MEETING THE STANDARDS IN THE CAFETERIA: A HOW TO GUIDE

The landscape of school meals and competitive foods is ever changing. With changes anticipated with the implementation of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010, food service professionals may be wondering why they should implement the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*.

For links to the underlined resources, go to the online toolkit at www.michigan.gov/nutritionstandards

THE BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Preparing for proposed USDA nutrition standards for school breakfast and lunch.
- Satisfying food service component of USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge.
- Preparing for anticipated USDA nutrition standards for competitive food and beverages.
- Helping satisfy the School Meal Initiative.

FOLLOW THESE EASY STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE *MICHIGAN NUTRITION STANDARDS* IN YOUR FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM:

1. PREPARE:

- If your school hasn't already done so, form a Coordinated School Health Team (CHST) at the school or district level. For more information on CSHTs go to the Team Work tab.
- Be an active member on the CSHT.
- Develop an implementation plan to roll out the nutrition standards as a whole for the school or district.

2. ASSESS:

- Take a close look at the food and beverages offered and sold in the following venues:
  - School breakfast
  - School lunch
  - Afterschool snacks
  - A la carte
  - Vending
  - Catering
  - Others
- Review the current offerings in each venue and determine if an area needs an adjustment. Follow steps on how to implement the standards in the different venues found in this handout.

3. PLAN:

- Create a plan on how you intend to implement the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* in each of the different venues.
- Don't make a go of this alone! Use students, food service staff, school staff and families to create the plan.
- See the following handouts in this tab for more information: Fuel Up to Play 60 and Family Matters involvement to implement the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*.
- Seek buy-in from school leaders prior to implementing your plan.

4. IMPLEMENT:

- Make the changes you planned and let others know about what is happening. See the Marketing tips for each venue found in this handout.

TIPS TO IMPLEMENT THE *MICHIGAN NUTRITION STANDARDS* WITHIN SCHOOL MEALS & SNACKS

ASSESS:

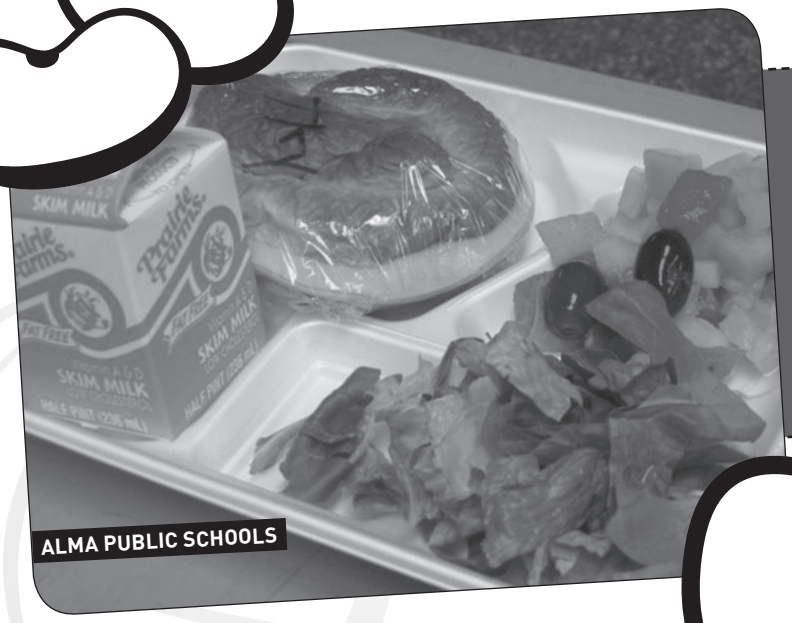
- Use the School Meals Checklist to see where the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* are currently being met.

PLAN:

- Identify areas for improvement.
- See the menu and recipe ideas for ways to incorporate foods that meet the standards.
- Gather input from students and parents through Nutrition Advisory groups, surveys, and Fuel Up to Play 60 teams.
- Taste test new items with the students prior to adding them to the menu. Piloting schools found this to be a very successful way to increase acceptance of new menu items.

"Our kids have been getting more and more unhealthy everyday. We don't do them any favors by ignoring the research or holding off to make changes"

PILOT DISTRICT



ALMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"In the beginning [it] was really a struggle and different from how I used to think, now it's kind of natural to me."

PILOT DISTRICT

MARKET:

MENUS

- Know your customer. Some districts have found it successful to market healthy changes to families by describing the new healthy food choices on the printed school menus. Others have found this not to be successful.
- Use fun descriptive words for nutrient-rich items on the menu and at point of purchase.
- Add information to a school website to let parents know about some of the healthy offerings available (i.e. whole grains, dark greens in salad mix, how many fresh fruit and vegetable choices are available, lower sodium products).

MEDIA

- Let students know, via morning announcements or online, that their voices were heard. Publish and post results of taste tests and let them know what changes took place to the menu.
- Highlight the most nutrient-rich choice for the day through icons on a menu, utilizing the GO! shelf tags, morning announcements, online or in school television channels.
- Market the most nutrient-rich choices to athletic and academic groups before big competitions.

> "Public awareness was pretty important to get out to our parents and community. Here's what our school is doing for your children."
>
> PILOT DISTRICT FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR

SERVING AREA

- Place the most nutrient-rich options easily accessible to students and at the front of the line.
- Consider adding or expanding grab-and-go options that meet the standards and make them reimbursable meals.
- Move whole fruits and vegetables to the point of sale area instead of traditional a la carte items. Place the traditional a la carte items behind the point of sale and make students ask for them instead (see www.smarterlunchrooms.org for more ideas).
- At the point of sale, ask students if they would like to add a fruit, vegetable or low-fat/fat free milk if they are not already on their tray. Have the items fresh, cold and attractively displayed.

> "We do something once a month to promote the standards."
>
> PILOT DISTRICT FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR

OTHERS

- Market the healthy changes to school staff.
- Increase the entrée choices available to all staff. Some pilot districts saw revenue increase with more staff purchasing meals when the entrée options available at the high school level were available to staff at all buildings.
- Have samples available for parents at parent teacher conference and open houses. Let them taste how delicious and tasty school meals have become.
- Apply for the HealthierUS School Challenge and receive national recognition for your efforts.

TIPS TO IMPLEMENT THE *MICHIGAN NUTRITION STANDARDS* WITHIN A LA CARTE & VENDING

ASSESS:

- Use the Competitive Food Guidelines and the online Competitive Food Calculator to determine which products currently sold meet the *Michigan Nutrition Standards.*

PLAN:

- **OFFER A BALANCE** of nutrient-rich options (i.e. fruits, vegetables, low fat and fat free dairy, whole grains, nuts, seeds and lean proteins).
- **CREATE A LIST** of products to consider offering.
- **GATHER OPINIONS** from students on food and beverages to offer that meet the standards. Use the Fuel Up to Play 60 team, student advisory committee or other existing student leadership team for input.
- **TASTE TEST** potential new items and have students vote for their favorites to be added to a la carte and vending machines.
- **EDUCATE FOOD SERVICE STAFF** on not continuing to order products that do not meet the standards. Create a reference book of products that do meet the standards.
- **UPDATE STANDING ORDERS** with vendors to reflect the current offerings.

MARKET:

PRICING AND PLACEMENT

- Price the most nutrient-rich options lower than the other options (i.e. fresh fruit will be less expensive than baked snack chips).
- Place the most nutrient-rich options in places most readily accessible to students in the middle rows of a vending machine or closest to the cash register (i.e. nuts & seeds, fruit, vegetables, and low fat dairy).

MEDIA

- Let students know their voices were heard and announce the winning items to be added to the a la carte and vending.

"A la carte was not a problem at all. At first we were afraid our sales might drop off but actually our meal sales have grown and a la carte revenue was steady."

PILOT DISTRICT FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR

SERVING AREA

- Create meal deals and bundling in a la carte and vending. This will not only help sell more fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy but will increase reimbursable meal sales.
- Consider using an icon on signage to indicate the most nutrient rich options available.
- Make sure marketing posters and the vending machine fronts are reflective of the products being offered.
- Work with outside vendors to change the fronts of vending machine or the inserts to coolers. Avoid having a cooler with a soda insert that is stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables. Consider changing to a water insert instead if it was provided by the manufacturer.

TIPS TO IMPLEMENT THE *MICHIGAN NUTRITION STANDARDS* WITHIN CATERING

Some pilot district food service departments noticed an increase in catering business when implementing the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*. By following the standards at all events, it sends a consistent message to students, staff and families to promote healthy eating.

ASSESS:

- Review the options available in catering.

PLAN:

- Offer a variety of nutrient-rich options available to purchase for meetings, events and meals.
- Create a brochure highlighting the healthy offerings.
- Consider the implications of a healthy food ordering system for families to use for classroom/school functions.
- Provide taste tests to staff and families for nutrient-rich options.

MARKET:

- Highlight the offerings available with school staff and families.
- Use pictures and colorful descriptions on marketing materials.

"All of our meetings have healthy foods. With all those meetings, our catering business has increased significantly because people aren't just bringing in cookies or whatever for meetings. They're having us do lunches, dinners, fruit and veggie trays."

PILOT DISTRICT FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Making changes, such as implementing the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*, doesn't come without a set of challenges. Pre-planning and involving many key partners can help alleviate some of these challenges.

> "I think it is just better to put it in place and the more you talk about it the more you're taking a chance. Negative people speak more about it—It's better just to speak softly and serve carrot sticks."
>
> PILOT DISTRICT

1. NAYSAYERS

- Create a set of key messages for staff to use when approached by someone that is less than thrilled about the upcoming changes.
- Remind people that the changes are for the kids!
- These changes will help our kids be healthy, fit, and ready to learn.
- Stay positive!

2. PRESS

- For more information go to the Cheer for Your Success tab.

> "The high school staff, teachers, and guidance counselors have been very supportive, good about talking the issues through with the kids."
>
> PILOT DISTRICT

3. SOCIAL MEDIA

- For more information on ways to use social media check out the Cheer for Your Success tab.
- Stay strong and positive about doing the right thing for children's health.
- Piloting districts report that things get easier after the first few months of changes.

4. FINDING PRODUCTS TO MEET THE STANDARDS

- Work with the vendors and keep asking questions about getting in new products. Use consortiums and talk with other directors to buy new products together to lessen the risk and increase the quantity.

> "There was some negativity expressed in a local newspaper after we first got this going. That's died way off—it was just the initial 'Oh my gosh how can you do this to my kid?' Actually it was just the adults who were having the hard time; the kids were thrilled with the different ways we were doing birthdays."
>
> PILOT DISTRICT

5. USING STUDENTS

- "Fuel Up to Play 60 tempered a lot of the middle school resistance. It's a student run organization and they are leading the charge to get kids involved and active. It's taken some pressure off of me actually."

6. USING COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH TEAMS

- Make sure the message comes from various staff and not just from food service.
- "It makes a world of difference—being able to communicate amongst ourselves."