



National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi

NFSMI Best Practice Guide

*for School Nutrition Professionals Serving the
Nutritional Needs of Pre-Kindergarten Children*



**COMMUNICATION
AND TRAINING**

**ADMINISTRATIVE
SUPPORT**

ENCOURAGEMENT

**MEALTIME
OPPORTUNITIES**

**DINING
ENVIRONMENT**

**NUTRITIOUS
MENUS AND MEAL
EXPERIENCES**

**HEALTHY WELLNESS
PRACTICES**

Applied Research Division
The University of Southern Mississippi

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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 (NFSMI) was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Purpose

The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

Mission

The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

Vision

The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Headquarters

The University of Mississippi
Phone: 800.321.3054
Fax: 800.321.3061
www.nfsmi.org

Education and Training Division

Information Services Division

The University of Mississippi
6 Jeanette Phillips Drive
P.O. Drawer 188
University, MS 38677-0188

Applied Research Division

The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #10077
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5773
Fax: 888.262.9631





NFSMI Best Practice Guide *for School Nutrition Professionals Serving the Nutritional Needs of Pre-Kindergarten Children*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED BY

Kristi L. Lofton, PhD, RD
Research Scientist

Mary Frances Nettles, PhD, RD
Research Scientist

Executive Director
Charlotte B. Oakley, PhD, RD, FADA



NFSMI Best Practice Guide

for School Nutrition Professionals Serving the Nutritional Needs of Pre-Kindergarten Children

School nutrition (SN) professionals have the opportunity to positively influence the nutritional intake of Pre-Kindergarten (PreK) children, while promoting healthy eating, lifestyle behaviors and attitudes essential for growth and development. School nutrition programs (SNP) serve as one of the comprehensive services provided in the public school setting.

School nutrition professionals understand the need for program development and assessment to measure the effectiveness of efforts serving the nutritional needs of PreK children. This guide is designed for SN professionals to assess and monitor the effectiveness of nutritional services provided to PreK children or as a tool for implementing goals and practices for new PreK programs. The guide is a Web-based, self-assessment tool with goals and best practices or quality indicators framed around seven practice categories identified in previous research conducted by NFSMI. The practice categories are Communication and Training, Administrative Support, Encouragement, Mealtime Opportunities, Dining Environment, Nutritious Menus and Meal Experiences, and Healthy Wellness Practices. These research-based practices are essential to serving the nutritional needs of PreK children.

The checklist follows a user-friendly format. There are 97 best practice statements that support the achievement of each goal and seven practice categories. Listed within each practice category are goals and best practices. Each statement is assessed following a 4-point scale (Unsatisfactory, Needs Improvement, Area of Strength, and Demonstrates Excellence) with Not Applicable as an option to select should the best practice not address specific program needs. Listed below are ways to use this guide.

- Identify practices crucial for implementing PreK programs in public schools
- Identify specific roles of stakeholders and resources necessary for planning and implementing potential PreK programs in public schools
- Identify school nutrition staff training needs specific to the PreK program
- Determine effective communication strategies to disseminate information about menus, nutrition education, and feeding issues and concerns with school staff, PreK children, parents and the community
- Examine the effectiveness and efficiency of current best practices and strategies to meet the nutritional needs of PreK children
- Evaluate SNP effectiveness and report contributions of the SNP to the PreK program
- Establish goals for continuous quality improvement
- Develop a team approach and effective communication strategies between school staff and SN staff



COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING

In this section, you will consider goals and best practices associated with communication and training issues related to child development, nutrition education and collaboration with school staff as necessary elements for serving the educational and social needs of PreK children. Goals and best practices under Communication and Training also reflect specific roles and duties of school nutrition staff as team members who collaborate with PreK teachers, principals and early education directors to provide comprehensive services to PreK children.

GOAL 1. School staff is trained in the area of child development to meet the needs of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
1. The school nutrition staff receives training on appropriate ways to communicate, interact be sensitive and responsive to differing abilities and temperaments of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
2. School nutrition staff receives training on social, cognitive and other development issues in PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
3. The school nutrition director provides training/information to the school nutrition staff on menu and nutrition needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
4. The school nutrition staff is trained in customer service strategies appropriate for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
5. Nutrition concerns about PreK children with special needs are addressed in a timely manner.	1	2	3	4	NA
6. The PreK teachers and/or members of the school nutrition staff receive training in nutrition education activities to promote healthy eating habits.	1	2	3	4	NA
7. PreK teachers and school nutrition staff are trained in the importance for good nutrition to educational preparedness of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING continued

GOAL 2. School professionals work together as a child-centered cohesive team to better serve PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
8. School nutrition staff, PreK teachers and other school staff communicate with parents to identify PreK children’s needs during the enrollment process.	1	2	3	4	NA
9. School nutrition staff and PreK teachers work as a team to disseminate information to parents to meet the nutritional needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
10. The school nutrition program has a plan to review and implement program improvements regarding PreK services.	1	2	3	4	NA
11. At least one school staff member in the dining area has received training and certification in CPR and first-aid.	1	2	3	4	NA
12. Menus are available and distributed to administrators, teachers and the school community.	1	2	3	4	NA
13. Parents of PreK children who are unable to pay for meals and/or snacks are provided information regarding free/reduced eligibility and applications.	1	2	3	4	NA
14. School administrators adjust meal schedules to meet the developmental needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
15. PreK teachers partner with the school nutrition staff to use the cafeteria as a learning lab for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
16. School nutrition staff works with PreK teachers to integrate nutrition-related activities into the PreK learning curriculum.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:

COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING continued

GOAL 3. School staff, administrators, and parents are familiar with food and nutrition procedures appropriate for PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
17. The school nutrition program collects and analyzes data to monitor and evaluate services provided by the school nutrition program to PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
18. The school nutrition staff follows the USDA meal pattern to meet the nutritional needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
19. All food and nutrition procedures are consistent with the federal, state and local guidelines and the local wellness policy.	1	2	3	4	NA
20. Selected food items for PreK children are evaluated regularly for nutritional content and appropriate portion size.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING continued

GOAL 4. School staff is trained in food and nutrition policies and procedures.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
21. PreK teachers and school nutrition staff are trained on health, safety and emergency guidelines to protect PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
22. The school nutrition staff is trained on the USDA meal pattern to meet the nutritional needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
23. School staff is trained on food safety and sanitation guidelines.	1	2	3	4	NA
24. The school staff is trained on food and nutrition procedures for feeding children with allergies and special needs.	1	2	3	4	NA
25. The school nutrition program has developed and implemented policies and procedures to inform parents about nutrition-related issues.	1	2	3	4	NA
26. A plan or procedure is in place to feed PreK children who come to school hungry or have missed an opportunity for meals.	1	2	3	4	NA
27. School nutrition staff receives training on policies and procedures associated with feeding PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
28. School nutrition staff receives training on policies and procedures to feed PreK children who arrive to school hungry.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING continued

GOAL 5. School nutrition directors, school staff, and parents maintain an on-going line of communication to serve the needs of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
29. Nutrition information encouraging healthful eating and active living practices is disseminated to parents via menus, Web site, newsletter and other means, as appropriate.	1	2	3	4	NA
30. The school staff communicates to parents in their preferred language or through translation.	1	2	3	4	NA
31. The school district and school nutrition program documents and addresses parental concerns through ongoing communication.	1	2	3	4	NA
32. PreK teachers and school nutrition staff work with parents to address special diet needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
33. School staff communicates with parents about policies and procedures to feed PreK children who arrive to school hungry.	1	2	3	4	NA
34. The school nutrition manager and designated school staff meet to assess menu issues that affect PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
35. PreK children who are unable to pay for meals and/or snacks are fed following guidelines established by the school district.	1	2	3	4	NA
36. The school nutrition director provides information on menu and feeding issues associated with PreK children, to parents and school staff.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING continued

GOAL 6. Partnerships are established with parents and community agencies to promote nutrition education.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
37. The school nutrition program informs parents and community agencies about nutrition-related issues and services.	1	2	3	4	NA
38. The school nutrition program identifies and develops partnerships with community agencies to provide nutrition education for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
39. The school nutrition program utilizes community resources to achieve goals for meeting the nutritional needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
40. The school nutrition program promotes nutrition education activities to encourage PreK children to engage in healthy eating habits.	1	2	3	4	NA
41. Nutrition information is disseminated to parents to encourage modeling of healthy eating behaviors and promotion of healthy food options.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

In this section, you will consider goals and best practices related to the administrative role of supporting food and nutrition services as an integral part of the PreK program and supervising PreK program dynamics. Administrative Support consists of two goals and nine best practice statements that focus on the administrators' support of the nutrition program as a fundamental part of the PreK team.

GOAL 1. School administrators foster a cohesive team and a child-centered learning environment for PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
42. School administrators encourage and support nutrition education in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	NA
43. School administrator(s) support a consistent routine for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
44. School administrator(s) support and encourage the participation of the school nutrition director/manager in school staff meetings.	1	2	3	4	NA
45. School administrators support education and training of PreK teachers and school nutrition staff in the area of child development.	1	2	3	4	NA
46. School administrators support the partnerships established between schools, parents and community agencies to promote nutrition education.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT continued

GOAL 2. School administrators recognize the importance of proper nutrition and nutrition environment as an integral part of educating PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
47. School administrators adjust meal schedules to meet the developmental needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
48. School administrators ensure that PreK children have enough time to eat meals and snacks without hurrying.	1	2	3	4	NA
49. School administrators support a dining environment at meal time that is pleasant, attractive, safe and sanitary.	1	2	3	4	NA
50. School administrators schedule recess/playtime prior to lunch time.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:

ENCOURAGEMENT

In this section, you will consider best practices related to the supportive roles of school professionals to provide quality nutrition services to PreK children in public school settings. Encouragement contains two goals and seven best practice statements.

GOAL 1. School professionals work together as a child-centered cohesive team to better serve PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
51. School nutrition staff members are encouraged to work with PreK teachers to integrate nutrition-related activities into the PreK learning curriculum.	1	2	3	4	NA
52. PreK teachers and parents are encouraged to talk about healthy foods in a positive way to PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



ENCOURAGEMENT continued

GOAL 2. Partnerships are established with parents and community agencies to promote nutrition education to PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
53. School staff provides nutrition education information to parents in their preferred language or through translation.	1	2	3	4	NA
54. The school nutrition director/manager and school staff partner with community organizations to share nutrition information and resources.	1	2	3	4	NA
55. School administrators, PreK teachers and school nutrition staff support and encourage parents to join their PreK children during meals and snacks.	1	2	3	4	NA
56. School nutrition staff and PreK teachers provide information to parents to encourage modeling of healthy eating behaviors.	1	2	3	4	NA
57. The school nutrition director provides information to PreK teachers and parents on menu and feeding issues to encourage and support healthy eating behaviors.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:

MEALTIME OPPORTUNITIES

In this section, you will consider goals and best practices related to mealtime opportunities and the many possibilities for the SNP to play an active role in creating a learning and interactive environment with PreK children during mealtime. Mealtime Opportunities consists of one goal and six best practice statements.

GOAL 1. Mealtime provides an opportunity to promote good nutrition, healthy eating and socialization of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
58. PreK teachers encourage PreK children to eat a variety of foods.	1	2	3	4	NA
59. PreK teachers are encouraged to serve as role models by eating school meals with PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
60. PreK teachers are encouraged to engage PreK children in conversation about the foods served.	1	2	3	4	NA
61. Children are encouraged to try the foods offered, including new unfamiliar foods.	1	2	3	4	NA
62. PreK teachers and parents are encouraged to talk about healthy foods in a positive way to PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
63. PreK teachers and school nutrition staff engage in calm and positive verbal and nonverbal communication with PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



DINING ENVIRONMENT

In this section, you will consider goals and best practices associated with providing a positive mealtime environment for PreK children that encourages healthful eating and provides opportunities for learning about the foods served. Dining Environment contains two goals and nine best practice statements.

GOAL 1. A positive dining environment is provided for PreK children to foster appropriate social interaction.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
64. Various ways of marketing nutritional messages are displayed throughout the dining area.	1	2	3	4	NA
65. Cafeteria furniture is age-appropriate and developmentally suitable.	1	2	3	4	NA
66. Tables and seating arrangement encourage appropriate social interaction.	1	2	3	4	NA
67. School nutrition staff ensures that the dining environment at mealtime is pleasant, attractive, safe and sanitary place to eat.	1	2	3	4	NA
68. Serving lines are the appropriate height for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
69. Eating utensils are developmentally-suitable for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



DINING ENVIRONMENT continued

GOAL 2. The mealtime experience meets the needs of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
70. PreK teachers and school nutrition staff are encouraged to engage in calm and positive verbal and non-verbal communication.	1	2	3	4	NA
71. Meals and snacks are served with minimal distractions.	1	2	3	4	NA
72. School nutrition staff practices good customer service and greets children in a positive, non-threatening manner.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:

NUTRITIOUS MENUS AND MEAL EXPERIENCES

In this section, you will consider goals and best practices associated with meeting the nutritional needs of PreK children and include providing a variety of foods that meet PreK children’s age-specific, developmental and social needs. Nutritious Menus and Meal Experiences contains two goals and eleven best practice statements.

GOAL 1. School nutrition directors, school staff and parents maintain an ongoing line of communication to serve the needs of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
73. The school district and school nutrition program documents and addresses parental concerns regarding meal issues.	1	2	3	4	NA
74. The school nutrition manager and school staff meet to discuss menu issues that affect PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
75. Menus are distributed to parents and are made available to school staff.	1	2	3	4	NA
76. The school nutrition director provides information to PreK teachers on school meals.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



NUTRITIOUS MENUS AND MEAL EXPERIENCES continued

GOAL 2. School meals focus on the needs of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
77. Menu items for PreK children are evaluated for nutritional content and appropriate portion size.	1	2	3	4	NA
78. A variety of food is offered to meet the age-specific and developmental needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
79. Menu items offer a variety of choices to reflect ethnic and cultural diversity.	1	2	3	4	NA
80. The school nutrition staff follows the USDA meal pattern to meet the nutritional needs of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
81. All food and nutrition practices are consistent with the federal, state and local guidelines and the local wellness policy.	1	2	3	4	NA
82. Menu items are regularly evaluated for acceptability by PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
83. The school nutrition director provides information to PreK teachers on school meals.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



HEALTHY WELLNESS PRACTICES

In this section, you will consider goals and best practices that coordinate with the SNP’s policies and procedures for school nutrition operations and their role in supporting a healthy wellness environment for PreK children. The Healthy Wellness Practices category contains two goals and fourteen best practice statements.

GOAL 1. School nutrition staff follows policies and procedures supporting health and wellness practices of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
84. The school district and school nutrition program have procedures on health, safety and emergency guidelines to protect PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
85. The school nutrition program has policies and procedures based on HACCP principles to protect children from foodborne illnesses.	1	2	3	4	NA
86. All foods are served at the appropriate temperatures following food safety guidelines or according to the school district’s HACCP plan.	1	2	3	4	NA
87. The school nutrition program has written food and nutrition procedures for feeding children with food allergies and special feeding needs.	1	2	3	4	NA
88. The school nutrition program has written food and nutrition procedures for food substitutions appropriate for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
89. The school nutrition program has written procedures for foods brought from home.	1	2	3	4	NA
90. School staff receives ongoing training on health and wellness practices of PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
91. Parents of PreK children who are unable to pay for meals and/or snacks are provided information regarding free or reduced-priced meal eligibility and application to support a healthy wellness environment for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:



HEALTHY WELLNESS PRACTICES continued

GOAL 2. Partnerships are established with parents to promote nutrition and wellness practices for meeting the needs of PreK children.	Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Area of Strength	Demonstrates Excellence	Not Applicable
Best Practices					
92. School nutrition staff members collaborate with other school staff and community organizations to promote wellness opportunities and appropriate resources.	1	2	3	4	NA
93. The school nutrition program establishes parent partnerships for nutrition and wellness issues.	1	2	3	4	NA
94. The school staff partners with the school nutrition staff to use the cafeteria as a learning lab for PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
95. The school nutrition director works with PreK teachers to integrate nutrition and wellness activities into the PreK curriculum.	1	2	3	4	NA
96. PreK teachers and parents are encouraged to form partnerships for promoting healthy food to PreK children.	1	2	3	4	NA
97. Nutrition issues concerning PreK children with special needs are addressed in a timely manner with parents and school staff.	1	2	3	4	NA

NOTES:

