

Identification of Best Practices for School Nutrition Professionals Serving Students with Special Food and/or Nutrition Needs



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PURPOSE

- The purpose of this project was to identify goals and establish best practices for serving students with special food and/or nutrition needs in school nutrition (SN) programs, based on the four practice categories (District/School Accountability, School Nutrition Responsibility, Information Resources, and Environmental Considerations) identified in previous NFSMI research.

METHOD

Phase I

- An expert panel of SN directors and representatives from state agencies and USDA, identified goals and best practice statements, grouped similar statements within the four practice categories, and provided formatting suggestions for the best practice resource.

Phase II

- A national review panel followed a guided review process to evaluate the best practice statements, goal statements, and draft resource. Panel members assessed the content, scales, format, and usefulness of the resource as a self-assessment tool for SN professionals.

RESULTS

- The final version of the resource incorporated the best practice statements within the four practice categories and eight goals. The best practice resource is a user-friendly, Web-based self-assessment tool. Each best practice statement is assessed using two 3-point scales, current status (*fully addressed, partially addressed, and not addressed*) and priority level (*high priority, medium priority, and low priority*).

APPLICATION

- The NFSMI *Best Practice Resource for Serving Students with Special Food and/or Nutrition Needs in School Nutrition Programs* is a self-assessment tool for SN professionals to assess their operation based on the identified best practices.
- Upon assessing the current status and priority level of the best practices, a plan of action can be established for addressing and prioritizing those best practices identified as needing attention.

BEST PRACTICE CATEGORIES AND GOALS

DISTRICT/SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Relates to the district and/or school accountability and responsibility to the student and/or family in meeting the special food and/or nutrition need.
 - **Goal 1:** A district-wide infrastructure is established to ensure accountability when accommodating students with special food and/or nutrition needs.
 - **Goal 2:** A district-wide communication infrastructure supports a comprehensive exchange of information regarding special food and/or nutrition services provided to students.

SCHOOL NUTRITION RESPONSIBILITY

- Relates to the responsibility of the school nutrition program and school nutrition staff in meeting the special food and/or nutrition needs of students.
 - **Goal 1:** A systematic approach is developed to ensure safe and effective service for students with special food and/or nutrition needs while complying with federal, state, and local guidelines.
 - **Goal 2:** A comprehensive training model is designed to prepare school nutrition staff for serving students with special food and/or nutrition needs.
 - **Goal 3:** A communication system is established with stakeholders to effectively provide services for students with special food and/or nutrition needs.
 - **Goal 4:** Operational systems are established to implement site-level procedures for serving students with special food and/or nutrition needs.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

- Encompasses the resources used to gather information on managing and responding appropriately to special food and/or nutrition issues. Resources are identified as print media, Web media, or professional experience.
 - **Goal 1:** Information regarding special food and/or nutrition needs is sought from reliable sources to ensure accountability of services provided to students.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Focus on the physical environment where the food is prepared and/or served and any accommodations that may be needed.
 - **Goal 1:** A positive and supportive environment is established to ensure the safety and well-being of students with special food and/or nutrition needs.