



# SCHOOL FOOD AUDIT

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

Don't be overwhelmed by the number of questions here. Read them through, 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 or check your school's website to get their name and phone number). Let them know that you are very interested in school food and want to get an overview of the service. The School Nutrition Director should know the answers to most of the questions listed below. If they don't, find out who does. Remember to support the changes that School Food Service Directors are already making so that they don't feel as though they are being undermined, but let them know that you want to help.



## LUNCH AND 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. These questions will help you figure this out:

1. Are fresh vegetables other than potatoes served every day?
2. Is fresh fruit served every day? What sort is it – whole fruit, fruit salad, fruit in syrup, fruit juice? Get as many details as possible.
3. Is there a salad bar? What's in it? Does the food look appealing?
4. Are wholegrain 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 meals (for example: a packet of crackers, chips and dip, packaged cookies or dessert)?
6. How often are "fast food" type entrées served during the week at either or both meals (for example: pizza, hamburgers, hot dogs, French fries, hash browns or "tater tots", chicken nuggets, donuts)?
7. Is flavored milk (chocolate, strawberry, etc.) served at breakfast or at lunch? What options are available?
8. What's the cafeteria like? Is there enough space for the kids to sit down and eat?
9. Is breakfast served in the classroom? (For younger kids, this can really help make sure they don't start the day hungry and short on attention.)
10. How long do the kids get for lunch? Do they have to wait in line? Is lunch before or after recess?
11. What are the kids actually eating? Is there a lot of waste?



## COMPETITIVE FOODS

### Is junk food competing with the meal service?

1. What snack and fast food options are available that children can eat as an alternative to a meal in the cafeteria?
2. Is there a branded 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? How many leave campus? How many 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 by the District School Nutrition Service?
3. Provided by an external food service 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? If there is, does it have the space and equipment (food processors, prep areas, refrigerator space) to prepare meals from scratch? Are the lunch ladies trained to make fresh meals from scratch?
5. If there's no kitchen, where does the food come from? (Many schools are supplied by a local central kitchen where food is prepared and then reheated on site.)



## OUTSIDE THE MEAL

If the Nutrition Director doesn't know the answers to these questions, ask the school Principal or call the District Superintendent's secretary.

1. Does your school have a wellness committee?
2. Does your district have a wellness policy? If so, is it enforced?
3. What does the policy say about the food in school (meals and any other food)?
4. Does it set out any criteria for the quality and nutritional content of the food?
5. Does it include anything about controlling soda, candy, snacks and junk food? (This doesn't have to be a complete ban, but helps to ensure that children's primary choice is a healthy one and that the products that are high in sugar, salt and fat are only available occasionally.)
6. Does your school have on-site fundraisers? If so what foods are allowed to be sold at them – homemade and fresh foods or processed and pre-bought foods? Does the policy provide resources on healthy fundraising alternatives?

## 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 children participate in the lunch program, the greater the federal subsidy given will be, 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 children and what percentage eat breakfast and lunch in the school cafeteria)
4. Do the staff eat lunch in the cafeteria? If not, find out why not. It may not be for a bad reason, but it's worth getting their opinion too.



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

**WELLNESS POLICY RESOURCES:**

Center for Ecoliteracy

[www.ecoliteracy.org](http://www.ecoliteracy.org)

Center for Science and the Public Interest

[www.cspinet.org](http://www.cspinet.org)

Healthy Schools Campaign

[www.healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org)

Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at Yale University's WellSAT

[www.wellsat.org](http://www.wellsat.org)

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TOOLS:**

**SCHOOL FOOD: THE BASICS**

**SCHOOL FOOD CHARTER**

**SCHOOL FOOD DECISION MAKERS**

