



## **Working with School Food Service: Working Towards Healthy Snacks** **A guide for collaborating with school food service to improve out of school time snacks and meals**

Many afterschool programs serve snacks or meals that are provided by their local school district's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). This guide aims to help afterschool staff and coordinators that receive snacks or meals from Food and Nutrition Services to work towards meeting the Out of School Nutrition and Physical Activity (OSNAP) Initiative Standards, keeping program requirements and cost in mind. In addition to highlighting federal guidelines for snacks, this guide offers tips to afterschool program staff to keep in mind when meeting with Food and Nutrition Services staff to discuss menu change.

### **OSNAP Standards for Program-Provided Healthy Eating and Beverages:**

- ❖ Serve water at snack every day
- ❖ Serve a fruit or vegetable at snack every day
- ❖ Do not serve foods with trans fats, found in processed snack foods and many fried fast foods
- ❖ When serving grains (like breads, cereals and crackers), serve whole grains (whole grains are listed as the first ingredient)
- ❖ Do not serve sugary drinks (drinks with added sugar, like soda, punch and fruit drinks)

### **Getting Started**

- ❖ **Menu:** *What's on it? What's actually being served?:*
  - Review your program's menu. If you don't have a copy, request one from your district's afterschool snack coordinator, your school's food service manager or your district's food service director.
  - Use the OSNAP Policy Self-Assessment tool to see how well your menu meets the OSNAP Standards (<http://osnap.org/tools/policy-assessment/policy-self-assessment-introduction/>)
  - Use the OSNAP Daily Practice Self-Assessment tool to track how often the snacks your program serves meet the OSNAP Standards (<http://osnap.org/tools/practice-assessment/introduction/>)
  - Don't forget water and other beverages! Look for their presence (or absence) on the menu.
- ❖ **Federal Food Programs:** *Which one applies to your program?*
  - There are several programs run by the federal government that provide reimbursement and guidelines to authorized providers for afterschool snacks and meals
    - *From the Food Research and Action Center:* <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/afterschool-programs/>



- ❖ **The Child and Adult Care Food Program** (meals and snacks)-  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/>

*Best for:*

- Schools interested in serving meals;
- Local government agencies (like parks and rec.);
- Afterschool programs run by nonprofits.

- ❖ **The National School Lunch Program** (snacks) - <http://www.fns.usda.gov/slp>

*Best for:*

- School sponsored afterschool programs that have a food service department that is willing to provide healthy snacks;
- Afterschool programs unable to administer a nutrition program themselves and want to serve only snacks.
- Become more familiar with the program your district's FNS participates in for afterschool and/or meals. If you aren't sure, check with your school food service manager, your afterschool snack coordinator or your district's food service director
- To learn about the out of school nutrition programs run by the federal government visit -  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/Publications/pdf/Afterschool Options.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/Publications/pdf/Afterschool_Options.pdf)
- For more ideas on healthy snacks at schools, visit-  
[http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/healthy\\_school\\_snacks.html#other](http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/healthy_school_snacks.html#other)

### **Meeting with Food and Nutrition Services Staff**

Once you've done a little background work tracking your snacks, looking over your menu and doing some research on the federal food program your site participates in, set up a meeting with Food and Nutrition Services staff. These staff can be great supporters for children's nutrition. They are often participants (and leaders!) of school wellness councils.



### Get to know your local supporters....

#### **Work with a specific program at a school:**

Talk with your cafeteria manager/food service attendant first.

These are often the staff who place and receive orders. They are often a critical link in ensuring that the foods/beverages you receive are those planned for the menu and of good quality. School food service staff are very busy during meal service times. Try to schedule your meetings either between the breakfast/lunch periods or after lunch is over for the day.

You may find you also need to meet with the FNS director for your district to make changes that the school-based staff can't (i.e. menu changes) or won't make. In that case, see the box to the right.

#### **Work with multiple programs at schools or a program not located at school:**

Meet with your district's FNS director. The FNS director oversees nutrition programs at all schools and across all meals (breakfast, lunch, snack, supper) offered by the school district. He or she oversees menu development, contracts with vendors and suppliers, as well as the staff involved, both centrally and at individual schools. In choosing your menu planning timing, know that it often takes a month for any menu changes to go into effect. The end of a school year or summer may be the best times to plan meetings regarding menus. Many districts may be with food vendors at this time to choose the food and beverage items they will provide.

### **Working on Menu Change**

A meeting with Food and Nutrition Services staff is an excellent time for you to bring up your goals for afterschool snack and discuss potential change, but it is also an opportunity for you to listen. Food service departments often operate within really tight budget constraints; the reimbursement they receive must cover food, serving utensils/containers and staffing. There may be district or school-specific infrastructure issues (i.e. availability of refrigerators or food storage space, lack of safe drinking water, limited options from food vendors) that impact decisions school food service has to make. These can be real barriers and challenges. You will be more effective at creating change once you understand what the issues facing your district are. There is often room for at least some improvement, though change may take time and some creative problem solving. Even when the challenges are numerous, continued collaboration with food service staff can lead to solutions.

If you've never met any Food and Nutrition Service staff in your district, you may want to think about the first meeting as the time to:

- ❖ Start to build a relationship;
- ❖ Introduce yourself;
- ❖ Thank them for their work providing your program with snacks; and
- ❖ Learn more about snacks
- ❖ Share your program priorities for snacks.



Remember to share with Food and Nutrition Services *why* you are interested in making changes (i.e. your program is participating in a specific wellness initiative or grant, or your program is generally interested in children's health). You should prepare an idea of these changes ahead of the meeting, which could also frame an agenda for the meeting. Programs that have participated in OSNAP in the past have found that some goals are more easily met. These goals include:

- ❖ Offer water as a beverage every day. <http://osnap.org/quick-start/promote-water/>  
There are federal guidelines for making water available for children during meal/snack times. One strategy to ensure that you can provide fresh water is to ask that both water and cups be explicitly listed on your menu. You may have to work with food services on how to do this in your particular school and district (i.e. they may need to procure water coolers if there are no drinking sources in the cafeteria already).
- ❖ Don't serve sugary drinks. <http://osnap.org/quick-start/reduce-sugary-drinks/>  
Since you will be offering water as a beverage every day, request that sugary drinks be removed from the menu if served; also ask FNS to limit 100% fruit juice to 4 ounces or less and served less frequently. This can save money to purchase whole fruits and vegetables more often, even if it's just one or two more days each week, which can get you closer to the goal of:
- ❖ Serve a fruit or vegetable every day during afterschool. <http://osnap.org/quick-start/promote-fruits-vegetables/>  
Fresh fruits and vegetables should be put on the menu on a day that is closest to their delivery day. Consider canned, frozen or cupped fruits and vegetables as options when storage or keeping produce fresh is an issue. It's possible that buying in bulk and having a staff member create cupped portions could increase labor costs and new costs related to containers and utensils. These are issues to talk through with Food and Nutrition Services, and you may come up with some creative and workable options.
- ❖ Serve a whole grain when serving grains. <http://osnap.org/quick-start/promote-whole-grains/>  
Request that when a grain is served, it is a whole grain. More and more food companies are offering snacks claiming to be whole grains. The most healthy options are those that have whole grains as the first ingredients and have limited sugars and sodium. OSNAP offers a list of affordable, healthy whole-grain items that you can bring to the meeting and share with Food and Nutrition Services.

Check out OSNAP's sample menus for examples you can bring to meetings.  
<http://osnap.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Sample-Snack-Menu.pdf>

**What's on the menu versus what you're receiving:** *Helping to ensure that the items on the menu are the ones your program receives*

In some cases, the menus that programs receive for afterschool snacks and meals do not match the snacks that are provided to staff to serve to children. Sometimes there are issues with the quality of the foods.



If you have a menu that meets your goals, or your Food and Nutrition Service director has made changes to the menu, you may still find you aren't getting the healthy snacks you're supposed to. Talk with your school's cafeteria manager or attendant. If they are in charge of distributing foods and beverages from an outside vendor, they can often be a link with the district to let them know about issues with deliveries. They can also check snacks upon receipt to ensure that there are no quality issues. If they are in charge of ordering and preparing the foods and beverages served, a good relationship with them can help ensure that the menu items are ordered and prepared according to plan.

*Keep in mind:*

- ❖ The menu provides a guide for food service staff; the exact snack may not be offered on the exact day on the menu or the combination of snack items may be different due to delivery issues. Items that do not appear anywhere on the menu should not be arriving for snack as they may not meet goals or requirements. You should be receiving the items on the menu at some point during the week or month, not the same snack day after day.

*Offer to help:*

- ❖ If new foods are incorporated into the menu, get feedback from kids- try a simple activity by making a poster board with a thumbs up column and a thumbs down column and ask kids to place stickers in one column or the other depending on whether they liked the new item
- ❖ Make sure you fill out the necessary paperwork the Food and Nutrition Service department needs for snacks
- ❖ Offer to make sure there are cups/pitchers available and that the water sources (i.e. fountain, cooler or pitcher) are clean. Bring the OSNAP water sanitation guide to Food and Nutrition Service staff to make sure those steps work for them.

<http://osnap.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Water-Pitcher-Sanitation-Guidelines.pdf>