

Best Practice Guide for Improving High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program



Amelia Estepa Asperin, PhD and Alexandra Castillo
National Food Service Management Institute
Applied Research Division
University of Southern Mississippi

PURPOSE

The purpose of the project was to develop a resource identifying research-based best practices for improving high school student participation and satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

METHOD

Phase I

- Four practice areas that affect high school student participation and satisfaction were identified based on results from the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) *Non-Participation and School Lunch Experience* surveys.
- Draft best practice statements were developed from previous NFSMI research findings and pertinent foodservice, school nutrition, and marketing literature.
- Eight SN professionals were chosen to participate in an expert panel work group session to (1) review the wording of each best practice statement, (2) classify statements under the appropriate research-based practice area, and (3) group similar statements into goals.
- Expert panel members reviewed the results of the work group session and confirmed the list of best practice statements using a guided evaluation.

Phase II

- The best practice guide was drafted utilizing suggestions from the expert panel with regards to definition of key terms, instructions for using the guide, and evaluation scales.
- A final guided evaluation was completed by a review panel composed of exemplary SN directors previously involved in pilot testing the *Non-Participation and School Lunch Experience* surveys (N=11).
- The review panel evaluated the following:
 - appropriate grouping of best practice statements into goals and practice areas,
 - ease of use of assessment scales,
 - formatting, and
 - general content validity of the resource.

RESULTS

- Expert panel members categorized the best practice statements into 13 goals within the four practice areas (Food Quality, Staff, Program Reliability, and Marketing and Communications).
- The national review panel confirmed that a Baseline Assessment of the best practices may be performed using a 4-point Current Status scale (*fully addressed, partially addressed, not addressed, and plans to address*), with *not applicable* as an additional option combined with a priority level scale (*high, medium, low*).
- The panel also agreed that a Progress Review for best practices included in a plan of action can be monitored using a 4-point Likert-type scale (*demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory*).

DEFINITION OF BEST PRACTICE AREAS

- Food Quality:** Practices that focus on improving the overall appeal of food to students (i.e., taste, appearance, aroma, and temperature).
- Staff:** Practices that address student concerns regarding staff attitude towards work, service efficiency, and staff behavior towards students.
- Program Reliability:** Practices that reflect the school nutrition program's ability to meet NSLP regulations and student expectations on the delivery of food and services in a consistent, timely, and reliable manner.
- Marketing and Communications:** Practices that affect the program awareness of students and other stakeholders regarding services offered through the NSLP. This also includes practices that affect and/or influence the students' dining experience and perception of the NSLP.

APPLICATION

- SN professionals can use the Baseline Assessment to identify best practices applicable to their SN program, as well as strategies that can be included in a plan of action designed to maintain and/or increase high school student participation and/or satisfaction.
- A periodic Progress Review will measure how effectively the plan of action has been implemented to address challenges identified during the baseline assessment.

BASELINE ASSESSMENT EXCERPT

Best Practice Guide for Increasing High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on improving the overall appeal of food to high school students. This includes characteristics such as taste, appearance, aroma, freshness, temperature, variety, and perceived healthfulness of menu items.

GOAL 1: The district school nutrition office establishes a system to effectively plan and prepare nutritious, high quality, good tasting meals that appeal to high school students.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	4 Fully Addressed	3 Partially Addressed	2 Plans to Address	1 Not Addressed	N/A Not Applicable	H High	M Medium	L Low
1. The district school nutrition office establishes a menu planning team that may include, but is not limited to, school nutrition staff, high school students, parents, and other school staff.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
2. Healthier versions are provided for menu items commonly preferred by high school students (e.g. whole grain pizza with low-fat cheese, hamburgers on whole wheat buns).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
3. The prepared menu offers a variety of food choices to accommodate the nutritional, ethnic, and sociocultural diversity of students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
4. The school nutrition manager ensures that the appropriate quantity is prepared.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
5. The school nutrition staff is trained to develop and follow standardized recipes.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Total Score _____ = # of BPs (include N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____								

PROGRESS REVIEW EXCERPT

Best Practice Guide for Increasing High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program

FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 1: The district school nutrition office establishes a system to effectively plan and prepare nutritious, high quality, good tasting meals that appeal to high school students.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				N/A Not Applicable
	4 Demonstrates Excellence	3 Area of Strength	2 Needs Improvement	1 Unsatisfactory	
1. The district school nutrition office establishes a menu planning team that may include, but is not limited to, school nutrition staff, high school students, parents, and other school staff.	4	3	2	1	N/A
2. Healthier versions are provided for menu items commonly preferred by high school students (e.g. whole grain pizza with low-fat cheese, hamburgers on whole wheat buns).	4	3	2	1	N/A
3. The prepared menu offers a variety of food choices to accommodate the nutritional, ethnic, and sociocultural diversity of students.	4	3	2	1	N/A
4. The school nutrition manager ensures that the appropriate quantity is prepared.	4	3	2	1	N/A
5. The school nutrition staff is trained to develop and follow standardized recipes.	4	3	2	1	N/A
Total Score _____ = # of BPs (include N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					