

Issues Related to Implementation of the Afterschool Snack Service

by

Alice Jo Rainville, PhD, RD, CHE, SFNS
NFSMI Scholar, Applied Research Division

Jerry B. Cater, MS
Research Scientist, Applied Research Division

Denise M. Brown, PhD, RD
Director, Applied Research Division



National Food Service Management Institute
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Education Division

The University of Mississippi
P.O. Drawer 188
University, MS 38677-0188
Phone: 800-321-3054

Applied Research Division

The University of Southern Mississippi
Box 10077
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0077
Phone: 601-266-5773

<http://www.nfsmi.org>

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PREFACE

The mission of the Applied Research Division (ARD) of the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) is to conduct research in operational settings leading to the enhancement and improvement of Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs). The purpose of this research project was to identify and record the perspectives and concerns of school foodservice directors who implemented reimbursable snacks as part of the afterschool care program. The focus group approach used in this project permitted the collection of numerous comments, perspectives, and concerns representing a wide cross-section of programs from 15 states. This preliminary work lays the foundation for additional in-depth examination of those specific considerations and guidelines that can encourage other school foodservice directors to participate in this vital service for the nation's children.

We are indebted to the school foodservice directors in Mississippi who participated in the initial development of the focus group questions and the participants of the three focus group sessions. We recognize their willingness to participate and their open sharing of ideas and perspectives. The research team of Dr. Alice Jo Rainville, NFSMI Scholar, Eastern Michigan University, and Ms. Jerry Cater, Research Scientist, Applied Research Division, worked tirelessly to conduct focus groups, analyze comments, and compile this report. We are grateful for everyone's effort and contribution.

Denise M. Brown, PhD, RD
Director of Applied Research

Jane Logan, PhD
Executive Director

Issues Related to Implementation of the Afterschool Snack Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 1998 enhanced nutrition benefits for children in afterschool care programs by authorizing reimbursements for snacks served. These snack components are intended to provide nutrition assistance to children enrolled in afterschool care programs that offer activities known to help reduce involvement in juvenile crime or other high risk behavior. This provision represented a new initiative to bring nutritious food to the nation's children. Afterschool snacks help ensure that children receive more of the nutrients they need to learn and grow. Ensuring these benefits reach eligible children is important.

Using focus group research, the Applied Research Division conducted a study to determine issues faced by Child Nutrition Program (CNP) administrators who implemented the snack component of the National School Lunch Program in afterschool care programs. Three two-hour focus groups were conducted with CNP administrators from fifteen states; there were seven to eleven participants in each group. Focus group participants were selected based on geographic representation (Southwest, Midwest, Northeast) and number of afterschool snacks served. The quantity of snacks served ranged from a low of 22 snacks per day in two schools to a high of 13,300 snacks per day in 33 schools. All of the focus group participants were recommended by their respective state agencies. Each focus group session was tape-recorded and

transcribed to make a complete record of the discussion available. All participants were given an opportunity to comment on issues that most concerned them. The strength of this study approach was the diverse group of CNP administrators who shared their experiences in an open-ended discussion format.

CNP administrators identified a variety of challenges in the implementation of afterschool snack service. The challenges most frequently mentioned include: a) obtaining accurate records for reimbursement claims, b) training the program providers on the reimbursable afterschool snack regulations, c) providing variety in snack menus, d) monitoring the afterschool care program sites, and e) the need for additional funding.

CNP administrators in all focus groups agreed that the reimbursable afterschool snack service played an important role in meeting daily nutrient needs of children and provided an opportunity to serve the community. Several administrators reported receiving positive feedback from students, parents, and school administrators.

More research studies of reimbursable afterschool snack service are needed to validate these preliminary results. Cost studies would be beneficial to assess accountability and funding concerns. Training materials for afterschool care program providers and staff are needed. The results of this qualitative study provide useful information to CNP administrators, school administrators, and state agency personnel.

Issues Related to Implementation of the Afterschool Snack Service

INTRODUCTION

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 1998 enhanced nutrition benefits for children in afterschool care programs by authorizing reimbursement for snacks served in both the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). On October 11, 2000, The Food and Nutrition Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) published proposed rules to incorporate the provisions of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act regarding reimbursement of afterschool snacks in the regulations governing the NSLP and the CACFP. The proposed rules noted that according to the Conference Report that accompanied the law (House Report 105-786), Congress intended that the new snack components provide nutrition assistance to programs offering the types of activities known to help reduce or prevent involvement in juvenile crime. To receive snack reimbursement, the afterschool care program must provide children with regularly scheduled activities in a supervised environment that includes educational or enrichment activities. The afterschool snack service is an effort to support and promote these afterschool care programs. The afterschool snack meal pattern is based on the nutritional needs of children ages 6 to 12 years. To be reimbursed, each snack must contain two different food items from the following four components: fluid milk, meat or meat alternate, vegetable or fruit or full-strength vegetable or

fruit juice, and whole-grain or enriched bread or cereal. Portion size regulations exist for each food group.

The reimbursement rates are based on the “area eligibility” of the afterschool care program. If the program is offered at a school or in a school attendance area in which at least 50% of the enrolled children qualify for free or reduced price meals, all snacks are reimbursed at the free rate, regardless of an individual student’s eligibility. If the afterschool care program is not “area eligible,” snacks are reimbursed at the free, reduced price, or paid rate based on each child’s eligibility. Reimbursement for afterschool care snacks is provided by USDA. Since afterschool snack service is part of the NSLP, reimbursement is administered at the state level.

The purpose of this study was to determine operational issues faced by Child Nutrition Program (CNP) administrators who implemented the afterschool snack component of the NSLP in afterschool care programs and determine administrative and management responsibilities related to implementation of the reimbursable snack service.

METHOD

This study used the focus group design to explore the operational and management issues faced by CNP administrators who implemented the reimbursable snack service under the NSLP. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* by Krueger and Casey (2000) was used as the basis for development of the research method. Data were collected in a systematic approach by asking semi-structured, open-ended questions. Each question had a distinctive function in the focus group research process.

Focus Group Design

After a pilot focus group in Mississippi (n=5), three two-hour focus groups with school foodservice directors were convened in Phoenix (n=11), St. Louis (n=9), and Philadelphia (n=7) in spring, 2001. See Appendix A. Following the pilot focus group's review of the focus group questions and focus group plan, the researchers refined and finalized a series of 12 questions designed to explore issues related to implementation of the afterschool snack component of the NSLP. See Appendix B.

The same individual moderated the three focus group sessions. The assistant moderator/recorder compiled notes. A series of questions focused on snack selection, costs, and service. Another series of questions focused on barriers to implementation, suggestions for improving the reimbursable snack service, and benefits to students. Overall the session moved from discussions related to specific content to a more open-ended discussion of topics that were of particular interest to the participants. For example, the final question asked participants, "Is there anything we should have talked about but didn't?" Throughout the two-hour session, the moderator used a structured approach to keep the discussion focused on the selected topics. After all questions were discussed, the assistant moderator summarized responses and participants were invited to verify that the summary comments were an accurate depiction of the discussion. Each focus group session was tape-recorded and transcribed so that a complete record of the discussion was available.

Participant Selection

Focus group participants were selected based on geographic location (Southwest, Midwest, Northeast) and number of snacks served (ranging from a low of 22 snacks per day in two schools to a high of 13,300 snacks per day in 33 schools). Fifteen state agencies within the three regions (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, New Mexico, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Utah) were asked to provide names and contact information of CNP administrators in school districts that offered the reimbursable afterschool snack service under the NSLP. See Appendix C. Two administrators from each state were chosen from the pool of names and contacted by telephone. After administrators agreed to participate, confirmation letters were sent. See Appendix D. All participants were either CNP administrators or assistant administrators in charge of overseeing the afterschool snack service. The goal in selecting these participants was to collect first-hand information from people who had experience in administering the snack service.

Data Analysis

The “long table” methodology of Krueger and Casey (2000) was used to analyze transcripts of the three focus groups. In this method, the transcripts were color coded by location, cut apart by comment, and arranged by content on large sheets of paper. The research team conducted a systematic, question-by-question analysis of the transcripts. Comments for each question were categorized and summarized.

RESULTS

Comparing the summarized comments from each session revealed a series of issues that occurred throughout all focus group discussions. Issues that were raised in all groups were given more weight than issues raised in only one group. Commonalties gleaned from the focus group discussions centered on four main areas. The areas were:

- Accountability
- Funding
- Training for the afterschool care program providers
- Providing variety in snack menus

The following is a summary by question of the responses for all focus group sessions. The quotations of representative comments are italicized.

1. How do you select snacks for the menu?

- Many participants in all three groups mentioned cost as important. *"We have been faced with the problem of finding snack foods that meet regulations for sizes and are also cost-effective. I go to all the food shows looking for snack items that students will accept and that are within the cost that we can afford."*
- Student preferences were mentioned. *"We purchase what kids like."*
- Convenience foods that are individually wrapped were preferred by most to minimize losses when student counts were lower than forecasted and to minimize labor hours. *"We use pre-packed convenience foods that can be returned (to the cafeteria) if they are not used." "We have to consider labor issues in our district, so we must use convenience and pre-packed."*
- Availability of foods that met the regulations. Many participants mentioned that fruit juices that met the NSLP portion size for reimbursable snack regulations (6 ounces)

were difficult to find. Because the breakfast requirement for fruit juice is different (4 ounces), most vendors only pack fruit juices in 4-ounce packages for the breakfast program. Administrators indicated also that having different snack portion size requirements from the breakfast program created extra paper work for bids and inventory. *“ In our state, most vendors still only carry the 4-ounce size of fruit juice. They need to be educated about snack requirements.” “I find that keeping both 6-ounce and 4-ounce juices in inventory causes problems. Sometimes, if the staff is not careful, they will pull the wrong size for snack service. It also causes problems with purchasing—you have to put both sizes on bid.”*

2. Does reimbursement cover food costs?

- Most participants stated that reimbursement does cover food costs but not labor costs associated with preparation and service. Several administrators said the variety of snacks offered is limited because preparation costs are not covered and they are using pre-packed foods. *“We are staying within food cost, but can’t provide variety. I would like to use more fresh fruit. Also, we don’t have labor costs assigned to snack service. Our staff prepares the snacks during the regular work day.”*
- Training site staff and monitoring service were mentioned as costs of providing the reimbursable snack service. *“Training is also a cost issue; 55 cents does not cover labor or training, yet we have to train program teachers about record keeping. The cost of that training is coming from somewhere else in our school nutrition program.”*
- Administrators in all three focus groups were concerned about increased food cost that resulted when snacks were ordered but not served. *“When we give away responsibility for a program, it’s hard because others do not care and there may be food waste. For example, if you prepare 50 snacks and only 40 students sign in for afterschool care, then you have 10 snacks that cannot be claimed for reimbursement.”* In response to these concerns, some directors indicated they charged the entity responsible for the afterschool care program for the costs of prepared snacks that were not served.
- Site eligibility was mentioned as an important factor in reimbursement. Several administrators said they offered reimbursable snack service only in schools that have at least 50% of the enrolled children certified for free and reduced price meals. Offering the program in schools with less than 50% of children certified for free and reduced price meals resulted in additional record keeping and additional costs. *“We can only break even and only then if the site qualifies for everyone to get free snacks.” “We have the same situation; that is why we only have schools on the program that qualify free based on the 50% eligibility of free/reduced students.”*

3. Where are the snacks served and who serves them?

- Most participants reported that school foodservice personnel count the snacks and leave them in the cafeteria to be picked up by staff from the program sites. Security was mentioned as a problem if the snacks cannot be locked in a secure location. *“We give the program coordinator access to the school kitchen to pick up the pre-counted snacks. We have a problem sometimes; the lead teachers often feel that any of the kitchen supplies belong to the school and they help themselves. If we (school foodservice staff) make it into an issue, the foodservice department turns into the 'heavy.'”*
- Training the afterschool care site staff on afterschool snack regulations was a concern of participants in all focus group discussions. *“It would help to have a training module or video that is about ten minutes long and explains regulations, snack components, and other issues about the snack service.”*
- Participants felt having school foodservice personnel involved with service of snacks would be ideal because they have a better understanding of NSLP regulations regarding reimbursement.
- The issue of adult snacks for site staff was discussed in two of the focus groups. Administrators reported that some afterschool care site staff order snacks for their personal consumption. These snacks are non-reimbursable and result in additional cost to the NSLP. Participants commented that the cost of adult snacks are either absorbed by the NSLP or paid by the school district. *“The lead teacher or principal serves the snacks in our district. We have established a ratio that one free adult snack is allowed for a certain number of student snacks. This gives a bit of an incentive for the lead teacher to be more accountable for unserved snacks. We absorb the cost of the adult snack in the foodservice department.”*

4. Have any food safety concerns been raised since teachers may not have been trained in food handling or food safety?

- Administrators reported keeping juice and milk in refrigerators until pick-up time. Several administrators reported that milk temperatures were a potential problem if milk was picked up too early. Administrators in all three focus groups expressed the importance of having refrigeration equipment available. *“When we partnered with a community service, we were able to get a locked refrigerator. The keys were given to the lead teacher and our program manager. It has improved food safety and accountability.”*

- Use of wrapped foods was mentioned as a food safety precaution.
 - One administrator reported that the lead teacher is required to have six hours of training in their district and two of those hours are devoted to food safety.
5. Have you received feedback on the afterschool snack service from students, parents, teachers, or administrators?
- Feedback from students on food and beverage preference was common. *"Our students are very vocal about their preference for snacks."* One administrator reported student preferences also differed based on the geographic location within the district.
 - Parent feedback was common, and most comments reported were positive. Some parents have requested larger portion sizes for snacks or more substantial snacks. Administrators agreed these requests met the definition of a meal rather than a snack. *"We are hearing from parents who want us to feed more than a snack—rather more like a meal."*
 - In one of the focus groups, administrators who had existing non-reimbursable snack service commented on positive feedback from school administrators regarding the reimbursement for snack service. *"Because we already had an afterschool snack service (non-reimbursable), we have had very positive feedback from school administrators about snack reimbursement."* *"Our administrators are happy to have the snacks reimbursed so the costs do not have to be passed on to the students."*
 - Several administrators commented that afterschool care program teachers reported using the snack service to incorporate nutrition education lessons and food preparation techniques such as sandwich preparation.
6. Has providing the snack service added extra time to your workday?
- Administrators reported that the reimbursable snack service required extra time to obtain accurate counts from sites in order to process claims for reimbursement. *"Getting paperwork from the host schools is a problem. Other groups don't understand the importance of the claim for reimbursement. That causes extra work for me. We now require a signed agreement with host schools to provide the necessary records on time. It does take time to prepare the claim."* *"I have had to put aside other important things in order to ensure the accuracy of the snack count from the program sites."*

- Monitoring the reimbursable snack service and visiting the sites were major concerns. *“It has definitely added to my workload. I find it almost impossible to provide the necessary supervision that is needed because we have so many programs. I need more help in the office; snacks in 22 schools require a lot of monitoring.” “If you think about it, snack service is a small program in relationship to lunch or breakfast, so time required to monitor the program should be much less than it is.”*
 - All but one administrator in the three focus groups reported they were using a manual system to keep track of snacks served. Participants expressed a desire for point-of-sale systems that included afterschool snacks to assist them in their record keeping and claims for reimbursement of afterschool snacks. *“Our point-of-sale system won't handle snacks as we are presently set up. Snacks have to be counted manually at the program site.”*
 - Site eligibility was discussed in all focus groups as an important factor in preparation of claims. *“There is a dramatic difference in the time required for preparing claims between schools under 50% eligibility and those over 50%. Our state requires claims be made in a short timeframe. It takes 1-2 days workload each month on claim-related issues for snack reimbursement.”*
 - Charging other programs for snacks not served took additional time.
 - The extra time and labor needed to train site teachers was a concern of several administrators. *“Training takes a lot of my time. We have to train all teachers as well as the lead teacher—then do follow-up training.”*
7. What is the greatest barrier to having a successful afterschool snack service?
- Accountability was most mentioned by administrators in all three groups as a barrier to overcome. *“School foodservice administrators are very concerned about accountability. It's just very hard for us to have a program that we can't control, yet we feel accountable for the outcomes.” “It goes against our grain in school foodservice to have such lax administration over our programs; in this program we have no control over areas that need monitoring.” “Other people involved in the afterschool care program need to better understand our program and the importance of regulations. We value the school nutrition programs; but once it leaves our domain, the value gets lost on other school staff members. We can't always get them to understand the importance of being prompt with paperwork.”*

- Obtaining accurate records for reimbursement was also mentioned frequently in all focus groups. *"We can't get site supervisors to understand the importance of accurate counts." "In our district, there are so many discrepancies between snacks ordered and the number of students on the sign-in attendance rosters that the lack of accurate records is becoming a real barrier." "The lack of understanding of the importance of documentation needed for our reimbursement is a barrier. Some school sites don't even keep attendance records, much less snack records." "On many occasions when I have gone to the program site to monitor the service, the lead teacher can't find the attendance roster."*
 - Training the afterschool care site staff was mentioned frequently as a barrier to successful snack service. Training barriers reflect both initial and repeated training to cover turnover. *"There is tremendous turnover, and care providers are not trained. ... It would be so much better if our people (school foodservice) could be in charge of the snack service. There would be less need for constant training."*
 - Several administrators mentioned that their school foodservice employees have been resistant to do the extra work required for snack service. *"They see it as adding more duties to the day without getting more wages." "...they have to do added paperwork and stay longer without getting extra pay."*
 - Some CNP administrators mentioned portion size regulations for menu planning as a barrier. *"One of our greatest barriers is getting products that meet regulations, that students will accept, and that vendors have packed in the right portions."*
 - Logistics of getting snacks to remote sites and planning for the many different types and schedules of afterschool care programs offered in the same district were mentioned in two groups. *"We have a few programs that only meet two days a week. The others have afterschool care five days; that has created planning problems."*
8. If you were asked to make a suggestion to improve the reimbursable snack service, what would be your number one priority?
- Administrators in all focus groups expressed a need for additional funding. Since reimbursement only covers food costs, the need for additional funds to involve foodservice personnel in snack service at the afterschool care program site and to cover costs of administering the program concerned administrators. *"Our greatest barrier is inadequate funding. We need more money to provide proper services." "I think the largest issue here is that there is no money for administration cost although monitoring is required."* One director found the resources to involve foodservice employees as monitors. *"We use our managers to monitor. We train them and then*

pay them to make the site visits to monitor snack service. They are well qualified and it helps to free me for other duties.”

- Administrators would like to receive additional funding for refrigeration equipment and more fresh fruits for the menus. *“We need grant or start-up money to purchase refrigerators and other equipment that would facilitate implementation of the program. For instance, transport equipment is needed when there are large programs at off-site locations.”*
- Administrators in all focus groups commented about the importance of improving accountability as a top priority. *“We need to improve accountability. We need funds so we can hire a person whose assignment is...the snack program...they would be in charge. That would eliminate the problem of accountability...”*
- Many school foodservice administrators suggested the "area eligibility" rule should be re-evaluated. The present rule allows a school to receive reimbursement at the free rate for all afterschool snacks served regardless of each individual child's eligibility status if 50% or more of the enrolled children are eligible for meal benefits. If less than 50% of the enrolled children are eligible, the school receives reimbursement by type (free, reduced, and paid), and must have documentation of eligibility status for all snacks served. This means that within the school district, students who are classified as "paid" and attend an "area eligible" site receive free snacks while students of the same classification who attend a "non-eligible" site are charged for their snacks. Parents do not understand this regulation. Administrators in all groups indicated that the extra work involved in record keeping for schools with less than 50% free and reduced meal benefits resulted in a decision not to offer snack service in some school districts even though there are children who would benefit. Several administrators suggested that lowering the “area eligible” threshold from 50% to 30% would provide more equalization of benefits among schools within a district. Administrators in all focus groups suggested exploring ways to make snack service universally free to all children in afterschool care programs. *“Make the program universally free; people do not understand the present concept of why some schools have all free snacks and other schools have students pay when they are in the same district.” “We only have afterschool care programs in schools that are eligible for free snack service. Universal would increase afterschool care programs.” “...it hurts free children in sites that fall below 50% when those schools do not offer the program because of additional record keeping and accountability issues.”*
- One administrator expressed an interest in exploring the possibility of allowing menus to be nutrient-based instead of food-based for snack service.

- Providing education and training for program sponsors was also discussed. *“We need a way to educate program sponsors that it is important to play by NSLP rules if they want the program to be a success.” “I would like to suggest that someone, either the state or USDA, develop a plan for training in regulations.... I would like to have the site coordinator sign that they understand our rules and agree to abide by them.”*
9. How would you convince a school foodservice director who has not implemented the afterschool snack service to implement the service?
- The overwhelming response to this question acknowledged benefits for children who receive the snacks. *“We are there for the children, so we should want to add a program that is helping children. It has been a struggle for my district and we have lost money on the program, but we support feeding children.” “Feeding children is what we do; it is our responsibility. As long as the program is available, we should implement it for the sake of the children.” “I think the bottom line is it’s best for kids. If kids stay at school, they get snacks that are nutritious and good for them.” “There are hungry kids who need to be fed.”*
 - The reimbursable snack service generated goodwill and improved public relations for the school foodservice department. *“It’s an opportunity for service, but the regulations may scare some directors. I would emphasize that this is an opportunity that provides a chance to serve our community.” “We saw it as a great opportunity to further our other programs. We used our district mission statement to increase test scores as a justification by emphasizing how nutritious snacks could help hungry kids. We now have better cooperation from teachers and we have seen improvement in test scores.” “The goodwill with principals and the community is important. I think it gives us a more professional image and that helps the school foodservice programs.” “Good snacks may help keep children who need it most in the afterschool care programs.... Tutoring is of great benefit to many children. Teachers tell me they (snacks) are an incentive for children.”*
 - The afterschool snack service can assist school foodservice administrators in forming partnerships with administrators. *“We think our program is very beneficial to students and it has helped us to build bridges with other administrators.” “Educate your principals as to the regulations.” “Tell your administrator, ‘I’m looking out for your best interests.’” “I talk to my administrators about the financial benefits of the program. We generate excess revenue with the reimbursable snack service.”*
 - Administrators in two groups responded that the snack service is fairly easy to administer if menus are planned toward pre-packed items. Extra labor can be minimized if snack menus are planned using convenience foods that are portioned
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and wrapped,. *“It really isn’t that labor-intense, so if menus are planned using pre-packed (foods), it (the snack service) can be fairly easy to administer.” “I know some directors who are afraid of the program because of the added work. I would think if someone could provide a guide with labor-saving ideas for implementation, it might convince directors to try the program.”*

10. Could you share your feelings about the benefits of the afterschool snack service and whether or not the service is reaching the target population?
- Administrators in all groups felt that nutritious snacks were important for children’s learning. *“The impact for kids is that they have better and more nutritious foods. Studies show the importance of eating healthy food to learning. Snacks enhance the environment of learning in the afterschool care program.” “Our educators feel there is a correlation between ‘ready to learn’ and students not being hungry.”*
 - The afterschool snack reimbursement has been important for community partnerships, and many administrators mentioned programs supported by a combination of grants and community partnerships. *“I think it is reaching the target students. It is helping take the financial burden off schools for the costs of snacks.” “The reimbursement for snacks has allowed the afterschool snack service to expand, and some of the grant money has been available for other programs so now we have students in other programs who are also getting snacks.”*
 - Administrators said the reimbursable afterschool snack service increased the opportunities for nutrition education. *“I think one of the greatest benefits of the program is that nutrition education has increased due to snack service. Proper nutrition is being introduced through snacks. We can address obesity by serving healthy snacks.”*
 - Transportation issues limited some children from attending afterschool care programs. *“Transportation is a challenge for some students who might otherwise stay for afterschool care. If a child stays, transportation must be provided to take them home.”*
 - Administrators mentioned the program as valuable for keeping children in a supervised setting. *“We are located in the inner city. This program keeps students off the street and out of trouble.” “We feel it is reaching the target population in our area. It fills a void for students who can’t go home and for kids who really need a snack.”*

- Some administrators suggested that reimbursable snacks should be available to students in all afterschool activities, including sports. *“Everyone needs a nutritious snack after school if they are participating in school activities.” “I would like for someone to answer the question as to whether the omission of athletic activities for snacks is due to a need to limit the program.” “Student athletes are in a supervised school setting and they need a nutritious snack after school.” “Not only low-income children need snacks. Students who are staying after school for other activities need snacks. We need to provide snacks for all students.”*

11. Of all the topics we discussed, which one is most important to you?

- Accountability was most mentioned by administrators in all focus groups. *“Accountability! As long as we don’t have funds to pay for snacks to be served and counted by the cafeteria staff, we can’t determine if the count is really accurate.” “I also think accountability is the most important issue in the snack service. We don’t have any real guidelines and auditors don’t always understand. The 50% site eligibility limits the snack service. Universal would be better—that cuts out the accountability issue.”*
- The nutritional benefits of snacks were frequently mentioned. *“I think one of the most important things to remember is the nutritional benefit of the snack service to children.” “I would like to mention that hungry kids are not necessarily poor kids. That’s the really good thing about this program. Working parents often have to pick up students late. The kids have to eat late. Many times parents don’t have anything (food) at home prepared or they have to go to the grocery store—having the snack at school helps.”*
- The concern over adequate funding. *“Additional funding—we need an administrative component to funding and funds to purchase extra equipment such as refrigerators.” “My program has to operate without my involvement in the monitoring. I plan menus and order food, but outside of that, I don’t have a lot of time to do more. We need more money to pay someone to monitor.”*
- Administrators in the Phoenix group specifically mentioned the 50% site eligibility rules. *“The 50% eligibility for a site to serve all free snacks needs to be changed to a lower percentage. We need to allow for more students to be served free.”*

12. Is there anything we should have talked about but didn’t?

- Administrators in all three focus groups mentioned regulations. They would like the regulations to be clearer. *“States often have trouble identifying how to meet the 50%*

eligibility rule. Guidelines may not be clear. We really need consistency in regulations.” “I think there is considerable confusion about the required regulations to implement the afterschool snack service. It would help if we got more clear-cut guidance. I have tried the USDA web site but the information I found there wasn’t much help.” “Is there any way to get one way of doing things? Could we have one set of rules or one set of documents and guidelines to operate all programs? Maybe some of this is because of state regulations, but it seems we are operating under too many guidelines.”

- Administrators want research studies and educational materials that will demonstrate the benefits of the afterschool snack service. They suggested studies that involve first-year implementation of the afterschool snack service compared to the previous year, studies of educational performance and good nutrition, and surveys of site coordinators. *“We need materials to promote the program. Teachers and principals may have to be reminded about benefits because they have never been hungry.” “We need more documentation and research to show that nutrition does help children learn. That’s what the education community understands. We can’t get hard statistics. I need bar graphs to show principals. They have to be convinced that children are hungry and that children do better when they have nutritious snacks.” “We want this study (focus group results) to go further than sitting on a shelf.” “We want the ‘powers that be’ to take this study and use it to improve the program.”*
- Administrators in two of the focus groups would like to see the use of afterschool snack service as a part of nutrition education activities. *“How can we use the program to teach good nutrition? I would like to see more discussion about nutrition activities. Nutrition activities in the afterschool snack service would enrich both education and school nutrition.”*
- Security of foodservice facilities and supervision of children was brought up as a concern. *“Supervision of kids is important. This is out of our hands, but if our facilities are used, they are taking a lot of abuse. If we are not careful, monitoring facilities to prevent damage may end up as more important than feeding the children.”*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Focus group results in this study are most appropriately used to explore and identify topics for a broader assessment of afterschool snack service. Participants in the focus group

discussions represented a suitable cross section of CNP administrators characterized by similarities but with sufficient diversity to allow for contrasting opinions about the challenges of implementing snack service in afterschool care programs. Based on the uniformity of responses in the three groups, several recommendations are offered for consideration.

Accountability is a significant concern with respect to accuracy of snack counts, training associated with obtaining accurate counts, and snack service monitoring costs that are not included in the reimbursement formula. Administrators would benefit from suggestions and strategies for evaluating, planning, and resolving these issues during initial program implementation. The following activities are suggested:

- Develop guidelines for assisting CNP administrators in implementing a snack service in afterschool care programs.
- Develop training materials including manuals and a videotape for afterschool care providers so that they can understand the requirements of operating an afterschool snack service under the NSLP.
- Conduct a cost study that evaluates the total costs of offering the service.

A second concern expressed by administrators reflects some difficulty in menu planning due to food safety and portion size requirements. The following recommendations were offered by participants.

- Encourage vendors to develop prepackaged food and beverage products that will meet the portion guidelines for menu planning.

- Encourage vendors to develop point-of-sale software that includes the reimbursable afterschool snack service so that accurate counts for reimbursement can be obtained.

Lastly, a number of the focus group participant comments reflect concerns related to federal regulations. In particular, administrators are concerned about the area eligibility provisions. Participants perceived that this provision can limit snack availability to eligible students. Since this is a policy and funding issue, it is beyond the scope of this project. However, these concerns can be forwarded to the appropriate agencies for consideration.

REFERENCES

Krueger, R.A., & Casey, M.A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2000). National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, State Administrative Expense Funds, Determining eligibility for free and reduced prime meals and free milk in schools: Reimbursement for snack in the afterschool care programs, 65 Fed. Reg. 60,501-60,539 (Oct. 11, 2000) (to be codified at 7 C.F.R. pt. 210 et al.).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

States Represented in the “Issues Related to Implementation of the Afterschool Snack Service” Focus Group Discussions

**Southwest Focus Group
Phoenix, Arizona**

Arizona
California
New Mexico
Utah
Nevada

**Midwest Focus Group
St. Louis, Missouri**

Missouri
Kansas
Kentucky
Illinois
Arkansas

**Northeast Focus Group
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

Maryland
Pennsylvania
Delaware
West Virginia
New Jersey

APPENDIX B

The questions asked in each focus group were:

- How do you select snacks for the menu?
- Does reimbursement cover food costs?
- Where are the snacks served and who serves them?
- Have any food safety concerns been raised since teachers may not have trained in food handling or food safety?
- Have you received feedback on the afterschool snack service from students, parents, teachers, or administrators?
- Has providing the snack service added extra time to your workday?
- What is the greatest barrier to having a successful afterschool snack service?
- If you were asked to make a suggestion to improve the afterschool snack service, what would be your number one priority?
- How would you convince a school foodservice director who has not implemented the afterschool snack service to implement the service?
- Could you share your feelings about the benefits of the afterschool snack service and whether or not the service is reaching the target population?
- Of all the topics we discussed, which one is most important to you?
- Is there anything we should have talked about but didn't?

APPENDIX C

December 1, 2000

Dear State Agency Director:

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), Applied Research Division, is beginning a research study to determine the issues related to the service of snacks under the National School Lunch Program to children participating in Afterschool Care Programs. A research information paper describing the study was reviewed by the Food and Nutrition Subcommittee of the Education Information Advisory committee (EIAC) at its October meeting. The paper is enclosed for your information.

In order to select participants for the focus group discussions, we are asking that state agencies within selected regions provide names of five school districts that serve snacks to children in the afterschool care programs. After receiving the names of the participating school districts, we will contact the appropriate person in two of the school districts and invite them to participate in our focus group discussions. Selection will be based on size of the district, number of snacks served, and willingness of the foodservice director to attend the focus group discussion. Dates for the focus group meetings have not been set, but we anticipate they will occur January - March 2001.

We would like to include representatives from your state in the research project and are asking that you recommend five school districts currently serving snacks in the afterschool care program. Please provide us with the name of the school district, contact person for child nutrition, and other information on the enclosed form. The information can be faxed to 888-262-9631 or mailed to Jerry B. Cater, Applied Research Division, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 10077, Hattiesburg, MS 39406. The information can also be E-mailed to Jerry.Cater@usm.edu. Please respond by December 15, 2000.

Thank you for your cooperation and your attention to the request. If you have questions, please contact Jerry Cater at 601-266-5773.

Sincerely,

Jane Logan, PhD
Executive Director

Martha Conklin, PhD, RD
Director, Applied Research

Enclosures

APPENDIX D

February 14, 2001

Mr. or Ms.

Dear Mr. or Ms.

The Applied Research Division of the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) appreciates your willingness to serve as a participant in a focus group discussion on the reimbursable afterschool snack. Your contribution is important to the success of this research project. Specific objectives of the focus group meeting are to:

- (1) Determine administrative and management responsibilities related to implementation of the National School Lunch Program's afterschool snack service.
- (2) Identify operational issues that affect a school district's implementation of snacks as an integral part of afterschool care programs.

The meeting will be in Tempe, Arizona (near Phoenix), at the Sheraton Phoenix Airport Hotel, Friday, March 9, 2001. The meeting will begin promptly at 9:00 a.m. and end at 12:30 p.m.

Travel Arrangements: For those who require flight travel, you should make your flight reservations by calling Pro Travel of Hattiesburg at 1-800-523-9979, ask for Donna. We would appreciate you confirming your reservations on or before Monday, February 19, 2001. If you travel by car, you will be reimbursed at \$0.325/mile. The Sheraton provides a complimentary shuttle to and from the airport.

Attire: The dress for the meeting is business casual. Dress comfortably in a manner that allows relaxation and sharing of ideas.

Hotel Arrangement: We have made a room reservation in your name. The hotel expenses will be billed directly to the NFSMI. You will be responsible for your telephone calls or any other incidentals. If you wish to contact the hotel for additional information, their address and phone number are:

Sheraton Phoenix Airport Hotel
1600 South 52nd Street
Tempe, AZ 85281
Telephone: (480) 967-6600

Expense Reimbursement: In an effort to limit your up-front expenses, the cost of your flight, hotel room, and Friday lunch will be billed directly to Applied Research Division, NFSMI. All other conference-related expenses such as travel to and from airports, other meals, and airport parking will be reimbursed directly to you. Federal regulations prohibit reimbursement for alcoholic beverages. The NFSMI Travel Expense Voucher will be provided for you at the meeting. Processing your expense reimbursement will take approximately two weeks.

Participant Information: Please complete the attached Participant Information Form providing us with the requested information. Also, review your personal data for accuracy. This information will be included on a list of participants to be distributed at the meeting. Make any necessary corrections directly on the form, sign your name, and FAX to 1-888-262-9631 by Monday, February 19, 2001.

Thank you for your help with this important project. We look forward to having your ideas on afterschool snacks. If you have questions, please contact us or Amy Jones at (601) 266-5773.

Sincerely,

Martha T. Conklin, PhD, RD
Director, Applied Research Division

Jerry Cater, MS
Research Scientist