a menu and menu items that our staff can successfully prepare and our students will accept and enjoy. After developing and testing internally, we take it to our students by testing in small batches at select schools, then gathering and analyzing feedback. Recent menu additions include Pork Banh Mi Sandwich, Build-Your-Own Baked Potato with Broccoli & Cheese or Pulled Pork topping, and Fish Tacos with fresh cabbage and house made cilantro sauce.

We have cultivated relationships within our school district, as well as taken advantage of programs available to help nutrition departments meet the needs of our customers in mutually beneficial ways. Through nutrition education opportunities such as smoothie bike events, school gardens and district and community collaboration, we work to elevate the school nutrition experience for students, parents, employees and administration.

Healthy eating and lifestyle lessons are always more impactful, and more fun, with activities and taste testing opportunities. The Power Up Café Blender Bikes that we offer to schools and district events have allowed us access to students, parents and the community through PE classes, Family Health and Fitness Nights, Field Days and large district events such as the Back to School Expo and the Superintendent Fun Run. Each unique event affords us the ability to interact with our customers and provide nutrition education while promoting school nutrition and Power Up Café.

Creating a newsletter that's of practical use around the office can also motivate your employees to peek into it every once in a while. In the final page, you can add a calendar of events that everybody can look forward to.



Social Media

How we branded our department for stronger & more consistent marketing

Social media continues to be a constructive marketing and educational tool for us. While we do have our own department platforms through which we share menus, updates and events, we have also built a team of employees and partners who will post and share our messages as well, helping to amplify our communications. We have cafeteria managers and staff all the way to department directors and administration at schools actively promoting, sharing and interacting via social media. Our district thrives on collaboration among schools, departments and administration, as we all work toward the unifying goal of supporting student opportunities and success.

We officially adopted Power Up Café as our department brand in 2009. We wanted to have a concept with a name that kids would recognize, a phrase that was not grade specific and different from Child Nutrition. It does give us a common theme when creating marketing materials and campaigns, and allows us to consistently brand any new program we initiate, such as supper programs or breakfast after the bell.



Connecting Students to Their Food Through Gardening

Cy-Fair Garden Fresh and Our New Hydroponic Garden

Through Cy-Fair Garden Fresh, we have partnered with a local school garden program, Ready to Grow Gardens, and our PE teachers to increase fruit and vegetable selection and consumption through a multi-faceted nutrition education approach. We have developed a Garden Fresh Harvest menu that coincides with the harvest calendar at our school gardens, and feature the harvest menu item on our café lines the first Friday of each month. Students at many of our schools have the opportunity to plant, grow and harvest produce that aligns with our menu calendar, making the connection between agriculture, food production and food service. Colorful posters highlighting the nutritional benefit of each month's featured produce are displayed in both elementary and middle schools. Students in all elementary schools also have education opportunities through their PE classes, as schools receive whole produce for the fruit or vegetable of the month to use as a teaching visual, and can access nutrition education materials through our Garden Fresh website.

Gardening continued...

Our newest endeavor is a pilot hydroponic greenhouse built to initially and primarily grow romaine lettuce to be served to students. During the summer of 2018, through collaboration and partnership with Dyne Aquaculture, Slow Food USA and Leaf Safari, Nutrition Services built a hydroponic, soilless gardening system which is housed in the current Cy Woods High School Greenhouse. Cy-Fair Nutrition Services purchased the equipment for the greenhouse pilot program. We also purchased the nutrients, replacement parts and any other equipment needed for the hydroponic system. We purchase the seeds and rockwool plugs.

Our staff (primarily our chef and Nutrition Education Coordinator) monitor and maintain nutrient levels, and manage each harvest. We are using the Cy Woods greenhouse space, so do have students help plant, monitor and harvest the romaine. Once harvested, our production staff clean and prep the lettuce and send to our cafeterias for service. So we have not had to hire any additional employees to manage the greenhouse at this time. Lettuce is grown from seed in rockwool plugs fed completely by water and essential nutrients. The greenhouse affords us temperature and humidity controlled environment, free of the burdens and trials that typically come with traditional soil growing methods. Horticulture and floral design students at Cy Woods work with our Nutrition Services team to plant, maintain and harvest romaine crops. We have had several successful harvests this year, some yielding up to 70 pounds of delicious, fresh romaine that was prepared in our production center and served to students at Cy-Woods. Long-term, we hope to secure funding and land to build several larger greenhouses to produce enough romaine to meet at least a significant portion of the approximately 30,000 pounds we serve on a monthly basis in our 89 cafes.

Feeding students to help equip them for their school day is our top priority. By recognizing and leveraging the expertise of our team and the support of our district, we capitalize on our opportunities to improve and innovate in the way we create, promote, and serve our meals as we strive to provide a quality dining experience every day.

*A special thanks to Katie and the team at Cy-Fair for sharing their story.
-The Academy SNS DPG*

