

Shennie Quintanilla

MS, RDN, LDN

**SCHOOL NUTRITION COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH SPECIALIST
CAMBRIDGE FOOD & NUTRITION SERVICES**



NOVEMBER 2020 SPOTLIGHT MEMBER

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MEET SHENNIE!

Shennie Quintanilla, MS, RDN, LDN is the School Nutrition Communications & Community Outreach Specialist at Cambridge Public School (CPS) in Massachusetts. Uniquely suited for this position, Shennie is a passionate RDN with an expertise in food service management and child nutrition, coupled with digital communications, community engagement and education. Following an unconventional path rooted in her love of music, Shennie shifted her undergraduate degree at Florida State University to nutrition, completed her Master's degree at Meredith College and then, with intention completed a distance dietetic internship at Utah State University in a program that emphasizes foodservice management and child nutrition programs. Shennie had the good fortune of interning for 13 weeks with the Alachua County School District in Gainesville, Florida, where her love for school nutrition was solidified. It was during this experience that she was also able to tap into her interest in digital communications through her work with the department's Marketing and Promotion Specialist. This experience broadened her eyes to a niche role, that she hoped she might one day find in her own school nutrition career. Following a move to Massachusetts, Shennie applied for a head of kitchen position with the Cambridge Public Schools. CPS Nutrition leadership recognized her nutrition and digital media experience and envisioned how it could serve a need in their program to strengthen transparency with the community and share all the great work being done in the district. She was hired into this newly created role! Fast forward two years and this niche position is now formally embedded on the CPS Nutrition team.

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK!

Shennie is a superb communicator and she strives to bridge the communication gap for staff, families and administrators to achieve transparency, clear expectations as well as community and family engagement. She works directly with the food and nutrition staff to assure clear, accurate and timely communication on administrative decisions that trickle down to each school kitchen and impact their daily work life. Here are a few examples that are fostering teamwork to make the dream work for the CPS Nutrition team:

- 1. Managers Menu** - a monthly communication with all the important details of the menu in to support managers and staff.
- 2. Nutrition Bites** - a newsletter developed specifically for foodservice staff, which has served as an effective way to share news, special events, updates and more.
- 3. Golden Spatula Award**- a ceremony to celebrate food and nutrition staff accomplishments, promote positivity and increase engagement was a huge hit!

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Shennie's main role with CPS, amongst her other responsibilities, is to better represent the district's vision in emphasizing family and community partnerships. The goal is to increase transparency to the community, parents, families and administrators about the nutritious and delicious meals the CPS Nutrition team prepares and serves to students. She works closely with the district's family liaisons, who are well-informed about the needs of individual families and their community as a whole. A longstanding partnership also exists with the public health department's Healthy Eating and Active Living team. Over the past couple years, Shennie has worked with their dietitian to ramp up engagement within the schools.



Caption: Shennie participated in the Cambridge Public Schools Resource Fair during summer 2020 to engage families and share information about school meals.

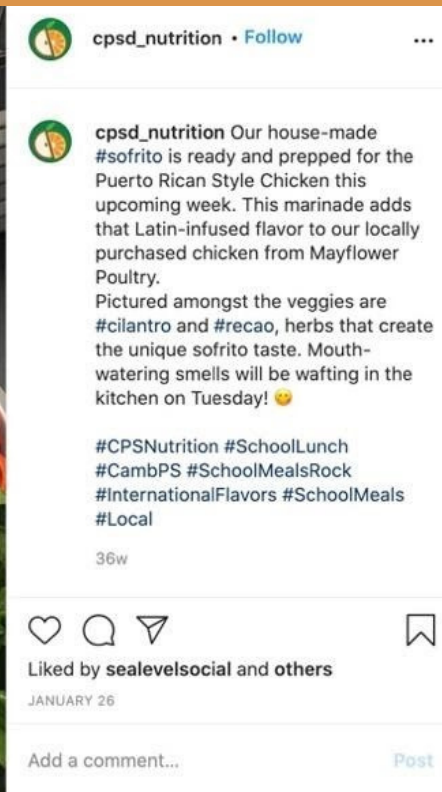
TASTE PARTIES

Cambridge is a beautifully diverse community comprised of a variety of cultures. One program spearheaded by the CPS Nutrition team designed to embrace cultural diversity and inclusion is the International Flavors Program, which utilizes “taste parties” (see photo) to enhance the cultural palettes of students and spark menu ideas popular with the diverse student population. A couple of examples of popular student-approved recipes include Azifa, an Ethiopian lentil salad, and Fricase de Pollo, a Puerto Rican chicken stew (see photo) which is a regular offering on the menu.



Caption: Student Taste Party during school breakfast week, where Shennie exposes elementary and middle school students to new additions to a Chinese Congee.

Communication and community engagement has been especially important during COVID-19 and with the onset of alternative meal distribution. Transparency with families and community has been paramount for CPS Nutrition; to let them know the many changes in foods, distribution, as well providing assurance of food safety during the pandemic. A variety of avenues are utilized to communicate to families, including the network of the district’s family liaisons, social media, district-wide newsletters as well as communication in multiple languages to meet the needs of the community.



Caption: Instagram #CPSNutrition post promoting their popular Puerto Rican Style Chicken.



Caption: Herb Roasted Halal Chicken - this menu option has been a huge hit with students and meets a need for their Muslim community.



STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Shennie's top three strategies to enhance communication and community outreach, include:

- 1. Assess what you are already doing and where the gaps are.** Who are you not reaching in terms of families who need access? In the Cambridge school district, a Resource Fair is held in the Fall for all families and Information Fair in the Spring for incoming JK/K students. It was the perfect opportunity to be present and answer questions directly about the department, menus, applications, and everything in between, and yet previously, unable to be attended due to time constraints. Putting it on the calendar ahead of time, letting appropriate administrators know the department will be attending, and being prepared with school menu and documents has increased communication and knowledge about what CPS Nutrition offers.
- 2. Identify your support team.** Gain support and trust from your administrators and team. In Cambridge, the district's family liaison work directly with families in each school and is a key support because of their deep understanding of the needs of families and the community.
- 3. Be aware and respect the culture of your community.** Food is a universal language. Everyone can relate to food! Meet dietary preferences within the boundaries of your program. A recent example is that the CPS Nutrition team were able to meet a request received from their Muslim community for Halal Chicken (see photo), which is now a popular, regular menu item.