

Office of Health and Nutrition Services  
Fiscal and Administrative Services Monitoring Team  
Spend Down Plan of Action Ideas for Excess Fund Balances

This document highlights ideas that Sponsors can consider for the Spend Down Plan of an Excess Fund Balance.

### Menu and Meal Quality

- ❖ **Serve a wider variety of fresh, local fruits, and vegetables.** Offer fruits like strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, peaches, and different apple varieties like ambrosia, honey crisp and pink lady. Look for locally sourced frozen fruits, when fresh is not in season. Introduce students to vegetables like asparagus and zucchini.
- ❖ **Purchase pre-cut and packaged fruits and vegetables like apple slices and baby carrot snack packs.** These items are typically more expensive than whole fruits and vegetables but are a convenient option for students and food service staff (they require less prep work).
- ❖ **Offer entrée items that may otherwise be cost-prohibitive like higher quality cuts of meat.**
- ❖ **Hire a chef to solicit student input and create culturally appropriate recipes reflective of student demographics to add to your menu.**

### Service and Atmosphere

- ❖ **Refresh the spaces and places where students eat.** \* Hire a designer to work with students to improve the atmosphere and functionality of the cafeteria and/or other areas where students eat. Invest in new seating, fresh paint, signage, and art.
- ❖ **Work with a marketing agency to develop a brand for your school nutrition department.** Use the elements of the new branding package (i.e., logo, color palette,

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font, tagline, and imagery) to refresh the cafeteria, wrap department vehicles, personalize packaging, and more.

- ❖ **Revamp packaging.** Packaging plays a critical role in the appeal of school meals. Consider how packaging could make your menu offerings stand out and be more attractive to students. Model the packaging that students are familiar with seeing at fast-casual restaurants. Purchase bento style boxes (segmented boxes with individual compartments for different items), Chinese restaurant-style takeout boxes, kraft paper bowls and boxes, etc. For a finishing touch, add branded stickers/labels.
- ❖ **Invest in marketing materials like digital signage and banners.** Promote your program and current menu offerings to students and families to increase participation.
- ❖ **Upgrade the hardware of your Point of Sale (POS) system.** Consider how functionality can be improved for both staff and students with options like a touchless pin pad and scanner and/or a portable tablet for grab and go meal service. Or add an additional POS access to improve line speed.
- ❖ **Order supplies to offer taste tests and administer student surveys.** Offering taste tests and administering surveys is a great way to get student feedback and make more informed decisions about menu additions.
- ❖ **Redesign and purchase new serving lines that keep food hotter or colder and allows for better merchandizing. \***

## Staffing

- ❖ **Provide staff with uniforms and shoes.** Consider purchasing branded chef coats featuring the school, district, department, or Sponsor logo. This can help boost staff pride and improve student perception of the program.
- ❖ **Hire additional food service staff to expand menu offerings and do more scratch cooking.**
- ❖ **Hire a dietician, menu planner, or a student input coordinator to lead menu planning and offer nutrition education.**
- ❖ **Increase staff wages or offer bonus/incentives to staff if wage increases are not sustainable.\***
- ❖ **Hire technology and/or communications staff for food service specific support. \*** In addition to ensuring that hardware and software are functioning properly, they can manage social media and website communications.
- ❖ **Hire a consultant for assistance with yearly planning and to help prepare for an Administrative Review.**
- ❖ **Hire a maintenance technician and/or custodian for food service. \*** This staff member can conduct routine maintenance on equipment and/or can offer extra food service specific cleaning as needed.
- ❖ **Contract with a cleaning service to launder staff uniforms.**

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## Equipment

See Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) [Pre-approved Food Service Equipment List<sup>i</sup>](#) and [When do you Need Pre-Approval for Food Service Equipment Purchases \(Admin Memo #5 2021\)<sup>ii</sup>](#) for more information on equipment requirements.

- ❖ **Replace small equipment and small wares.** Evaluate all your small equipment and small wares to see what is worn and in need of replacement. Ask staff what they need to get the job done more efficiently. Consider purchases—like a chopper or sectionizer— that will save time as well as ease the task for staff, relieving burden on their bodies and improving morale.
- ❖ **Replace big kitchen equipment and upgrade for efficiency, for example purchasing a combi oven.**
- ❖ **Increase storage capacity by adding refrigerator/freezer units.** \* Consider renting initially to assess how these units best meet the needs of your program (i.e., size and location). Once you determine what works well, make the purchase. If needed, walk-in freezers and coolers can be placed outside of the school if space does not permit inside the kitchen.
- ❖ **Purchase a sealing machine.** Sealing items like sandwiches, salads, fruits, and vegetables helps to keep the food fresher longer and makes it more portable.
- ❖ **Install a central cooler/freezer to use when you have an overflow or in case of emergencies, like when a freezer or cooler shuts down.**
- ❖ **Purchase generators to serve as a backup to prevent food spoilage in case of a power outage.** \*
- ❖ **Upgrade your temperature monitoring and control systems on coolers/freezers.**
- ❖ **Invest in reusable trays.**
- ❖ **Buy a salad bar or refrigerated buffet table.**
- ❖ **Purchase equipment to offer alternative and innovative meal delivery models like Breakfast in the Classroom or Grab and Go Breakfast.** Equipment like carts, insulated rolling bags, portable kiosks, and mobile POS systems.
- ❖ **Add a transport vehicle, refrigerated truck, or food truck to your vehicle fleet to support your summer meals program.** A refrigerated truck can be used for meal delivery and as backup if a cooler or freezer shuts down.
- ❖ **Upgrade computers and printers at each school POS site and the food service office.**

## Staff Training and Professional Development

- ❖ **Take your team to a conference or association meeting.** Ideally, make this an annual practice.
- ❖ **Hire a company or a professional to offer culinary training.** This can be a great opportunity to refresh knife techniques, cooking skills, and food safety practices.

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- ❖ **Host a team-building event for all staff.** \* Hire a motivational speaker, nutritionist, or mental health advisor based on the needs and interests of your team.
- ❖ **Offer a training for your management-level staff.** \* Identify areas where your staff can benefit from professional development like dealing with difficult employees, maintaining proper documentation, problem-solving, guidance for improvement plans, improving staff morale, etc. Contract with someone that can offer coaching to the team and at the individual level.
- ❖ **Provide additional training and professional development for staff as it relates to improving the food service program and to meet professional standards requirements.**

## Nutrition Education

- ❖ **Launch a “harvest of the month” program.** Promote seasonal, local, and healthy eating by showcasing in-season fruits and vegetables.
- ❖ **Start a school garden program.**
- ❖ **Invite a farmer to school.**
- ❖ **Purchase a cooking cart for cooking demonstrations as part of the meal service.**
- ❖ **Purchase aquaponic tower gardens so students have experience growing food.**
- ❖ **Purchase some colorful aprons with nutrition education messages on them.**

## Universal Free Meals

- ❖ **Provide Universal Free Breakfast for all students.** \*
- ❖ **Discretionary Elimination of the Reduced Meal Price.** Allow students who qualify for reduced price meals to eat free of charge for both breakfast and lunch. *Note that universal free lunch is not allowable for paid eligible students due to the Paid Lunch Equity requirements.*

## Questions

Please contact the Fiscal and Administrative Services Unit at:

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517-241-5380

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Pre-Approved\\_Food\\_Service\\_Equipment\\_List\\_8-4-21\\_731854\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Pre-Approved_Food_Service_Equipment_List_8-4-21_731854_7.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Admin\\_Memo\\_No.\\_5\\_715592\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Admin_Memo_No._5_715592_7.pdf)