

School Nutrition Association Releases “State of School Nutrition 2009” Survey

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School foodservice directors cite funding and cost of food as biggest concerns but are weathering tough economy

ALEXANDRIA, Va., August 4, 2009 – More than 77% of the 1,200 school foodservice directors surveyed state that funding and the cost of food/food preparation are the most pressing issues facing cafeteria programs nationwide as they head back to school this fall. According to results released today in the School Nutrition Association’s comprehensive “School Nutrition Operations Report: The State of School Nutrition 2009,” nearly 60% of districts increased their school lunch prices this year to keep up with the cost of preparation. Just two years ago, only about a third of districts increased prices and the median price increase for school lunch was \$0.15 in 2007 compared to a median increase of \$0.25 today. As families are also struggling in the economy, survey results show increases in free/reduced meal program participation across every grade level since 2005.

This fall, as Congress considers the 2009 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, the School Nutrition Association (SNA) is advocating that school foodservice programs receive an additional \$0.35 for each reimbursable meal served. Current Federal reimbursements equal \$2.57 for each “free” school meal served under the National School Lunch Program, which costs an average \$2.92 to produce. The increase would help programs keep pace with rising costs to providing students healthy, nutritious meals.

The report indicates school nutrition programs have increased prevalence of healthy options with peak gains seen in vegetarian offerings (gain of 12.4% since 2007) and low fat prepared/packaged foods (11.5% increase). Locally-grown fruits and vegetables are included on more menus as 37% indicate they offer these items and another 21% of districts are considering. Additional offerings at districts include:

- fat-free or low fat milk - 99% of districts
- fresh fruits and vegetables - 98.8%
- whole grain items - 96.3%
- salad bars or pre-packaged salads - 91.1%
- yogurt and yogurt drinks - 87.9%
- from scratch-baked items - 74.2%
- vegetarian meals - 63.9%

“These survey results show that despite the difficult economy, school nutrition professionals nationwide continue to provide children with high quality, nutritious foods and educate them on making the right food choices,” stated School Nutrition Association President Dora Rivas, RD, LD, SNS, and executive director of Food and Child Nutrition Services for the Dallas Independent School District in Texas.

Last released in August 2007, the updated State of School Nutrition 2009 was accumulated from a survey of 1,207 school nutrition directors nationwide and benchmarks detailed information impacting school nutrition programs. The State of School Nutrition 2009 covers demographics and operational parameters, programs and policies, breakfast and lunch service types, food safety measures, foodservice budget issues, marketing and customer service and pressing concerns.

Among the findings:

- Breakfast is served in more than 96% of districts with traditional cafeteria, grab & go and a la carte being the most popular forms of service. After school snack and summer foodservice programs remain popular, with nearly 51% and 43%, respectively, providing these services.
- As many school districts face significant financial challenges, school nutrition directors are finding alternate ways to raise funds. About 75% of districts provide catering services for events within their schools, while another 27% offer catering outside of schools.
- The variety of ethnic foods served in school continues to grow as more school districts offer entrees that appeal to their students’ cultural tastes. Remaining the most popular, Mexican food is offered in 99% of school districts and Asian entrees are featured in 81%.
- Formal policies exist as guidelines on a variety of issues. The following five areas are the most common formal policies, reportedly in place within three-quarters or more of the districts:
 - o Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)
 - o Nutritional requirements of foods/beverages sold by food service
 - o Crisis management plan / emergency preparedness plan
 - o Providing meals and services for students with special dietary needs
 - o Time of day certain foods / beverages can be sold
- Majority of districts (65.3%) have not banned any foods due to food allergies. Only about one in ten districts have banned certain foods in all of their schools, an additional 22% have done so in some schools. Peanuts are the most commonly banned food item, with nearly 96% of districts with a food ban in place targeting the ban of peanuts.
- Meat, cheese/dairy and fruits and vegetables are the items most commonly purchased with commodity dollars. Meat and cheese/dairy are especially emphasized, with more than nine of every ten districts reporting that they used commodity dollars to purchase those items. Fruits and vegetables are somewhat less common, cited by 81.9% as being purchased with commodity dollars.
- An increasing amount of districts are allowing parents to monitor or place limits on student purchases, with 78% of districts offering this feature. Most of the districts that do not offer these options plan to implement them in the next 12 months or are considering doing so.

The State of School Nutrition 2009 represents the feedback of over 1,200 school nutrition directors from districts in 49 states. The survey was conducted in spring of 2009. Copies of the full report can be ordered from the School Nutrition Association's online bookstore at www.schoolnutrition.org.

The School Nutrition Association is a national, non-profit professional organization representing more than 55,000 members who provide high-quality, low-cost meals to students across the country. The Association and its members are dedicated to feeding children safe and nutritious meals. Founded in 1946, SNA is the only association devoted exclusively to protecting and enhancing children's health and well being through school meals and sound nutrition education.