



Insight

A Publication for Child Nutrition Professionals from the National Food Service Management Institute — Spring 2000

BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL FOODSERVICE

OVERVIEW

It has frequently been said, "There is always a better way of doing something; your challenge is to find it." Modeling best practices has been used to do just that. Child nutrition programs strive to be the best possible. One means of accomplishing that goal is to find a school that is doing an outstanding job with a particular aspect of the operation and borrow their ideas. One of the founding principles of the Foodservice Analysis and Benchmarking Service was to be able to identify schools with high customer satisfaction measured by the NFSMI foodservice surveys and share their great ideas with all schools. This issue of the *NFSMI Insight* is dedicated to accomplishing that goal.

The foundation of continuous quality improvement, benchmarking, and modeling best practices will be discussed. Information from schools with high student satisfaction based on the NFSMI high school and middle/junior high school foodservice surveys will be shared.

Historical BRIEF

THE QUALITY MOVEMENT OF TODAY HAS ITS ROOTS IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, skilled craftsmen manufactured and inspected their goods for quality. During the Industrial Revolution, Thomas Jefferson introduced to America the concept of the interchangeable part. About this same time, Fredrick Taylor, often called the "Father of Scientific Management," fostered the development of assembly lines. These two concepts destroyed the holistic nature of manufacturing previously known in this country. To ensure that products produced from an assembly line were manufactured correctly, independent quality control departments were created.

Statistical approaches to quality control had their origins in the early 1920s when Walter Shewhart, Harold Dodge, and George Edwards developed new methods to maintain and ensure quality. These methods involved internal comparisons called benchmarks. Edward Deming and Joseph Juran were influenced by their thinking.

Deming and Juran introduced statistical quality control to the Japanese workers following World War II as part of General MacArthur's rebuilding program. The Japanese government supported the concepts; and by the late 1970s and early 1980s, Japan had gained a large global market share of the electronic and automobile manufacturing industries. At that time, many American products were considered inferior.

During the 1980s America began its quality movement. Buzz words such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Control (QC), and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) became commonplace in the strategic planning of corporations. The quality movement in America has evolved around three basic principles: measurement, customers, and culture. Measurement is an important tool to understanding and solving problems. To solve a problem, it is important to know how you are performing. The customer is a driving force and should be a central concern of any organization. A company culture that reflects shared values and beliefs is essential for an organization to be successful. Today, these basic concepts are infiltrating every business down to the small entrepreneur.



BEST PRACTICES

IN SCHOOL FOODSERVICE

Thousands of middle and high school students have rated their school foodservice and nutrition programs using the NFSMI Middle/Junior High School and High School Foodservice Surveys. Child nutrition program directors and managers whose students rated their programs highly were asked in writing and in telephone conversations to supply information about their operations. The following are their comments categorized by the same quality factors rated by students on the foodservice surveys. These vary slightly depending on whether the survey was designed for middle or high school students. Two middle school responses are listed first, followed by the high schools'.

**ROCK HALL MIDDLE SCHOOL
CHESTERTOWN, MARYLAND
DIRECTOR: MARGARET ELLEN
KALMANOWICZ
MANAGER: KATHY ASHLEY**

FOOD QUALITY: The staff members look at the line from the perspective of a middle school child. "After the serving lines are set up, I go down the line like the children do. Then I ask myself, 'would I eat here?'" states Kathy Ashley. Children are asked for suggestions and the staff listen to their concerns. Vegetables are not very popular at Rock Hall. They seem to be the hardest menu item to keep presentable, but the staff continues to try new ideas. Taste tests are usually conducted two to three days before a new food is offered.

STAFF: Ms. Ashley also said, "Not only am I a cafeteria manager, I am a mother. I try to treat my middle school children the way I would want someone to treat my child." The staff support her in this effort. The staff also try to make the lunch line a stress-free area. Smiling faces are not only good for the children but also for the workers.

"We all respect what each of us are trying to do. I guess you could say we are a team." — KATHY ASHLEY

PRICE: With my customers, price has not really been an issue.

AMBIANCE: The dining room is a wonderful area. Children sit six to a table. The ambiance is more like a restaurant dining room. There are flowers on the tables that are changed for holidays and special occasions. The principal gives complete cooperation and keeps order in the dining area. The custodian takes great pride in keeping the dining area clean.

TIME: The kids only have a certain length of time in which to eat; service moves quickly. When the line setup is standardized and a serving time is established, it becomes a game with the staff to see if the service time can be reduced.

"To sum it up ... I guess I just like my job." — KATHY ASHLEY

**BLYTHE MIDDLE SCHOOL
BLYTHEWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
DIRECTOR: CAROLYN RIGHTSSELL
MANAGER: ANNIE GOWENS**

FOOD QUALITY: Blythe serves what the students want, but make it healthy without them recognizing it. Food is prepared as the staff would want it prepared if they were eating.

"We cook with a lot of love. We do not feed the students anything we would not eat ourselves."

— ANNIE GOWENS

STAFF: The staff members are very child oriented. They love the children and talk and joke with them. Carolyn Rightsell says about the staff, "They prepare absolutely fabulous food. You cannot get a better meal in Columbia. The staff treat the children like their children and their grandchildren."

PRICE: Lunches are \$1.50. The students have a choice of three reimbursable meals: hot line, which consists of traditional foods such as spaghetti; sandwich line, with sandwiches or burgers, fries, salad; and a salad bar with 20 items daily including fresh fruit. The salad bar is comparable to any local restaurant's salad bar. The students' favorite items are pasta salad and three-bean salad.

AMBIANCE: The cafeteria is decorated in school colors with a canopy over the serving lines and many green plants. It is similar to food courts found in shopping malls. The staff have added many small touches, such as decorative magnets on the cooler doors.

TIME: The food and nutrition program has no control over the length of time for lunch periods, but they try to allow students as much time as possible to eat and not have to stand in line. On the average, they serve 230 students in 12 minutes.

"Customers are who we are when we are not working."

— ANNIE GOWENS

**WEST HALL HIGH SCHOOL
GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA
DIRECTOR: JUDY CHISMAR
MANAGER: SHIRLEY WINN**

FOOD QUALITY: The foodservice staff have a policy to taste test all food before placing it on the line. Proper temperature is a top priority, and the team members constantly check for quality. The staff make a special effort to ensure that the food is appealing and appetizing. "I go out to the dining area and talk with the kids. We have really good kids here, and they tell me new items they would like," states Ms. Winn. The staff at West Hall High School are concerned with nutritional composition of the meals. Most foods are traditionally fried or baked. Reduced-calorie condiments are used as much as possible. Vegetables are cooked without fat and a baked potato is always available on the salad line.

STAFF: The staff make a special effort to be friendly to students and guests. They take pride in their uniforms and strive to present a positive impression. They listen and answer questions regarding nutritional value and menu choices. The staff really get along with the kids. Students have even nicknamed one of the cashiers “hot lips.” The manager frequently serves as cashier for breakfast. She makes a concerted effort to speak to all the students and get to know them.

DINING AMBIANCE: West Hall has four lunch periods. The tables are cleaned after each period. The foodservice staff and various clubs decorate the cafeteria for special events and seasonal occasions.

DIVERSITY: Throughout the year, the menu is planned to include various foods from around the world. Student suggestions are incorporated into the district menu whenever possible.

TIME/COST: Students are on a tight schedule. Two full service lines and one salad/baked potato line enable the foodservice staff to serve the students quickly.

NUTRITION: We do not post nutrition information, but if a student wants nutrition information on any menu item, we get that for them.

ST. JOSEPH ACADEMY
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA
SUPERVISOR: DIANE BEZDEK
MANAGER: DEBBIE DANIELS

FOOD QUALITY: “I feel that the quality of our food is one of our main selling points. It is truly delicious. If you do not have good tasting food, no marketing or other activities will maintain your customer base,” states Debbie Daniels. Standardized recipes are followed that have been adapted to our particular “cajun spiced” high school tastes. Therefore, no matter which cook is preparing the meal, it turns out the same. Garnishes are widely used; food carving and other food decorations are incorporated where possible. The salad bar and serving lines are attractively decorated with fruit, silk flowers, and ivy. Food must be prepared properly or it is not placed on the serving line.

STAFF: The staff know that they are expected to smile at the students, greet them, visit with them, and treat them like their own children. Students know that the manager’s office and the kitchen are always open to them. The central office provides attractive uniforms, aprons, and visors to ensure a professional look. The staff often attend student athletic events and pep rallies. The students know that the foodservice staff really do love them and care about them. Students feel comfortable going to the staff with suggestions, or if they just need a hug. “I not only try to enhance the dining room environment, but the kitchen environment to create a positive working atmosphere. I have motivational posters and often get my staff small tokens of appreciation for their hard work,” states Ms. Daniels.

“When we all get along, the friendliness carries over to the students.”
— DEBBIE DANIELS

DINING AMBIANCE: The central office gives great support by providing theme napkins and decorations for various holidays. The office also assists us in securing

giveaways for students. Dining room tables are spotless at the beginning of each lunch shift. The staff go the extra mile to ensure the dining room is as nice for the last lunch shift as it is for the first shift. Since it is a high school, the students converse freely. It is not quiet, but not terribly noisy. Creative contests such as “Create a New Salad Bar” and “Who Will Be the 25,000th Meal?” are conducted periodically. Students appreciate the kitchen tours that are also provided.

DIVERSITY: The normal 20-meal cycle includes Mexican (fajitas and tacos), Italian (pizza, lasagna, spaghetti and meatballs), and cajun (red beans and rice, jambalaya, seafood, stews and gumbos) food items. In addition, the all-American favorites such as chicken nuggets, hamburgers, hot dogs, etc. are served.

TIME/COST: For \$1.45, true value, the students can have a complete reimbursable meal, salad bar, and milk. Breakfast is only \$.50. Students are fortunate to have a 50-minute lunch period. Two traditional serving lines are available, and sometimes students have to wait a maximum of 15 minutes. “I encourage them not to stand in line when the line gets long, but to make use of this time to see a teacher or go to their lockers and return when the line has diminished. Therefore, they do not feel they are wasting time,” states Ms. Daniels.

NUTRITION: Nutrition information was posted in the past, but the guidance department has requested this information not be posted due to students with eating disorders. Some of the students will eat no food that contains 1 g. fat.

“In addition,” Debbie Daniels adds, “we are very flexible with our students’ needs. For example, even though breakfast technically ends at the end of first period, we continue to serve those requesting breakfast through third period, if they have unstructured time. Sure, it is a little more trouble, but they appreciate it and we feel good about catering to their needs.”

SOUTH PARK HIGH SCHOOL
BUFFALO, NEW YORK
DIRECTOR: BRIDGET O’BRIEN WOOD
MANAGER: FRANNY CALKINS

“Being friendly is the key to everything.” — FRANNY CALKINS

FOOD QUALITY: Children like to make their own choices as to what they eat. The menu offers at least four choices each day.

STAFF: Ms. Calkins’ philosophy is that the staff must be part of the students’ day. To do this, the staff listen and talk with the students. Having the right staff is very important. Image is also important, and clean uniforms are a must. Ms. Calkins believes in leading by example, “If I do it, they do it.” The staff treat the students as customers.

DINING AMBIANCE: Promotions and special events revolve around sport teams and student government activities. The staff strive to become part of the school. During football



season on Friday's "Spirit Day," the staff dress in sweatshirts of school colors and feature a special meal. Students who have outstanding grades or perfect attendance are honored with special breakfasts.

DIVERSITY: The menu is planned to reflect the style of cooking the students are accustomed to, including sandwiches, pizza, and hamburgers. The food is not fancy, but what the students will eat.

TIME/COST AND NUTRITION: These are not as great a concern for our students.

Additional thoughts from Franny Calkins: "A school cafeteria could serve 5-star cuisine. The students would appreciate it, but they are looking for more. They are looking for a friendly face and a cheerful smile. Our clean, friendly, and cheerful servers help make the students feel comfortable during their meals."

**ZACHARY HIGH SCHOOL
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA
SUPERVISOR: ANNETTE DUPARD
MANAGER: ANITA MCADAMS**

FOOD QUALITY: Anita McAdams states, "Variety is the key. Keep them interested and they will come back." Many students who never ate school lunch before now eat lunch at Zachary. Nine choices are offered daily including the traditional hot line; express lines with pizza; chef salads; grilled chicken salads, and bag lunches. The bag line is rather unique. The student picks up a bag with lettuce, tomato, condiments, chips, and a cookie and then chooses a hot sandwich from a chest where they are stored to stay warm. Fresh fruit is always on the line. A variety of beverages are offered including several types of milk, fruit juices, fruit punch, and waters.

STAFF: The staff are very friendly and courteous to the students. Most students are called by name. Students look forward to visiting with their favorite "lunch lady."

DINING AMBIANCE: The dining room is clean and decorated for special events. A variety

— Continued on next page

IN THE DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT of today, it is often hard to go the extra mile. We congratulate all of those directors, managers, and staff involved in the featured schools. We encourage all of the school foodservice and nutrition directors, supervisors, managers, cooks, bakers, servers, and cashiers to follow, not where there is a path, but instead go where there is no path and leave a trail. For then, they will forge best practices in their own operations.

BENCHMARKING A Process of Managing Change

BENCHMARKING IS MORE THAN A SYSTEM OF MEASUREMENT; IT IS A SYSTEM FOR MANAGING CHANGE.

1 The first step in benchmarking is to institute a **continuous monitoring** process. It should not be a one-time event but an ongoing effort within the organization. It can involve statistical measures such as food cost and participation rate, operational measures such as production and inventory systems, and strategic measures such as strategic missions and people skills.

2 The second step is **analysis** designed to identify areas for improvement. Ideally, the area selected should be reflected in the mission or vision of the organization.

3 **Planning**, the third step, involves comparing benchmarks and modeling "best practices" in functions or processes both inside and outside the organization's business sector. The Japanese call modeling best practices while making improvements on the product or practice "Zembara." The Japanese manufacturing companies became masters of "Zembara" while adopting the concepts of Demming and Juran. You may have heard the joke, "What is the difference between a Mercedes and Lexus? \$30,000." The Japanese studied the German manufacturing of the Mercedes and copied the product while making a few improvements to enhance the car. They were able to make a car that looked exactly like the Mercedes, but with superior handling, at a lower cost.

4 The fourth step is **implementation and evaluation**. The plan should be implemented to solve the identified problem and evaluated once it is in place.

Many consider benchmarking as only the measurement in the first and fourth steps. But benchmarking also helps identify best practices. Benchmarking best practices can stimulate radical innovation rather than just seeking minor incremental changes. It also can give an organization a unique perspective into solving its problems. Dominos Pizza, in an effort to improve the process they use to prepare and deliver a high quality product at the optimal temperature, benchmarked with a hospital emergency room to see how they brought their teams together to handle a crisis. Southwest Airlines benchmarked with a car maintenance crew at a car rally to reduce turnaround time of cleaning and servicing their aircraft.

"Fool you are ... to say you learn by your experience ... I prefer to profit by others' mistakes, and avoid the price of my own."
— Prince Otto Van Bismark

FACT FINDER

The following facts were gathered from NFSMI School Foodservice Surveys:

79,000/698

How many students from how many schools participated in the NFSMI High School Foodservice Survey since 1998? These schools were from 27 states and the District of Columbia.

JANUARY 2000

When was the NFSMI Elementary School Foodservice Survey for grades 3-5 completed? Hot off the press, several districts nationwide were using the survey during spring 2000.

5 AND 6

What was the number of entrée choices most associated with greater student satisfaction in the middle/junior high and high schools, respectively? Middle/junior high school students were more satisfied overall when 5 servings of meat/meat alternates, 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, and 1 serving of bread and grains were offered. High school students were more satisfied overall when 6 choices of meat/meat alternates were made available.

4.1

What was the highest average factor score on the NFSMI High School Foodservice Survey representing an average of 79,000 students? This score was for the group of questions evaluating foodservice staff. Questions on the survey were scored on a seven-point scale with 1 = low and 7 = high. The national averages for the other factor scores were as follows in descending order: dining ambiance: 3.9, diversity: 3.7, time/cost: 3.3, food quality: 3.1, and nutrition information: 2.5.

23,000/109

How many middle/junior high students from how many schools have completed the NFSMI Middle/Junior High School Foodservice Survey? These schools were from 12 states.

3.7

What was the national average score for overall satisfaction according to the NFSMI Middle/Junior High School Foodservice Survey? This was the average score out of seven possible points for satisfaction with the school foodservice and nutrition program. Average scores for other factors in descending order were as follows: staff: 4.1, ambiance: 4.0, price: 3.4, food quality: 3.3, and time: 3.1.

BEST PRACTICES *cont'd*

of promotions that include prizes are conducted yearly. Ms. McAdams states, "Believe it or not, high school kids love to win things." Giveaways include jars of candy, stuffed animals, King Cakes during Mardi Gras, movie tickets, and other things.

DIVERSITY: Variety, variety, variety is our secret.

TIME/COST: Students feel the \$1.15 is a real value. Many seniors say that they can get more for their money in the cafeteria than they can get at fast food restaurants. Having four serving lines helps get the students served quickly.

NUTRITION: Nutrition information is always available on the menu items.

"We keep changing and modifying our menu to hold the students' interest." — ANITA MCADAMS

ERATH HIGH SCHOOL
ERATH, LOUISIANA
DIRECTOR: DEBBIE KITE
MANAGER: DOT MERGIST

FOOD QUALITY: The menus reflect student preferences for variety and brands. Foods are well seasoned to meet the students' tastes. Recipes are prepared like they would be prepared at home. The staff add home touches to make their foods special. Commodity items are made into creative foods students like.

STAFF: The staff are very friendly, and they listen to the students. The students and faculty are greeted daily with warm smiles and friendly gestures. The foodservice staff assists the school with an annual fund-raiser of selling snicker-doodle cookies. They bake cookies for several days. Last year over \$500 was raised for the school. At Thanksgiving this year, over 800 quarts of rice stuffing mix were sold to assist with raising money for graduation.

"Ms. Dot goes above and beyond the call of duty. The cafeteria is always spotless and the meals are the types of foods the kids like. We have a 60-70% participation rate, and in today's environment that is really good."

— MR. LYNN VINCENT,
ERATH HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

DINING AMBIANCE: Cleanliness is very important. The tables are cleaned after each serving time. Special events are promoted by preparing and serving banquets. Meals are prepared for the football team prior to the games. A banquet is prepared for the band annually. Erath hosts an open house yearly, during which 300-400 people visit the cafeteria.

DIVERSITY: Students enjoy "fast food" type

— *Continued*

items as well as “cajun” favorites such as gumbo, jambalaya, and red beans and rice with sausage. All types of foods are offered. Meals are served using the offer vs. serve plan.

TIME/COST: Students only have 15 minutes for lunch. The staff serves 220 students in each of the four lunch periods. Students are served on two lines in 4 to 5 minutes.

NUTRITION: Ms. Mergist provides nutrition information to students in the classroom. Teachers work with her to develop a curriculum that includes food and nutrition.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Dot Mergist has received numerous awards at Erath, and she has been inducted into the school Hall of Fame. Ms. Mergist will retire this year after 34 years of service.

Practical Use of This **INFORMATION**

The techniques and practices identified by these schools are not unique. They are used by thousands of foodservice businesses across the country. The managers, directors, and staff were willing to often try new ideas and go beyond the normal “call of duty.” The one characteristic that was noted in each of these cases was the caring, committed nature of the managers and staff. They did the little or creative things that made the difference. People often remember the extra mile when they forget the marathon. Best practice schools can be compared to the horse that consistently runs just a second faster than another horse in a race and is worth millions of dollars more.

For More Information

RESOURCES:

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Information about this and other topics may be obtained by contacting the

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