

PROMISING PRACTICES

While there were many excellent activities conducted by the school systems that participated in this grant, we have identified the following practices and resulting accomplishments by all the school systems that exemplified the overall project.

I. Increased Students' Involvement

Time Matters:

One culinary arts site met with students for one full class, 1 hour 15 minutes, every other week. The class time was too short to discuss content material, have a cooking demonstration and clean up. The site did not increase the class period, but increased the frequency of the CHEF grant meetings. After increasing the grant meetings, instructors were able to discuss strategies to maximize the use of time for each full class.

Less is More:

The student to instructor ratio was also very important. Larger groups of students required more attention. Time was focused on classroom behavior management, especially during culinary activities. Sites were most successful when the number of students was limited to 8 to 10 as opposed to 20 plus students. This change helped concentrate efforts with students that were genuinely interested in the program.

Walk the Walk:

Asking students to work on the serving line was a tremendous eye-opening activity that clarified the offer versus serve information. Even though these culinary students were going through the lunch line each day, it took on a new meaning when they had to serve their peers.

Training:

Students received training on the following topics in order to better understand school nutrition and food production:

- Understand the process of creating a school meal
- Practice skills in food preparation, customer service, marketing techniques, and food safety

- Prepare a nutritionally balanced and tasteful meal
- Understand the National School Lunch Program guidelines
- Develop collaborative relationships with food service staff (Interact with food purveyors to learn about related careers as well as product development)
- Grow herbs to utilize in recipes
- Administer food tasting surveys to determine recipe selection

In addition, several of the menu items developed by the culinary students were tested on the school lunch menu. The agriculture students provided the culinary students with tomatoes, peppers, and fresh herbs. These processes gave the culinary students true and practical experience in institutional cooking.

2. Empowered Foodservice Staff

Each school district's school nutrition office professionals involved foodservice staff from their schools to assist in moving from a four to six week lunch cycle. They identified methods to increase menu variety for students. This reinforced menu engineering, decreased the need for menu changes, and increased the use of USDA foods and scratch cooked menu items.

It was important for high school students to understand the limitations of the school foodservice employees with respect to time, budget, and program regulations. The more that school foodservice staff can express their desire to offer fresh and healthier foods despite program challenges, the better chance there is for community involvement and improvement.

The project gave foodservice staff the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills in food presentation, recipe and menu costing, food sustainability, and meatless meals.

3. Partnered with Instructional Staff and Culinary Teachers

The project forced school nutrition professionals to better understand the jobs and activities of teachers and curriculum specialists. These partnerships will lead to an enhanced relationship at the school system and school levels.

The school nutrition professionals found that involving the principal from the school where the culinary program is located, provided support, leadership, and accountability. The principal's leadership provided the teachers and students with a degree of recognition that further enhanced the relationship between school food service and the school.

Another promising practice documented was to involve the classroom culinary instructors from the beginning of the project. The supervisors were engaged in the initial planning, but the classroom culinary instructors were needed to support the project's implementation.

Starting small is critical in order to achieve big results. One school system attempted to work with two different culinary classrooms in two different high schools. The staff stated that they could have achieved better results if they had focused their time and energy in one classroom.

The project provided an opportunity for culinary arts teachers to attend professional development seminars on the National School Lunch Program, ProStart curriculum, and general nutrition education. These instructors were given tours of school cafeterias. In addition, recommendations were made for food and nutrition staff to provide culinary teachers with other professional development opportunities on topics such as food handling and transportation practices, equipment use, and cooking methods. Also, culinary teachers should be more familiar with the meal components and serving sizes that are served in school cafeterias.

4. Enhanced the Image of School Nutrition Programs

Marketing School Menu Items:

Several school systems created marketing materials, including a brand and

theme. One school system developed a concept to brand the menus as Top Chef Menus. The Top Chef Menus were featured in local newspapers and on television stations to help to promote healthy school meals.

Additional support for marketing is critical. Food Nutrition Services staff and culinary teachers do not have the time, expertise or resources to develop marketing campaigns for new lunch menu items. Students should participate in the creation of in-school commercials and announcements; however, print media is best developed by professionals.

Student Chef Competitions:

Many school systems created competitions among their student chefs who worked all year to perfect their recipes. In one competition, fourth and fifth graders judged all the menus and the top six recipes were implemented in the school system's lunch menu.



FEEDBACK

Student:

- "This is the bomb."
- "This was the best lunch we've had all year."
- "I can't believe [the other students] didn't eat this."
- "We need to make food like this every day."
- "You guys need more workers to do this kind of stuff."

School Foodservice Staff:

- "Phenomenal; would do it again, next year!"
- "What a wonderful experience I had working with Ms. Hughes & her students."
- "The students enthusiasm while promoting their creations, was inspirational to my staff, & truly a fun experience for our students."



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