



SCHOOL FOOD AUDIT

NAVIGATE THE SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEM

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The school food system is confusing to navigate. Before you can make any changes in the future, you need to find out what's being offered now. Once completed, this survey will show how the system really works in your child's school.

Don't be overwhelmed by the number of questions. Read them through and then download the school lunch menus from the school's website. If your school doesn't post the menus online, call the school office and ask them to mail them to you. After you've read through all of the menus, make an appointment with the School Nutrition Director. Call the Principal's office to get the name and phone number or check your school's website.

Let her (or him) know that you are very interested in school food and want to get an overview of the service. Bring a camera and document your experience if possible. The School Nutrition Director should know the answers to most of the questions listed below. If they don't ask them who does. You may have to be persistent.

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LUNCH & BREAKFAST

How much is fresh? How much is processed?

Our School Food Charter (see resources) is a good guide to what a really good meal service should be providing. The goal is to get as much fresh, unprocessed food on the plate as possible.

1. Are fresh vegetables other than potatoes served every day?
2. Is fresh fruit served every day? What does that mean? Whole fruit, fruit salad, fruit in syrup, fruit juice? Get as many specifics as possible.
3. Is there a salad bar? What's in it? Does the food look appealing?
4. Are whole grain products – bread, rice, pasta – served? (Don't include the bread coating on products such as chicken nuggets. It might contain wholegrain which can count towards a portion but doesn't offer the same nutritional benefit.)
5. Are pre-packaged snacks part of the meal (a package of crackers, chips and dip, packaged cookies or desserts)?
6. How often are "fast-food" type entrees served during the week at either or both meals (examples: pizza, hamburgers, hot dogs, French fries, hash browns or "tater tots," chicken nuggets, donuts)?
7. Is flavored (chocolate, strawberry, etc.) milk served at breakfast? At lunch?
8. What's the cafeteria like? Is there enough space for the kids to sit down and eat?
9. How long do the kids get for lunch? Do they have to wait in line?
10. Is breakfast served in the classroom? (For younger kids this can really help increase numbers and ensure they don't start the day hungry and short on attention.)
11. What are the kids actually eating? Is there a lot o whaste?

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COMPETITIVE FOOD

Is Junk Food Competing with the Meal Service?

1. What snack and fast food options are available that kids can eat as an alternative to a meal in the cafeteria?
2. Is there a brand-name fast food outlet in the school?
3. Is it an open campus where students have easy access to fast food?
4. Are candy and soda or sports drinks available in vending machines, snack shacks or the school café?
5. How many children in the school are opting for “grab and go” foods instead of eating a balanced meal?
6. Is the school relying on the revenue from grab-and-go foods to support other programs in the school?
7. How many students take school lunch? Leave campus? Grab-and-go?

WHO IS SUPPLYING THE FOOD AND WHERE IS IT PREPARED?

Is the catering service:

1. In-house and run by staff employed directly by the school and prepared on-site?
2. Provided and managed and by the district school nutrition service?
3. Provided by an external foodservice contractor? If yes, then you need to find out more information about the company and the people in charge there.
4. Is there a kitchen on site at your school?
5. If there is, does it have the space and equipment (food processors, prep areas, refrigerator space) to prepare meals from scratch?
6. If not, where does the food come from? (Many schools are supplied by a local central kitchen where the food is prepared, and then re-heated on site.)

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OUTSIDE THE MEAL

If the Nutrition Director doesn't know the answers, or won't give them to you, call the secretary at the office of the District Superintendent.

1. Does your school have a wellness committee?
2. Does your district have a wellness policy?
3. If so, is it enforced?
4. What does it say about the food in school (meals and any other food)?
5. Does it set out any criteria for the quality and nutritional content of the food?
6. Does it include anything about controlling soda, candy, snacks and junk food? (This doesn't have to be a complete ban, rather help to ensure that kids' primary choice is a healthy one and that the products high in sugar, salt and fat are only available occasionally.)

WHO'S EATING LUNCH?

The School or District Nutrition Service Director will have all of this information, too. This helps you to figure out how many vulnerable children there are in your school who depend on the meals as their main source of nutrition. The more kids who participate in the lunch program, the greater the federal subsidy given—which means more money to fund the meal service.

1. What percentage of students in your school and district qualify for free or reduced* price breakfast and lunch?
2. How many of them are actually eating these at school?
3. What are the overall participation rates in your school meal program, i.e. how many kids and what percentage eat breakfast and lunch in the school cafeteria and are therefore part of the federal school meal program?
4. Does the staff eat lunch in the cafeteria? (Usually a sign that the food is good.)

*The Free and Reduced Priced Meal Program is a federally subsidized program of the USDA

WELLNESS POLICY RESOURCES:

Center for Ecoliteracy
www.ecoliteracy.org

Center for Science and the Public Interest
www.cspinet.org

Healthy Schools Campaign
www.healthyschoolscampaign.org

Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University's WellSAT
www.wellsat.org

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TOOLS:

The Basics About School Lunch

Jamie's School Food Charter

School Food Decision Makers