

**NFSMI Best Practice Guide for Increasing
Middle/Junior High School Student Participation
and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program**



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National Food Service Management Institute The University of Mississippi

Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

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PURPOSE

The purpose of the National Food Service Management Institute is to improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

MISSION

The mission of the National Food Service Management Institute is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

VISION

The vision of the National Food Service Management Institute is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

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NFSMI BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR INCREASING MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Past research has demonstrated that during middle/junior high school, students' participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) begins to decline, a trend that worsens throughout high school (McConnell, Matta, & Shaw, 1997). In an effort to address this issue, the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD) conducted a series of multi-faceted studies. As a result, two middle/junior high school foodservice surveys were developed. The *Middle/Junior High School Participation Survey* targets students who participate daily in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), while the *Middle/Junior High School Non-Participation Survey* targets students who participate occasionally or not at all (Castillo & Lofton, 2012). The *Guide for Administering School Lunch Satisfaction and Participation Surveys to Middle/Junior High School Students* (Rushing, 2012) was developed to provide step-by-step instructions for using the surveys and creating action plans framed around the "Continuous Quality Improvement" process.

Findings from research conducted by Asperin and Carr (2009) suggested that in addition to providing survey tools to school nutrition (SN) professionals, there is also a need to provide feasible strategies that can be used for the completion of "Continuous Quality Improvement Action Plans" outlined in the *Guide for Administering School Lunch Satisfaction and Participation Surveys to Middle/Junior High School Students*. Thus, the primary objective of this project was to utilize a modified best practices research model (Mold & Gregory, 2003) to develop a best practice resource that SN directors can use to increase participation rates and

improve middle/junior high school student satisfaction in the NSLP. To accomplish this, two expert panels of SN professionals participated in a work group session and a national review panel to systematically identify best practices for dissemination to other SN professionals.

Four practice areas that affect middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction were identified by Castillo (2012). Draft best practice statements framed around the practice areas, “Choice,” “Customer Service,” “Food Quality,” and “Other,” were developed based on previous NFSMI, ARD research findings (Asperin & Castillo, 2009). Eight SN professionals were chosen to participate in an expert panel work group session to accomplish the following: review the wording of each best practice statement; classify statements under the appropriate research-based practice area; and group similar statements into goals. Using a guided evaluation form, expert panel members reviewed the results of the work group session. Then, members confirmed the list of best practice statements, the definitions of key words, and the formatting of the resource.

The best practice guide was then drafted using suggestions from the expert panel with regard to definitions of key terms, instructions for using the guide, and evaluation scales. A final guided evaluation was completed by a review panel composed of 14 SN directors recommended by state agency child nutrition directors based on their experience with successfully increasing student participation in the NSLP. 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.

The best practice guide, *NFSMI Best Practice Guide for Increasing Middle/Junior High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program*, contains 86 best practice statements grouped into 12 goals that support the four practice areas (“Choice,”

“Customer Service,” “Food Quality,” and “Other”). There are two components to the guide, the “Baseline Assessment” and the “Progress Review.” Both are provided to assist SN professionals in evaluating operational performance based on the best practice areas.

INTRODUCTION

Past research demonstrated that during middle/junior high school, students' participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) begins to decline, a trend that worsens throughout high school. Middle/junior high school students are experiencing emotional, social, and physical changes that influence the choices they make, including participating in the NSLP. Children today are more knowledgeable about food because they grew up frequenting restaurants, grocery stores, and convenience stores with their parents. They learned to recognize brands, expect good customer service, and make decisions concerning what foods they will or will not eat. During this age period, students are still considered a captive audience, since most middle/junior high schools do not allow students to eat lunch off campus as they do at the high school level (McConnell, Matta, & Shaw, 1997; Meyer, 2000). Actively assessing their satisfaction and addressing their concerns may give these students a sense of empowerment and positively influence their decision to eat school lunch in the future (Roseman & Niblock, 2006).

Researchers from the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD) conducted focus group discussions with middle/junior high school students and school nutrition (SN) professionals to determine issues associated with middle school student satisfaction and participation in the NSLP (Castillo, Lofton, and Nettles, 2011). This research revealed two distinct groups of middle/junior high school customers: students who participate daily in the NSLP and students who participate occasionally or not at all. Middle/junior high school student focus groups identified five primary reasons why students eat school lunch (food preference, hunger, no choice, convenience, and socialization) and four primary reasons why they do not eat school lunch (food quality, customer service, sanitation, and long lines). Focus groups with SN professionals provided additional barriers that prevent

middle/junior high school students from participating in school lunch including: the desire to socialize instead of eating, peer pressure not to eat school lunch, negative perceptions of school lunch, and menu fatigue. Based on these findings, it was concluded that to improve participation, SN professionals need to communicate with students, identify reasons they do not eat school lunch, and explore the best course of action to address their wants and needs.

In 2012, Castillo and Lofton developed and validated two customer service surveys for middle/junior high school students to measure factors that impact their participation in and satisfaction with the NSLP. The qualitative data from the previous focus group study (Castillo, Lofton, & Nettles, 2010) and the NFSMI, ARD participation and non-participation surveys for high school students (Asperin, Nettles, & Carr, 2008; Asperin, Nettles, & Carr, 2009) were used to develop draft surveys. Afterwards, a two-stage pilot test was conducted to refine and validate the survey instruments. Results of the pilot showed that middle/junior high school student satisfaction with school lunch can be attributed to two main factors, food preference and staff attentiveness, while middle/junior high school students' low participation can be attributed to two primary factors, food quality and customer service. The final version of the two surveys developed from this study were shown to be generalizable for use by the middle/junior high school student population (grades 6-8), regardless of school district size. The participation survey is appropriate for SN programs that have a relatively high rate of participation at the middle/junior high school level and would like to retain students by increasing customer satisfaction. The non-participation is appropriate for SN programs that have a lower rate of participation at the middle/junior high school level and would like to focus on customer service issues in an effort to increase participation (Castillo & Lofton, 2012).

In 2012, Rushing developed a step-by-step guide for administering the middle/junior high school student participation and non-participation surveys developed and validated in previous NFSMI, ARD research (Castillo, et al., 2012). The project consisted of the following steps: develop a draft survey guide; evaluate the survey guide with a review panel of SN professionals; and revise the survey guide based on review panel suggestions. A draft of the middle/junior high school survey guide was created using the *High School Student Satisfaction and Non-Participation Survey Guide: Internal Bench Marking for School Nutrition Programs* (Asperin et al, 2009) as a template. The completed resource contains the following sections: “Introduction,” “Planning for Survey Administration,” “Survey Options,” “Administering the Survey,” “Tabulating and Interpreting Results,” “Developing a Customer Service Action Plan Using the Continuous Quality Improvement Process,” and “Appendices.”

Findings from research conducted by Asperin and Carr (2009) suggested that in addition to providing survey tools to SN professionals, there is also a need to provide feasible strategies that can be used for the completion of “Continuous Quality Improvement Action Plans” outlined in the *Guide for Administering School Lunch Satisfaction and Participation Surveys to Middle/Junior High School Students*. The best practices research method (BPRM) (Mold & Gregory, 2003) provides the following five-step process for developing a compilation of strategies that can be used for operational improvement:

- *Development of conceptual model* through literature review to establish components of the model;
- *Definition of “best” method* by identification of qualities and minimum standards for each desired outcome;

- *Identification/evaluation of potential methods for each component* by an expert panel of practitioners;
- *Combining “best” components* by assessing the compatibility of individual methods for each identified component; and
- *Test combined method* to measure baseline performance, implement changes, and evaluate performance of new methods.

Mold and Gregory (2003) proposed that by using the BPRM, effective and efficient strategies can be systematically identified, described, and combined by practicing professionals for dissemination to other professionals in their field. Thus, the primary objective of this project was to utilize a modified BPRM in developing a best practice resource that SN directors can use for increasing participation rates and improving middle/junior high school student satisfaction in the NSLP.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- Identify sustainable best practices used by successful SN programs to increase participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students;
- Classify best practices into identifiable practice areas and actionable goals;
- Develop a best practice guide that can be used as an assessment tool for establishing baseline performance and evaluating the improvement of the SN program;
- Validate and evaluate the usefulness of the best practice guide; and
- Disseminate the information by providing the best practice resource guide to SN professionals in an accessible, downloadable format on the NFSMI Web site.

METHOD

Research Plan

This research project was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved an expert panel of school nutrition (SN) directors who have participated in previous National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD) studies involving the development of resources for improving middle/junior high school and high school students' participation and satisfaction with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The purpose of the expert panel was to assist in the development of practice statements and goals for this resource. The information collected in Phase I was used to revise and format a draft practice statement resource. In Phase II, a national review panel of SN directors participated in the evaluation of the resource for content clarity, accuracy, and usability, and the provision of comments and suggestions to improve the document. The comments provided by this group were considered for incorporation into the final resource.

Informed Consent

The researcher for this project followed consent procedures established by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee at The University of Southern Mississippi. There were no identifying codes used to recognize participants involved in either Phase I or Phase II of this project. Expert panel and review panel members' agreement to participate in this research served as consent.

Phase I

Expert Panel

In Phase I of the research, an expert panel session was conducted with SN directors. A pool of expert panel members was selected from the list of SN directors who previously

participated in NFSMI, ARD studies involving the development of resources for improving middle/junior high school (Castillo, Lofton, & Nettles, 2011) and high school students' participation and satisfaction with the NSLP (Asperin & Castillo, 2009). Eight SN directors were identified, invited, and agreed to participate in the expert panel. Five expert panel members had previously participated in the piloting of middle/junior high school student non-participation surveys (Castillo, et al., 2011). Three of the expert panel members participated in the review panel that evaluated the *NFSMI Best Practice Guide for Increasing High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program* (Asperin, et al., 2009). The invitations asked respondents to participate in a day-and-a-half expert panel work group session to assist in developing the best practices resource. Each participant received an e-mail to determine willingness to serve on the expert panel work group. The invitation explained the project and the purpose of the meeting, as well as provided the researcher's contact information for questions and concerns. After the invitees agreed to participate, a confirmation letter was sent to each expert panel member, with additional information on the work group session and travel arrangements.

Each expert panel member received a pre-meeting packet that included a cover letter and a pre-meeting assignment form. The form comprised of a draft list of best practice statements developed around four primary factors that affect middle/junior high school participation and satisfaction with the National School Lunch Program identified in previous NFSMI, ARD research: "Food Quality," "Food Choice," "Customer Service," and "Other Factors" (Castillo, et al., 2012). Expert panel work group members were provided instructions to review the draft list of best practice statements prior to the meeting and asked to complete the pre-meeting assignment form. The pre-meeting assignment form requested feedback on content, wording, and

final selection of the statements as best practices for SN programs. These documents were collected at the close of the meeting in order to capture individual responses and comments.

The work group session was facilitated by one researcher, with two assistant moderators capturing the participants' comments. The panel was initially divided into two subgroups and given two objectives. The first objective was to discuss the outcomes of the pre-meeting document review and come to a consensus within the group as to whether each statement should be accepted, deleted, or modified. The second objective was for the subgroups to classify each practice statement into the most appropriate practice area: "Food Quality," "Food Choice," "Customer Service," and "Other Factors." Consensus building steps were then applied by the moderator to guide the two subgroups into arriving at agreement on:

- The wording of remaining practice statements;
- The appropriate classification of statements in the research-based practice area; and
- The identification of additional practice statements that subgroups recognized as missing.

Statements classified by both subgroups under the same practice area were accepted as written without discussion. Statements categorized in the same practice area, but worded differently, were briefly discussed to resolve wording issues. Statements that subgroups categorized differently were discussed to determine the appropriate practice area, and whether the statement would be kept or modified to fit the practice area, or be deleted. Added statements were discussed to determine the classification of the statements.

After the expert panel work group session ended, researchers reviewed the work group results, and captured all of the agreed upon practice statements. Researchers drafted a work

group summary for the expert panel to review, which included the practice areas, the practice statements, and goals created by the expert panel teams.

An e-mail was sent to each expert panel member providing an overview of the steps taken by the researchers after the conclusion of the expert panel work group session. Attached to the e-mail was a summary form designed for the panel members to evaluate the outcome of the work group session. Instructions for completing and returning the evaluation and the objectives of the expert panel review were provided. Panel members were asked to confirm the following: the wording of the best practices statements from the work group session; the placement of the best practices statements into the appropriate practice area; whether the best practices statements were grouped under the appropriate goals; and the wording of each goal. Participants were also asked to provide any additional statements that were omitted in the original work group session.

Draft Resource Guide

The draft resource guide consisted of an introduction, definitions of key terms, and instructions for using each section of the guide. The resource contained two primary assessment sections: a baseline assessment and a progress review. Each assessment section contained four practice areas, 13 goals, and 107 practice statements. The baseline assessment instructed users to assess each best practice statement with regard to “Current Status” and “Priority Level.” The rating scale for current status was *fully addressed, partially addressed, plan to address, not addressed, and not applicable*. The rating scale for “Priority Level” was *high, medium, and low*. The progress review section instructed users who previously identified best practice statements as *fully addressed, partially addressed, and plan to address* to indicate the level at which the practices have been implemented since the last assessment. The implementation level scale

choices were *demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and not applicable.*

Phase II

For the review panel, NFSMI, ARD requested child nutrition (CN) state agency directors to recommend SN directors who have been successful in increasing participation rates in the NSLP at the middle/junior high school level. From this list, 18 SN directors were invited to participate via e-mail, and 14 accepted. The review packet, which was included with the invitation, contained a list of instructions, an evaluation questionnaire, and the draft best practice resource. Panelists were instructed to review the practice statements and goal statements prior to completing the evaluation questionnaire. The evaluation questionnaire was divided into five sections, four representing the practice areas with the goal statements, and one representing the full document. In the first four sections, the panel members were asked to consider the goal statement in relation to the practices sub-grouped within a goal, and to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

- This goal statement accurately reflects the best practices listed.
- The goal statement is clearly worded.
- The best practices listed are applicable to increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.
- The goal statement is appropriate for this practice area.

Following each practice area, expert panel members were asked to identify any gaps that needed to be addressed and to submit corresponding best practice statements for consideration. In the full document, section panel members were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- The resource is organized in a logical sequence.
- The resource uses language that is familiar to SN professionals.
- The resource offers sufficient recommendations to SN directors for increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.
- The resource gives guidance for selecting appropriate strategies for the school lunch program.
- The format of the resource is easy to use and understand.
- The “Current Status” scale (*fully addressed, partially addressed, plan to address, not addressed, and not applicable*) is appropriate for completing a Baseline Assessment.
- The “Priority Level” scale (*high, medium, and low*) is appropriate for completing a Baseline Assessment.
- The “Implementation Status” scale (*demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and not applicable*) is appropriate for completing a Progress Review.
- The Baseline Assessment and the Progress Review are BOTH essential for using the resource effectively.
- The resource is a useful tool for SN professionals.

Data Analysis

Researchers used qualitative research methods to identify and confirm goals and practice statements for the practice categories. Descriptive statistics were calculated and consisted of frequencies and percentages of total response from the review panel’s evaluation questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Expert Panel Work Group Session

An expert panel work group session convened to review and reach consensus on the draft best practice statements for the four practice areas identified from previous National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD) research: “Food Quality,” “Food Choice,” “Customer Service,” and “Other Factors.” The eight school nutrition (SN) professionals invited to participate on the expert panel all completed the pre-meeting assignment form and attended the work group session. The expert panel members represented five of the seven United States Department of Agriculture regions.

During the expert panel work group, panel members deleted 47 (32.9%) of 143 statements, accepted 54 statements (37.8%) as written, and modified and accepted 42 statements (29.3 %). Eleven new statements were added.

Expert panel work group members were asked to participate in a post-session review. Six of the eight expert panel members (75%) completed the post-session review and provided additional feedback. The draft list of practice areas, goal themes, and practice statements were created based on the expert panel ($n = 8$) session (Table 1). The revisions from the expert panel post session reviews resulted in 107 practice statements grouped into 13 goal themes under four practice areas. The definitions of the practice areas agreed upon are listed below:

- **Choice:** These are practices that address the selection of food offered to students, such as variety, kid-friendly options, and healthy options.
- **Customer Service:** These are practices that will address student concerns regarding staff attitude towards work, service efficiency, and staff behavior towards students.

- **Food Quality:** These include practices that focus on improving the overall appeal of food to students (i.e., taste, appearance, aroma, and temperature).
- **Other Factors:** These practices will include other factors that may affect and/or influence students’ dining experiences.

Table 1

Expert Panel Work Group Session Results

Practice Areas, Goal Themes, and Sample Statements	Practice Statements
Practice Area: Choice	
<p><i>Goal Theme 1:</i> The SN staff actively promotes and provides access to healthy menu items and facilitates communication and input from students. <i>Example:</i> Varied lunch options are provided to meet the needs of middle/junior high school students (e.g., reimbursable vending, kiosks, to-go sacks, and self-service salad bars.)</p>	8
<p><i>Goal Theme 2:</i> School nutrition staff includes students in the menu planning process to ensure a variety of healthy, appealing, kid-friendly menu options are available to meet the diverse needs of the student population. <i>Example:</i> The district SN office establishes a menu-planning process that may include, but is not limited to, SN staff, middle/junior high school students, parents, and other SN staff.</p>	7

(Table 1 continues)

(Table 1 continued)

Expert Panel Work Group Session Results

Practice Areas, Goal Themes, and Sample Statements	Practice Statements
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Practice Area: Customer Service

<p><i>Goal Theme 1:</i> School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to evaluate student satisfaction and effectively respond to customer complaints and concerns.</p>	7
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Example: The SN manager ensures the SN staff follows the process for responding to mealtime complaints.

<p><i>Goal Theme 2:</i> School nutrition staff actively promotes good nutrition by targeting stakeholders through a variety of marketing mediums and educational activities.</p>	20
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Example: The district SN office utilizes promotional messages that link proper nutrition to the priorities of middle/junior high school students (e.g., better academic performance, weight control, enhanced athletic performance, and improved quality of life.)

<p><i>Goal Theme 3:</i> School nutrition staff actively promotes good customer service by targeting communication and promotional activities at secondary SN stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, other school community members, and SN staff.)</p>	11
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Example: District/school staff is encouraged to provide feedback to SN staff on the students' acceptance of menu items gathered through surveys.

<p><i>Goal Theme 4:</i> School nutrition staff is trained to meet the unique customer service needs of middle/junior high school students.</p>	7
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Example: The SN staff is provided appropriate customer service orientation and regularly participates in professional development activities.

(Table 1 continues)

(Table 1 continued)

Expert Panel Work Group Session Results

Practice Areas, Goal Themes, and Sample Statements	Practice Statements
Practice Area: Food Quality	
<p><i>Goal Theme 1:</i> School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food preparation consistently leads to a variety of high quality, good tasting, and child-appealing foods available to students in appropriate portion sizes.</p>	6
<p><i>Example:</i> The SN staff consistently prepares high quality, good tasting meals that appeal to middle/junior high school students.</p>	
<p><i>Goal Theme 2:</i> School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure fresh foods are offered to students in an appealing manner, while providing menu item descriptions, nutrition content, and promoting smooth traffic flow through the serving area.</p>	8
<p><i>Example:</i> Menu items are organized to facilitate the smooth flow of students from point-of-selection to point-of-sale.</p>	
<p><i>Goal Theme 3:</i> School nutrition staff food safety training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food safety is maintained throughout the food service system.</p>	8
<p><i>Example:</i> School nutrition staff is regularly trained on safe food-handling procedures to ensure that students are protected from food-borne illnesses.</p>	
<p><i>Goal Theme 4:</i> School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place regarding food receiving/storage procedures and the development of food specifications to ensure only the highest quality foods are offered to students.</p>	2
<p><i>Example:</i> The SN district office establishes food specifications and monitors shipments to ensure high quality foods are received from vendors.</p>	

(Table 1 continues)

(Table 1 continued)

Expert Panel Work Group Session Results

Practice Areas, Goal Themes, and Sample Statements	Practice Statements
Practice Area: Other Factors	
<p><i>Goal Theme 1:</i> Continuous quality improvement training activities and procedures are in place to ensure the SN program maximizes the available resources to best meet the needs of students while promoting a positive work environment for staff.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The SN director/designee participates on a district-level team to prioritize identified areas of improvement to increase middle/junior high school student participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).</p>	6
<p><i>Goal Theme 2:</i> School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure regulatory compliance with current NSLP guidelines.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The school nutrition staff has policies in place to protect the confidentiality of middle/junior high school students receiving free- and reduced-price meals.</p>	7
<p><i>Goal Theme 3:</i> A multidisciplinary approach is utilized to ensure the cafeteria environment is pleasing to students, while maximizing the time available for students to eat.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Students are able to purchase reimbursable meals and are allowed to enjoy their meals outside of the cafeteria.</p>	10

After the post-session review, the researchers formatted the practice areas, goal statements, and practice statements into a draft resource. The first section of the resource should enable users to establish baseline data to identify the current status of each best practice statement pertaining to their SN program with regard to increasing middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction in the NSLP. The “Current Status” scale for the first portion of the resource included *fully addressed, partially addressed, plan to address, not addressed, and not applicable*. Additionally, this section of the resource should enable users to use the “Priority Level” scale to rank each practice statement as *high, medium, or low*, based on the level of impact of each practice statement.

The second portion of the resource, the progress review, was designed to measure how effectively a user has implemented a plan of action identified during the baseline assessment. This is most effective when done periodically (e.g., annually or bi-annually). The “Progress Review” section instructed users who previously identified a best practices statement as *fully addressed, partially addressed, and plan to address* to indicate the level at which the practices have been implemented since the last assessment. The “Implementation Status” choices were *demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and not applicable*.

Review Panel

Of the 14 SN directors invited to participate in the review panel evaluation, 13 (92.9%) completed the evaluation questionnaire and provided additional comments and suggestions for the resource. Review panel members evaluated the practice statements, goal statements, and the draft practice resource. Panel members also reviewed and assessed the content, scales, format, and usefulness of the resource as a self-assessment tool for SN professionals.

The panel members’ evaluation of goal statements and best practice statements is displayed in Table 2. The agreement percentages and frequencies indicate a high level of agreement that these statements were best practices for increasing middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction in the NSLP; that the goals appropriately reflected each best practice statement sub-grouped under that goal; and that there were an adequate number of practice statements to appropriately address the goal(s) under the practice category.

The review panel also evaluated the content, scales, format, and usefulness of the resource. They identified whether they agreed or disagreed with the evaluation questions. The review panel’s evaluation of the overall resource is displayed on Table 3. The agreement

percentages indicate a high level of agreement that the formatting of the best practice resource was appropriate for the community it would serve, and that the baseline assessment and the progress review sections are appropriate for SN professionals using the resource. Space was provided on the evaluation questionnaire for the review panel members to provide comments and suggestions. Figure 1 contains the general comments submitted by reviewers. The researcher reviewed the comments made by the panel and incorporated their suggestions into the practice resource. The revisions from the review panel resulted in 86 practice statements grouped into 12 goal themes under four practice areas.

Table 2

National Review Panel's Evaluation of Goal and Practice Statements (N=13)

Evaluation Questions per Goal	Level of Agreement Percentages and Frequencies per Practice Category and Goal for Agree and Strongly Agree	
	Practice Area: Choice	
	Goal 1	Goal 2
The goal statement accurately reflects the best practices listed.	100% (13)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is clearly worded.	84.6% (11)	92.3% (12)
The best practices listed are applicable to increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.	100% (13)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is appropriate for this practice area.	100% (13)	92.3% (12)

(Table 2 continues)

(Table 2 continued)

National Review Panel's Evaluation of Goal and Practice Statements (N=13)

Evaluation Questions per Goal	Level of Agreement Percentages and Frequencies per Practice Category and Goal for Agree and Strongly Agree			
	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
Practice Area: Customer Service				
	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
The goal statement accurately reflects the best practices listed.	100% (13)	92.3% (12)	91.6% (11)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is clearly worded.	100% (13)	100% (13)	91.6% (11)	84.6% (11)
The best practices listed are applicable to increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.	100% (13)	100% (13)	100% (12)	92.3% (12)
Practice Area: Food Quality				
	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
The goal statement accurately reflects the best practices listed.	100% (13)	100% (13)	92.3% (12)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is clearly worded.	100% (13)	100% (13)	92.3% (12)	92.3% (12)
The best practices are applicable to increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.	100% (13)	100% (13)	92.3% (12)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is appropriate for this practice area.	100% (13)	100% (13)	92.3% (12)	84.6% (11)

(Table 2 continues)

(Table 2 continued)

National Review Panel's Evaluation of Goal and Practice Statements (N=13)

Evaluation Questions per Goal	Level of Agreement Percentages and Frequencies per Practice Category and Goal for Agree and Strongly Agree		
	Practice Area: Other Factors		
	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
The goal statement accurately reflects the best practices listed.	100% (13)	100% (13)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is clearly worded.	92.3% (12)	100% (13)	92.3% (12)
The best practices listed are applicable to increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.	92.3% (12)	92.3% (12)	92.3% (12)
The goal statement is appropriate for this practice area.	92.3% (12)	92.3% (12)	84.6% (11)

Table 3

Review Panel’s Overall Evaluation of the Best Practices Guide

Overall Resource Evaluation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Best Practice Guide is organized in a logical sequence.	0%	0%	69%	31%
The Best Practice Guide uses language that is familiar to SN professionals.	0%	0%	77%	23%
The Best Practice Guide offers sufficient recommendations to SN directors for increasing participation and satisfaction of middle/junior high school students in the NSLP.	0%	0%	77%	23%
The Best Practice Guide gives guidance for selecting appropriate strategies for the school lunch program.	0%	8%	77%	15%
The format of the Best Practice Guide is easy to use and understand.	0%	0%	62%	38%
The “Current Status” scale (<i>fully addressed, partially addressed, plan to address, not addressed, and not applicable</i>) is appropriate for completing a Baseline Assessment.	0%	0%	62%	38%
The “Priority Level” scale (<i>high, medium, and low</i>) is appropriate for completing a Baseline Assessment.	0%	0%	46%	54%
The “Implementation Status” scale (<i>demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and not applicable</i>) is appropriate for completing a Progress review.	0%	0%	62%	38.5%

(Table 3 continues)

(Table 3 continued)

Review Panel's Overall Evaluation of the Best Practices Guide

Overall Resource Evaluation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Baseline Assessment and the Progress Review are BOTH essential for using the Best Practices Guide effectively.	0%	0%	69%	31%
The Baseline Assessment and the Progress Review are BOTH needed components of the Best Practices guide.	0%	0%	69%	31%
The Best Practices Guide is a useful tool for SN professionals.	0%	8%	38%	54%

Figure 1

Review Panel General Comments

This is a great tool for any food service department, old or new. You could use this tool to improve your program.

Very enlightening and helpful.

Honestly, this is a very good project. It is somewhat like the HealthierUS School Challenge in general, though. It is lengthy, and does take some review. It has good information, but the fact that it may take some time to complete may deter many people from implementing it. It is a pretty thick packet of stuff.

It is an easy-to-use document, which is essential to providing assessment. I appreciate the best practices being written so that they also provide suggestions on what to do.

Overall, the guide is easy-to-use and provides a “quick” assessment of your programs, something that is critical in our time-crunched work day. With the addition of paperwork for documentation, having a quick and easy-to-use tool is essential. Thank you for the hard work.

I guess I believe everything you are surveying is good - but will food safety REALLY help improve the number of junior high and high school students that eat in the school lunch program?

I feel like this good, but VERY lengthy from my perspective as a food service director. It isn't an easy program evaluation. In many ways, it has components of the HealthierUS School Challenge - so are you re-inventing the wheel?

This actually gave me some great ideas for improving our program based on questions asked.

This could be a very useful tool for evaluating a program and identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Study Conclusions and Applications

The primary objective of the project was to identify and confirm best practices suitable for increasing participation rates and improving middle/junior high school student satisfaction with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). A modified best practices research model (Mold & Gregory, 2003) was used. Two expert panels of school nutrition (SN) professionals participated in a work group session and a national review panel to systematically identify and confirm best practices for dissemination to other SN professionals. The *NFSMI Best Practice Guide for Increasing Middle/Junior High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program* (Appendix) contains 86 best practice statements grouped into 12 goals that support the four practice areas (“Choice,” “Customer Service,” “Food Quality,” and “Other”). There are two components to the resource, the “Baseline Assessment” and the “Progress Review.” Both are provided to assist SN professionals in evaluating operational performance based on the best practice areas.

The “Baseline Assessment” is designed to help the SN professional initially identify practices that are applicable to his/her SN program. Completing this assessment will aid in identifying strategies that the SN program can continue to implement (or implement in the future) to maintain and/or increase middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction. Each best practice statement is assessed using a “Current Status” scale (*fully addressed, partially addressed, plan to address, not addressed, and not applicable*). The user is then instructed to assign a priority level (*high, medium, and low*) for addressing the best practices that pertain to the user’s SN program. Upon assessing the current status and priority level of the

best practices, SN professionals can establish an action plan for addressing the practices identified as needing attention.

The “Progress Review” is designed to measure how effectively the action plan has been implemented to address challenges identified during the “Baseline Assessment.” Each best practice statement is evaluated using an “Implementation Status” scale (*demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and not applicable*). School nutrition professionals are advised to perform the progress review annually to facilitate continuous quality improvement. Results of subsequent progress reviews may also be used to guide SN directors and/or managers in reporting program improvements to the district and/or school community.

This resource provides SN professionals a research-based tool to evaluate operational practices for program improvement. Use of the resource can help SN directors focus improvement efforts on best practices that will produce the most impact on middle/junior high school students’ participation in the NSLP and satisfaction with their school lunch experience.

Education and Training Implications

The following are recommendations for additional education and training resources:

- Training modules are needed to help SN professionals better understand the four practice areas and how performance in each area influences the perceptions of middle/high school students regarding the NSLP and the school lunch experience. These modules may be developed as online courses to provide maximum access to SN professionals.
- There is a need to develop train-the-trainer modules enabling SN directors to teach SN managers how to critically evaluate their programs and complete the “Baseline

Assessment” and “Progress Review” in each SN site. These modules could be included in an orientation for new or aspiring SN directors and/or supervisors.

- Additional training resources can be developed to guide SN professionals in using results of the “Baseline Assessment” in completing action plans as a part of a continuous quality improvement process.

Limitations

The project is limited only to the development of the best practice guide utilizing expert advice from a small number of practicing professionals. A feedback mechanism should be put in place for SN professionals to provide insight on the usefulness of the resource and their role in administering the self-assessment.

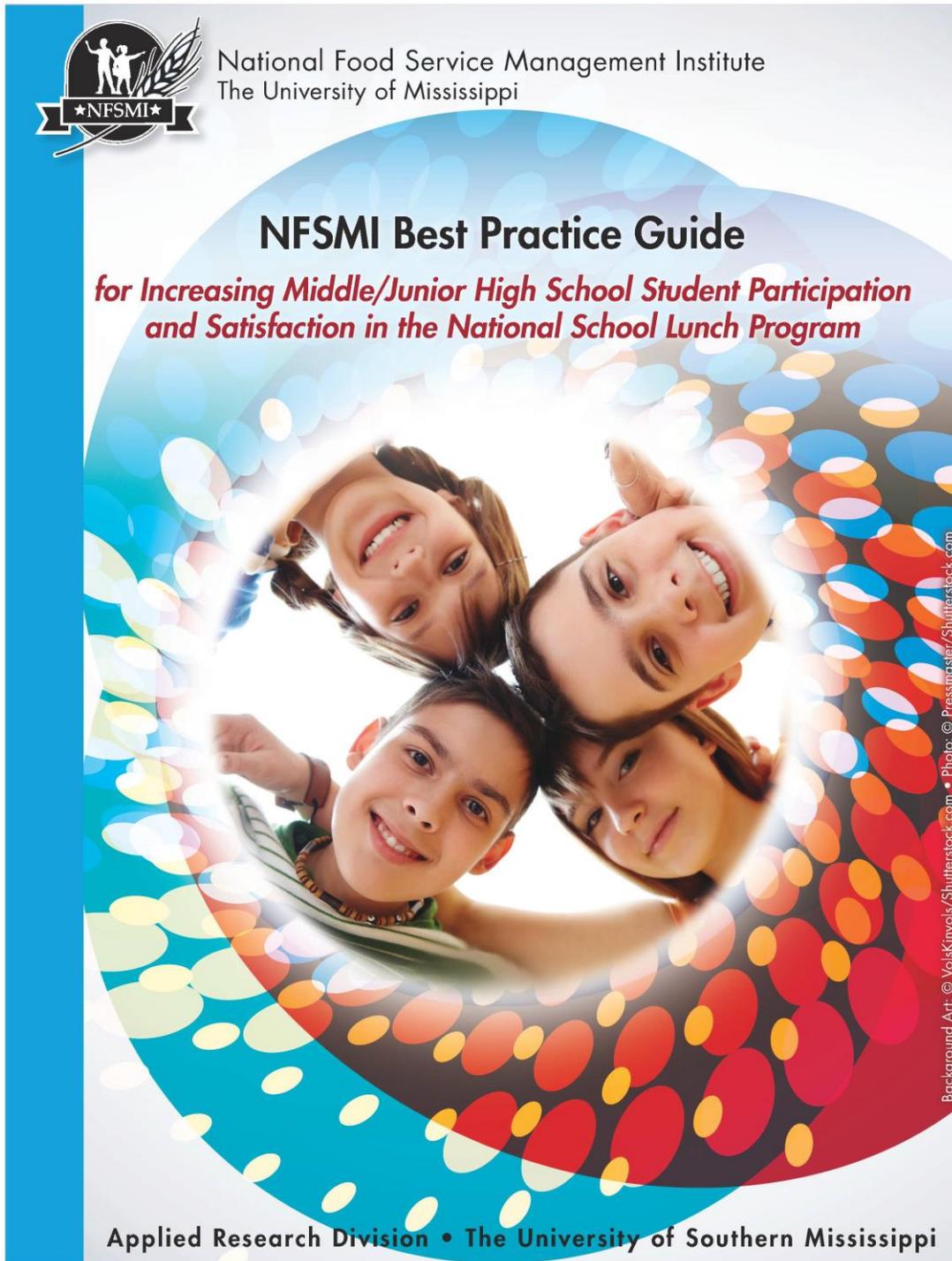
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Appendix

NFSMI Best Practice Guide for Increasing Middle/Junior High School Student Participation in
the National School Lunch Program



NFSMI Best Practice Guide
*for Increasing Middle/Junior High School
Student Participation and Satisfaction
in the National School Lunch Program*



National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi

Item Number: GY 2012 #2
2015

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

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National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi
Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

The National Food Service Management Institute was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford and is operated in collaboration with The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Purpose

The purpose of the National Food Service Management Institute is to improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

Mission

The mission of the National Food Service Management Institute is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

Vision

The vision of the National Food Service Management Institute is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

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Introduction

Past research has demonstrated that during middle/junior high school, students' participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) begins to decline, a trend that continues throughout high school. In an effort to address this issue, the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD) has conducted a series of multi-faceted studies. As a result, two middle/junior high school foodservice surveys were developed. The *Middle/Junior High School Participation Survey* targets students who participate daily in the NSLP, while the *Middle/Junior High School Non-Participation Survey* targets students who participate occasionally or not at all. The *Guide for Administering School Lunch Satisfaction and Participation Surveys to Middle/Junior High School Students* was developed to provide step-by-step instructions for using the surveys and creating action plans framed around the "Continuous Quality Improvement" process.

These studies indicated there was also a need to develop a compilation of best practices and/or strategies that complement the Continuous Quality Improvement Action Plans outlined in the *Guide for Administering School Lunch Satisfaction and Participation Surveys to Middle/Junior High School Students*. Thus, the primary objective of this project was to identify and confirm best practices for increasing participation rates and improving middle/junior high school student satisfaction with school nutrition (SN) programs.

The best practices were framed around four best practice areas identified in previous NFSMI research, namely *Choice*, *Customer Service*, *Food Quality*, and *Other*. This project was conducted in two phases, both involving SN professionals from exemplary SN programs across the United States. In Phase I of the study, an expert panel of SN professionals reviewed draft best practice statements during a facilitated work group session. Members came to consensus on (1) wording of each best practice statement, (2) classification of statements under the appropriate research-based practice areas, and (3) grouping of similar themed statements into goals. Phase II utilized a nationwide review panel of SN directors to evaluate (1) appropriate grouping of best practice statements into goals and practice areas, (2) ease of use of assessment scales, (3) formatting, and (4) general content validity of the resource.

This resource contains 86 best practices grouped into 12 goals that support the four practice areas (Choice, Customer Service,



Introduction

Food Quality, and Other). There are two components to the resource, the Baseline Assessment and the Progress Review. Both are provided to assist SN professionals in evaluating operational performance based on the best practice areas.

Baseline Assessment

This form is designed to help the SN director/supervisor and/or SN manager initially identify practices that are applicable to his/her SN program. Completing this assessment will help identify strategies that the SN program can continue to implement (or implement in the future) to maintain and/or increase middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction. Each best practice statement is assessed using a current status scale (*fully addressed, partially addressed, plan to address, not addressed, and not applicable*). The user is then instructed to assign a priority level (*high, medium, and low*) for addressing the best practices as these pertain to the user's SN program. Upon assessing the current status and priority level of the best practices, SN professionals can establish an action plan to address and prioritize the practices identified as needing attention.

Progress Review

This form is designed to measure how effectively the action plan has been implemented to address challenges identified during the baseline assessment. Each best practice statement is evaluated using an implementation status scale (*demonstrates excellence, area of strength, needs improvement, unsatisfactory, and not applicable*). School nutrition professionals are advised to perform the progress review annually to facilitate continuous quality improvement. Results of subsequent progress reviews may also be used to guide SN directors and/or managers in reporting program improvements to the district and/or school community.

The *NFSMI Best Practice Guide for Increasing Middle/Junior High School Student Participation and Satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program* provides SN professionals a research-based tool to evaluate operational practices for program improvement. Use of the resource can help SN directors focus improvement efforts on best practices that will produce the most impact on middle/junior high school students' participation in the NSLP and satisfaction with their school lunch experience.



Introduction

Definition of Key Terms

Best Practices

Measurable practices that define achievable, effective and efficient strategies for school nutrition professionals for maintaining and increasing middle/junior high school student participation and/or satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program.

Practice Areas

Research-based categories influencing middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program as identified in a previous NFSMI research study:

Choice: Practices that address the selection of food offered to students, such as variety, kid-friendly options and healthy options.

Customer Service: Practices that address student concerns regarding staff attitude towards work, service efficiency, and staff behaviors towards students.

Food Quality: Practices that focus on improving the overall appeal of food to students (i.e., taste, appearance, aroma, and temperature).

Other Factors: Practices that include other factors that may affect and/or influence student's dining experience.

Goals

Broad objectives that provide the context for what is to be accomplished under each practice category.

Stakeholders

Individuals or groups of individuals (e.g., middle/junior high school students, parents, school nutrition staff, the community, industry partners, and other school administrators/staff) that can directly or indirectly affect, influence, and/or benefit from the services offered by the school nutrition program.



Baseline Assessment

Instructions for Using the Baseline Assessment

Step 1 – Current Status

Indicate the current status of each best practice statement pertaining to YOUR school nutrition program with regards to increasing middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program.

Scale	Anchor	Description
3	Fully Addressed	Practice is currently being implemented in your program.
2	Partially Addressed	Practice is implemented to some degree in your program.
1	Plan to Address	Practice has never been implemented, but you are planning to try in your program.
0	Not Addressed	Practice can be done, but is not implemented in your program.
N/A	Not Applicable	Practice cannot be supported given the constraints of your program.

Compute the total score for each goal. Divide the total by the number of practices that you evaluated (i.e., exclude practices designated as N/A). The resulting number is your *Goal Score*.

$$\text{Total Score} \text{ ______ } \div \text{\# of BPs (exclude N/A)} \text{ ______ } = \text{Goal Score} \text{ ______ }$$

Goals with the highest *Goal Scores* are your areas of strength and should be maintained.

Goals with the lowest *Goal Scores* are the areas where you have the greatest opportunity for improvement.



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

Baseline Assessment

Step 2 – Priority Level

Indicate the priority level of each statement pertaining to YOUR school nutrition program with regards to increasing middle/junior high school student participation and satisfaction in the National School Lunch Program.

Scale	Anchor	Description
H	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice has significant impact on participation and/or satisfaction. Plan for action should be implemented immediately.
M	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice has moderate impact on participation and/or satisfaction. Plan for action should be developed with implementation following completion of high priority practices.
L	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice can potentially impact participation and/or satisfaction. Plan of action and timeline for implementation may be included in long-term planning for the school nutrition program.



Baseline Assessment

Practice Area: Choice

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on improving how healthy food options are selected, marketed, and offered to students, such as variety, student-friendly options and healthy options.

Goal 1

The school nutrition staff provide access to healthy menu items and facilitates communication with students.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
Varied lunch options are provided to meet the needs of middle/junior high school students (e.g., reimbursable vending, kiosks, grab-n-go sacks, self-service salad bars).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Nutrition information for food items is posted in the cafeteria (e.g., calories, carbohydrates, protein, fat, major allergen ingredients).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Healthful options are placed at the beginning of the serving line to increase student awareness of their availability.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office coordinates with suppliers, distributors, and other industry partners for student taste panels of new products.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

Goal 1 (Continued)

The school nutrition staff provide access to healthy menu items and facilitates communication with students.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff encourage middle/junior high school students to try the foods offered, including new and unfamiliar foods.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The à la carte items offered are limited to food items that exist as components of the reimbursable meal and/or meet the Smart Snack Regulations.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff regularly check the posted menu for accuracy in relation to production records and standardized recipes.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Menu changes are communicated to students and staff prior to meal service.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

GOAL 2

Students are involved in the menu planning process to ensure a variety of healthy and appealing, menu options are available to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The district school nutrition office establishes a menu planning process that may include, but is not limited to, school nutrition staff, middle/junior high school students, parents, and other school staff.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district menu planning process incorporates healthful options that appeal to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Healthier versions of menu items commonly preferred by middle/junior high school students are provided (e.g., whole grain pizza with low-fat cheese, hamburgers on whole wheat buns).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district and/or site-level school nutrition office offers students opportunities to sample and provide feedback regarding new menu items to be added to the next school year's menu.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The menu planning process incorporates a variety of food choices that meet the needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

GOAL 2 (Continued)

Students are involved in the menu planning process to ensure a variety of healthy and appealing, menu options are available to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The menu planning process ensures that there is a variety of food choices that appeal to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Menu planning ensures that a variety of food choices are offered to accommodate the local preferences and cultural diversity of students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

Notes for Action Plan



Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on promoting stakeholder satisfaction including customer relations, marketing, promotion to stakeholders, and training. These are practices that address student concerns regarding staff attitude towards work, service efficiency, and staff behaviors towards students.

Goal 1

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to evaluate student satisfaction and effectively respond to customer complaints and concerns.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition manager ensures the school nutrition staff follow the process for responding to meal time complaints.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition office conducts informal evaluations to assess student satisfaction with their dining experience (e.g., the menu for the day, the dining environment, a new item on the menu).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
An interdisciplinary team approach is used to examine and address customer service needs and concerns of middle/junior high school students participating in the National School Lunch Program.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

Goal 1 (Continued)

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to evaluate student satisfaction and effectively respond to customer complaints and concerns.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff follow good customer service strategies when interacting with students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff utilize appropriate communication techniques to interact with students (e.g., verbally describe menu items being served, addressing students by first name).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office establishes a system and training plan for addressing student comments and meal time complaints received from students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office addresses students' comments and complaints on an individual and timely basis.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2									
School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.									
Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level			
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low	
The district school nutrition office utilizes promotional messages that link proper nutrition to the priorities of middle/junior high school students (e.g., better academic performance, weight control, enhanced athletic performance, improved quality of life).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L	
The district school nutrition office markets by utilizing student leaders in their promotional messages.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L	
The district school nutrition office utilizes targeted promotional materials to address the needs of different market segments (e.g., athletes, females/males, ethnic groups).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L	
The district school nutrition office utilizes positive messages and/or themes in developing and disseminating promotional materials through multiple communication channels.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L	
Informational and promotional materials are available for parents/guardians in different languages, as appropriate.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L	



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
Students receive positive, motivating messages about healthy eating and the school nutrition program throughout the school setting.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition director/designee meets with student leaders to educate them about the role of good nutrition and encourage them to be advocates for the school nutrition program.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office encourages the district/school to actively endorse healthy food choices available through the school nutrition program.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district/school supports healthy food choices by discouraging advertising that promotes less nutritious food choices.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
District/school administrators and school staff regularly visit the cafeteria to eat, socialize, and encourage students to eat a variety of healthy foods.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
A representative from the school nutrition staff is included on the school wellness team.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition director/designee initiates media coverage of lunch services provided for middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
School nutrition staff and teachers are trained on the importance of good nutrition to educational performance of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff engage parents/guardians by inviting them to visit the cafeteria during meal time.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office establishes a partnership with health and/or nutrition teachers to promote healthy eating behaviors.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Lunch meal prices are reasonable for the amount and quality of food served to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
Students are involved in developing menu merchandising and marketing plans for the school lunch program.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Printed menus and promotional materials indicate menu items suggested and/or approved by students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
A marketing station is established to display the meal of the day and to offer small samples of selected items.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office provides the menu along with the nutrition information through diverse forms of communication (e.g., Web site, printed materials, displays, public service announcements).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 3

School nutrition staff actively promote good customer service by targeting communication and promotional activities to stakeholders (e.g. students, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, other school community members, and school nutrition staff).

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
District/school staff are encouraged to provide feedback to school nutrition staff on the students' acceptance of menu items gathered through surveys.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office provides information to parents/guardians regarding foods and/or ingredients served through the National School Lunch Program, when requested.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office communicates to stakeholders the benefits of receiving adequate nutrition in the educational performance of students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office communicates the role of the school nutrition program in the educational performance of students to stakeholders through the district wellness policy.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 3 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good customer service by targeting communication and promotional activities to stakeholders (e.g. students, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, other school community members, and school nutrition staff).

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The district school nutrition office collaborates with school staff and community utilizing a variety of outlets such as social media to promote the school nutrition program's role in building a healthy school nutrition environment.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district/school and school nutrition staff document and address parental concerns regarding meal issues.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
School nutrition staff and the wellness committee collaborate to provide parents/guardians information about meeting the nutritional needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Nutrition information is incorporated into the printed menus sent home to parents/guardians.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office establishes partnerships with the media.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 3 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good customer service by targeting communication and promotional activities to stakeholders (e.g. students, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, other school community members, and school nutrition staff).

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
School menus are distributed to administrators, teachers, parents/guardians, and the school community.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
District/school administration promotes and encourages students to share comments and suggestions to the school nutrition staff.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 4								
School nutrition staff are trained to meet the customer service needs of middle/junior high school students.								
Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff are provided appropriate customer service orientation and regularly participate in professional development activities.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff attend annual training on issues associated with food and nutrition needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
District/school administrators support customer service training and education for school nutrition staff serving middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff are trained on customer service strategies and understanding specific food and nutrition needs appropriate for middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff are trained annually on customer service trends that affect the dining experiences of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 4 (Continued)

School nutrition staff are trained to meet the customer service needs of middle/junior high school students.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition and school staff are trained to be culturally sensitive when communicating, interacting, and responding to social and cognitive issues of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

Notes for Action Plan



Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on promoting stakeholder satisfaction including: food preparation, food presentation, food safety training, and procurement, receiving, and storage. These include practices that focus on improving the overall appeal of food to students (i.e., taste, appearance, aroma, and temperature).

Goal 1

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food preparation consistently leads to a variety of high quality, good tasting, appealing foods available to students in appropriate portion sizes.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff consistently prepare high quality, good tasting meals that appeal to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
School nutrition staff ensure menu items are evaluated regularly for student acceptability.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff are trained to develop and follow standardized recipes.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff use standardized recipes that indicate the appropriate serving portion and serving utensils for each menu item.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

Goal 1 (Continued)

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food preparation consistently leads to a variety of high quality, good tasting, appealing foods available to students in appropriate portion sizes.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff utilize the appropriate utensils to serve correct portion sizes for each menu item.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office ensure there is a variety of food preparation methods incorporated throughout the school nutrition menus.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 2

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure fresh foods are offered to students in an appealing manner.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
Menu items are organized to facilitate the smooth flow of students from point-of-selection to point-of-sale.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Menu items are displayed in an appealing manner.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff is trained to use edible garnishes that complement the flavor and color of the menu items.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff ensure the freshness of ready-to-eat raw fruits and vegetables.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition manager establishes procedures to ensure that menu items on the serving line remain fresh.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
All menu items are clearly labeled at point-of-selection.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Descriptions are provided at point-of-selection when a menu item is new or unfamiliar to students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
School nutrition staff ensure quality standards are the same for either fresh or re-heated foods.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
<p>Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____</p>								



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 3

Training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food quality and food safety are maintained throughout the foodservice system.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
School nutrition staff are regularly trained on safe food handling practices to ensure that students are protected from food-borne illnesses.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition manager ensures meals are prepared and served according to National School Lunch Program standards.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff monitor the temperature of menu items throughout the serving period to ensure that food is served at the proper temperature.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition staff maintain appropriate holding temperatures to ensure freshness of finished products.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
School nutrition office ensures there is sufficient refrigeration equipment for holding menu items that require cooling.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
School nutrition district office ensures there is sufficient holding equipment for menu items that need to be kept warm or hot.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 3 (Continued)

Training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food quality and food safety are maintained throughout the foodservice system.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff are trained to follow food holding procedures to maintain food quality.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office ensures that HACCP measures are established throughout the food service system in the district (e.g., from receiving, to storage, to preparation and re-thermalization, to service, to sanitation) and that all school nutrition staff are routinely trained on following these measures.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office establishes food specifications and monitors shipments to ensure high quality foods are received from vendors.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office ensures school nutrition staff are adequately trained on receiving and storing food to ensure and maintain the highest level of food quality.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
<p>Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____</p>								



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

Notes for Action Plan



Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on how a school nutrition program continually improves, maintains regulatory compliance, and promotes a healthy enjoyable atmosphere for students. The grouping goals for this practice area are continuous quality improvement (CQI), regulatory accountability and environment. These practices include other factors that may affect and/or influence student's dining experience.

Goal 1

Continuous quality improvement training activities and procedures are in place to ensure the needs of middle/junior high school students are met while promoting a positive work environment for school nutrition staff.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition director/designee participates on a district-level team to prioritize identified areas of improvement to increase middle/junior high school student participation in the National School Lunch Program.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office develops a plan to routinely review and implement program improvements regarding services available to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition director and manager(s) collaborate to ensure that staff morale is high and a positive working environment is maintained.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

Goal 1 (Continued)

Continuous quality improvement training activities and procedures are in place to ensure the needs of middle/junior high school students are met while promoting a positive work environment for school nutrition staff.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The district school nutrition office evaluates service protocols related to serving middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office identifies resources needed to improve meal services provided to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition office leverages technology in all areas possible to maximize program efficiency and effectiveness.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 2								
School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure regulatory compliance.								
Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition staff has policies in place to protect the confidentiality of middle/junior high school students receiving free and reduced price meals.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Parents/guardians are provided information regarding free and reduced priced meal eligibility and application procedures.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition staff communicate policies regarding services available for middle/junior high school students to parents/guardians and school staff through the National School Lunch Program.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition office has policies in place informing parents/guardians of their child's access to school lunches (e.g., available meal credits, low balance, pending payments, pending free and reduced priced meal applications).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district/school and district school nutrition office communicate with parents regarding services available to accommodate students with special food and/or nutrition needs.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure regulatory compliance.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
Parents/guardians can request menu modifications in support of a diet prescription/order certified by a licensed physician and/or a medical statement certified by a recognized medical authority.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office consults with a Registered Dietitian or other health specialist to plan age-appropriate meals for middle/junior high school students who have special food and/or nutrition needs.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 3

A multi-disciplinary approach is utilized to ensure the cafeteria environment is pleasing to students, while maximizing the time available for students to eat.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The school nutrition director and/or manager provides input to school administrators who develop lunch period schedules to optimize the cafeteria's seating capacity.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The dining room atmosphere is relaxed, inviting, and well lit for an enjoyable dining experience.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Dining room furniture is appropriately designed to meet the needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Eating utensils are suitable for middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Dining and service areas are designed, renovated, and decorated to appeal and meet the needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
A pleasant, attractive, safe, and sanitary dining environment is provided for students.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The district school nutrition office has a policy on work attire and personal hygiene.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 3 (Continued)

A multi-disciplinary approach is utilized to ensure the cafeteria environment is pleasing to students, while maximizing the time available for students to eat.

Best Practices	Current Status					Priority Level		
	Fully Addressed	Partially Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Addressed	Not Applicable	High	Medium	Low
The district school nutrition office collaborates with other district departments to seek additional funding sources to update/renovate the cafeteria.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
Service and/or check-out lines are organized to facilitate the smooth flow of students from point-of-selection to point-of sale.	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L
The school nutrition director/designee coordinates with district/school administrators to minimize academic or extracurricular activities scheduled during the lunch periods (e.g., remedial classes, student organization meetings).	3	2	1	0	N/A	H	M	L

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Baseline Assessment

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

Notes for Action Plan



PROGRESS REVIEW

Instructions for Using the Progress Review

For practices previously identified as *Fully Addressed*, *Partially Addressed*, and *Plan to Address*, indicate the level at which the practices have been implemented since the last assessment.

This form should be used for each succeeding periodic assessment.

Scale	Anchor	Description
3	Demonstrates Excellence	Practice was successfully implemented with effects exceeding forecasted results.
2	Area of Strength	Practice was implemented as planned with consistent results.
1	Needs Improvement	Implementation is inconsistent with mediocre results.
0	Unsatisfactory	Implementation was planned, but was not performed.
N/A	Not Applicable	Practice was not part of the school nutrition program's plan of action.

Compute the total score for each goal. Divide the total by the number of practices that you evaluated (i.e., exclude practices designated as N/A). The resulting number is your *Goal Score*.

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____

Goals with the highest *Goal Scores* indicate your greatest success with implementing your plan of action.

Goals with the lowest *Goal Scores* should be the focus of your next plan of action.



Progress Review

Practice Area: Choice

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on improving how healthy food options are selected, marketed, and offered to students, such as variety, student-friendly options and healthy options.

Goal 1

The school nutrition staff provide access to healthy menu items and facilitates communication with students.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
Varied lunch options are provided to meet the needs of middle/junior high school students (e.g., reimbursable vending, kiosks, grab-n-go sacks, self-service salad bars).	3	2	1	0	N/A
Nutrition information for food items is posted in the cafeteria (e.g., calories, carbohydrates, protein, fat, major allergen ingredients).	3	2	1	0	N/A
Healthful options are placed at the beginning of the serving line to increase student awareness of their availability.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office coordinates with suppliers, distributors, and other industry partners for student taste panels of new products.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff encourage middle/junior high school students to try the foods offered, including new and unfamiliar foods.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The à la carte items offered are limited to food items that exist as components of the reimbursable meal and/or meet the Smart Snack Regulations.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

Goal 1 (Continued)

The school nutrition staff provide access to healthy menu items and facilitates communication with students.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition staff regularly check the posted menu for accuracy in relation to production records and standardized recipes.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Menu changes are communicated to students and staff prior to meal service.	3	2	1	0	N/A
<p>Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____</p>					



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

GOAL 2

Students are involved in the menu planning process to ensure a variety of healthy and appealing, menu options are available to meet the diverse needs of the student population.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office establishes a menu planning process that may include, but is not limited to, school nutrition staff, middle/junior high school students, parents, and other school staff.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district menu planning process incorporates healthful options that appeal to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Healthier versions of menu items commonly preferred by middle/junior high school students are provided (e.g., whole grain pizza with low-fat cheese, hamburgers on whole wheat buns).	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district and/or site-level school nutrition office offers students opportunities to sample and provide feedback regarding new menu items to be added to the next school year's menu.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The menu planning process incorporates a variety of food choices that meet the needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The menu planning process ensures that there is a variety of food choices that appeal to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Menu planning ensures that a variety of food choices are offered to accommodate the local preferences and cultural diversity of students.	3	2	1	0	N/A

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



National Food Service Management Institute

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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CHOICE

Notes for Action Plan



Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on promoting stakeholder satisfaction including customer relations, marketing, promotion to stakeholders, and training. These are practices that address student concerns regarding staff attitude towards work, service efficiency, and staff behaviors towards students.

Goal 1

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to evaluate student satisfaction and effectively respond to customer complaints and concerns.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition manager ensures the school nutrition staff follow the process for responding to meal time complaints.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition office conducts informal evaluations to assess student satisfaction with their dining experience (e.g., the menu for the day, the dining environment, a new item on the menu).	3	2	1	0	N/A
An interdisciplinary team approach is used to examine and address customer service needs and concerns of middle/junior high school students participating in the National School Lunch Program.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff follow good customer service strategies when interacting with students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff utilize appropriate communication techniques to interact with students (e.g., verbally describe menu items being served, addressing students by first name).	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

Goal 1 (Continued)

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to evaluate student satisfaction and effectively respond to customer complaints and concerns.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office establishes a system and training plan for addressing student comments and meal time complaints received from students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office addresses students' comments and complaints on an individual and timely basis.	3	2	1	0	N/A
<p>Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____</p>					



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2					
School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.					
Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office utilizes promotional messages that link proper nutrition to the priorities of middle/junior high school students (e.g., better academic performance, weight control, enhanced athletic performance, improved quality of life).	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office markets by utilizing student leaders in their promotional messages.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office utilizes targeted promotional materials to address the needs of different market segments (e.g., athletes, females/males, ethnic groups).	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office utilizes positive messages and/or themes in developing and disseminating promotional materials through multiple communication channels.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Informational and promotional materials are available for parents/guardians in different languages, as appropriate.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Students receive positive, motivating messages about healthy eating and the school nutrition program throughout the school setting.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition director/designee meets with student leaders to educate them about the role of good nutrition and encourage them to be advocates for the school nutrition program.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office encourages the district/school to actively endorse healthy food choices available through the school nutrition program.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district/school supports healthy food choices by discouraging advertising that promotes less nutritious food choices.	3	2	1	0	N/A
District/school administrators and school staff regularly visit the cafeteria to eat, socialize, and encourage students to eat a variety of healthy foods.	3	2	1	0	N/A
A representative from the school nutrition staff is included on the school wellness team.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition director/designee initiates media coverage of lunch services provided for middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition staff and teachers are trained on the importance of good nutrition to educational performance of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff engage parents/guardians by inviting them to visit the cafeteria during meal time.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office establishes a partnership with health and/or nutrition teachers to promote healthy eating behaviors.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Lunch meal prices are reasonable for the amount and quality of food served to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good nutrition by targeting students and other stakeholders through a variety of marketing and educational activities.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
Students are involved in developing menu merchandising and marketing plans for the school lunch program.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Printed menus and promotional materials indicate menu items suggested and/or approved by students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
A marketing station is established to display the meal of the day and to offer small samples of selected items.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office provides the menu along with the nutrition information through diverse forms of communication (e.g., Web site, printed materials, displays, public service announcements).	3	2	1	0	N/A
Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					



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Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 3

School nutrition staff actively promote good customer service by targeting communication and promotional activities to stakeholders (e.g. students, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, other school community members, and school nutrition staff).

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
District/school staff are encouraged to provide feedback to school nutrition staff on the students' acceptance of menu items gathered through surveys.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office provides information to parents/guardians regarding foods and/or ingredients served through the National School Lunch Program, when requested.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office communicates to stakeholders the benefits of receiving adequate nutrition in the educational performance of students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office communicates the role of the school nutrition program in the educational performance of students to stakeholders through the district wellness policy.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office collaborates with school staff and community utilizing a variety of outlets such as social media to promote the school nutrition program's role in building a healthy school nutrition environment.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district/school and school nutrition staff document and address parental concerns regarding meal issues.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition staff and the wellness committee collaborate to provide parents/guardians information about meeting the nutritional needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

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PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 3 (Continued)

School nutrition staff actively promote good customer service by targeting communication and promotional activities to stakeholders (e.g. students, parents/guardians, teachers, school administrators, other school community members, and school nutrition staff).

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
Nutrition information is incorporated into the printed menus sent home to parents/guardians.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office establishes partnerships with the media.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School menus are distributed to administrators, teachers, parents/guardians, and the school community.	3	2	1	0	N/A
District/school administration promotes and encourages students to share comments and suggestions to the school nutrition staff.	3	2	1	0	N/A
<p>Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____</p>					



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

GOAL 4

School nutrition staff are trained to meet the customer service needs of middle/junior high school students.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition staff are provided appropriate customer service orientation and regularly participate in professional development activities.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff attend annual training on issues associated with food and nutrition needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
District/school administrators support customer service training and education for school nutrition staff serving middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff are trained on customer service strategies and understanding specific food and nutrition needs appropriate for middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff are trained annually on customer service trends that affect the dining experiences of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition and school staff are trained to be culturally sensitive when communicating, interacting, and responding to social and cognitive issues of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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PRACTICE AREA: CUSTOMER SERVICE

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PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on promoting stakeholder satisfaction including: food preparation, food presentation, food safety training, and procurement, receiving, and storage. These include practices that focus on improving the overall appeal of food to students (i.e., taste, appearance, aroma, and temperature).

Goal 1

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food preparation consistently leads to a variety of high quality, good tasting, appealing foods available to students in appropriate portion sizes.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition staff consistently prepare high quality, good tasting meals that appeal to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition staff ensure menu items are evaluated regularly for student acceptability.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff are trained to develop and follow standardized recipes.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff use standardized recipes that indicate the appropriate serving portion and serving utensils for each menu item.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff utilize the appropriate utensils to serve correct portion sizes for each menu item.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office ensure there is a variety of food preparation methods incorporated throughout the school nutrition menus.	3	2	1	0	N/A

Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 2					
School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure fresh foods are offered to students in an appealing manner.					
Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
Menu items are organized to facilitate the smooth flow of students from point-of-selection to point-of-sale.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Menu items are displayed in an appealing manner.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff is trained to use edible garnishes that complement the flavor and color of the menu items.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff ensure the freshness of ready-to-eat raw fruits and vegetables.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition manager establishes procedures to ensure that menu items on the serving line remain fresh.	3	2	1	0	N/A
All menu items are clearly labeled at point-of-selection.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Descriptions are provided at point-of-selection when a menu item is new or unfamiliar to students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition staff ensure quality standards are the same for either fresh or re-heated foods.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 3

Training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food quality and food safety are maintained throughout the food service system.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
School nutrition staff are regularly trained on safe food handling practices to ensure that students are protected from food-borne illnesses.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition manager ensures meals are prepared and served according to National School Lunch Program standards.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff monitor the temperature of menu items throughout the serving period to ensure that food is served at the proper temperature.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff maintains appropriate holding temperatures to ensure freshness of finished products.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition office ensures there is sufficient refrigeration equipment for holding menu items that require cooling.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition district office ensures there is sufficient holding equipment for menu items that need to be kept warm or hot.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition staff are trained to follow food holding procedures to maintain food quality.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

GOAL 3 (Continued)

Training activities and procedures are in place to ensure food quality and food safety are maintained throughout the food service system.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office ensures that HACCP measures are established throughout the food service system in the district (e.g., from receiving, to storage, to preparation and re-thermalization, to service, to sanitation) and that all school nutrition staff are routinely trained on following these measures.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office establishes food specifications and monitors shipments to ensure high quality foods are received from vendors.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office ensures school nutrition staff are adequately trained on receiving and storing food to ensure and maintain the highest level of food quality.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					



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PRACTICE AREA: FOOD QUALITY

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PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

In this section, you will consider the goals and best practices that focus on how a school nutrition program continually improves, maintains regulatory compliance, and promotes a healthy enjoyable atmosphere for students. The grouping goals for this practice area are continuous quality improvement (CQI), regulatory accountability and environment. These practices include other factors that may affect and/or influence student's dining experience.

Goal 1

Continuous quality improvement training activities and procedures are in place to ensure the needs of middle/junior high school students are met while promoting a positive work environment for school nutrition staff.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition director/designee participates on a district-level team to prioritize identified areas of improvement to increase middle/junior high school student participation in the National School Lunch Program.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office develops a plan to routinely review and implement program improvements regarding services available to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition director and manager(s) collaborate to ensure that staff morale is high and a positive working environment is maintained.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office evaluates service protocols related to serving middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

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PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

Goal 1 (Continued)

Continuous quality improvement training activities and procedures are in place to ensure the needs of middle/junior high school students are met while promoting a positive work environment for school nutrition staff.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office identifies resources needed to improve meal services provided to middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The school nutrition office leverages technology in all areas possible to maximize program efficiency and effectiveness.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 2					
School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure regulatory compliance.					
Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition staff has policies in place to protect the confidentiality of middle/junior high school students receiving free and reduced price meals.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Parents/guardians are provided information regarding free and reduced priced meal eligibility and application procedures.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition staff communicate policies regarding services available for middle/junior high school students to parents/guardians and school staff through the National School Lunch Program.	3	2	1	0	N/A
School nutrition office has policies in place informing parents/guardians of their child's access to school lunches (e.g., available meal credits, low balance, pending payments, pending free and reduced priced meal applications).	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district/school and district school nutrition office communicate with parents regarding services available to accommodate students with special food and/or nutrition needs.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Parents/guardians can request menu modifications in support of a diet prescription/order certified by a licensed physician and/or a medical statement certified by a recognized medical authority.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

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PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 2 (Continued)

School nutrition staff training activities and procedures are in place to ensure regulatory compliance.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The district school nutrition office consults with a Registered Dietitian or other health specialist to plan age-appropriate meals for middle/junior high school students who have special food and/or nutrition needs.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					



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

Progress Review

PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 3					
A multi-disciplinary approach is utilized to ensure the cafeteria environment is pleasing to students, while maximizing the time available for students to eat.					
Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition director and/or manager provides input to school administrators who develop lunch period schedules to optimize the cafeteria's seating capacity.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The dining room atmosphere is relaxed, inviting, and well lit for an enjoyable dining experience.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Dining room furniture is appropriately designed to meet the needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Eating utensils are suitable for middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Dining and service areas are designed, renovated, and decorated to appeal and meet the needs of middle/junior high school students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
A pleasant, attractive, safe, and sanitary dining environment is provided for students.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office has a policy on work attire and personal hygiene.	3	2	1	0	N/A
The district school nutrition office collaborates with other district departments to seek additional funding sources to update/renovate the cafeteria.	3	2	1	0	N/A
Service and/or check-out lines are organized to facilitate the smooth flow of students from point-of-selection to point-of sale.	3	2	1	0	N/A



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

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PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

GOAL 3 (Continued)

A multi-disciplinary approach is utilized to ensure the cafeteria environment is pleasing to students, while maximizing the time available for students to eat.

Best Practices	Implementation Status				
	Demonstrates Excellence	Area of Strength	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
The school nutrition director/designee coordinates with district/school administrators to minimize academic or extracurricular activities scheduled during the lunch periods (e.g., remedial classes, student organization meetings).	3	2	1	0	N/A
Total Score _____ ÷ # of BPs (exclude N/A) _____ = Goal Score _____					



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

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PRACTICE AREA: OTHER

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