

Child and Adult Care Food Program

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD

YMCA of Silicon Valley

Background

The YMCA of Silicon Valley provides afterschool and childcare programs to 22 districts on 110 school campuses, with 56 ASES/21st Century Programs primarily in suburban areas. While a majority of the students they serve are in elementary schools, they are also working with five middle school sites. Jennifer Puthoff, Director of Child Care and After School Programs for the YMCA of Silicon Valley, saw the Meal Program as an opportunity to serve healthier options to youth during the school year as part of their efforts to address food security year round.



Implementation Strategies

The YMCA of Silicon Valley began serving afterschool meals in August 2011, piloting the program at one school in the highest need community first. The YMCA now sponsors the supper meal program at 19 sites. As the Meal Program sponsor, the YMCA works with both district food services directors and other private contractors who provide the meals as vendors. In addition, the YMCA works with districts that are the meal sponsors at five sites. The YMCA serves an average of 2,200 meals per day. As an afterschool program provider also acting as the Meal Program sponsor, the YMCA has gained purchasing power to offer meals at afterschool sites where the district(s) was unable to do so. Depending on who the sponsor is, the YMCA either purchases refrigerators and warmers, or the school district provides them to ensure safe food storage. Student satisfaction is more easily addressed when the YMCA is the sponsor because of their increased control over meal variety, timing and the type of food served. The YMCA does not serve a snack when they are the Meal Program sponsor, as they found that this was a little too much food for elementary schoolers. As part of their commitment to make year round access to healthy meals a priority, the YMCA has built in staff time and added positions and other resources to their budget.

Challenges and Solutions

When a school district food services department becomes a Meal Program sponsor, it can build on its existing infrastructure and experience. It is much more challenging for an afterschool provider to ramp up to be a sponsor. However, the YMCA found that districts were slow to adopt the Meal Program and was eager to provide meals as soon as possible. Jennifer suggests, "If an afterschool program provider would like to become a sponsor itself, it should start out by collaborating with a like organization that is already an established sponsor, look at its own internal capacity to take on the additional work, and establish a good working relationship as early as possible with its program analyst at the California Department of Education to start the sponsor application. Working with similar agencies that have had experience sponsoring allows a new program to benefit from lessons already learned and tested best practices."

Impact

Jennifer reports, "Serving meals has benefited not only the children, but also our afterschool staff, families, and communities. We see greater participation from the children in the activities; specifically around homework completion and our nutrition talks around health/wellness. Families love the program and rely on this for many reasons. Our meals are not only appetizing, but are also healthy. And children are being exposed to new foods—like salad, hummus, and kale—all of which would not have been possible without the Meal Program."

Recommendations

Jennifer encourages programs to apply to be a sponsor, if their school food services department is not ready—"While it may appear overwhelming at first, the application is simple, and there are a number of resources available to help programs navigate the process."

Learn more at www.afterschoolnetwork.org/after-school-meal-program



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The At-Risk After School Meal Component (Meal Program) of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) offers federal funding to afterschool programs that serve a meal to children in low-income areas. Reimbursement for afterschool snacks has been available since the 1990s through both the National School Lunch Program and CACFP. However, reimbursement for afterschool meals was available only in a few states. In late 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act expanded the availability of afterschool meals to all fifty states.

The Meal Program is now available to afterschool programs operating at or in the catchment area of a school where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FRPM) Program. California has more than 4,400 publicly funded programs serving over 450,000 students who are eligible for these meals. Since the Meal Program's inception in October 2010, participation by California's afterschool programs has steadily increased. In just two and a half years, participation has increased from zero to over 3 million meals served in May 2013.

The following case studies highlight different approaches to implementing the afterschool Meal Program—including doable solutions to common challenges. These three communities each implemented the Meal Program in order to address the real hunger that they saw among their students.

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Oakland Unified School District

Background

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) serves a K-12 student population of over 46,000 at 136 schools, with just over 50 publicly funded afterschool sites. In this urban setting, 81 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. Hearing from afterschool staff that snack was not enough to satisfy the children’s hunger until their supper at home, Jennifer LeBarre, OUSD’s Nutrition Services Executive Director, was motivated to be an early adopter of the Meal Program.

Implementation Strategies

In October 2011, OUSD selected pilot sites based on infrastructure available as well as interest on the part of the afterschool program sites. Some of the pilot sites have cooking kitchens where meals can be prepared on site, while others only have serving areas and rely on prepackaged food that comes from a central cooking kitchen. The Meal Program was piloted in 12 schools and is currently being provided at 19 schools at 13 campuses, serving approximately 500 meals per day across the district. This year, OUSD plans to add eight new sites with cooking kitchens, as well as ten sites at which a vendor will provide the meal. OUSD’s central kitchen is currently at its capacity so the district will be using a vendor to add meal sites until its new central kitchen comes online. Their priority is to serve as many students as possible as soon as possible.

OUSD is the meal program sponsor, and the district’s food services department prepares the meals. Food services personnel take meal counts and serve meals to ensure proper documentation.

OUSD’s pilot sites asked for hot meals, and the food services department delivered with an emphasis on providing hot, but easy-to-serve meals. To ensure students like what they are served, the afterschool meals follow a different menu than what is served for lunch. Menus include a good variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. At middle and high schools, meals are scheduled early in the program day to increase student participation.

The food services department measures student satisfaction by monitoring food waste. This information is relayed back to the menu planner to better meet students’ tastes.

Challenges and Solutions

A big concern of some food services departments is not taking away work from their staff, but also covering labor costs within the confines of the meal reimbursement.

By implementing a full service model, OUSD was able to create full-time, benefited positions for food services employees within the meal reimbursement amount. While the afterschool program staff do pitch in to help make the meal a good experience for students, they are also able to focus on student instruction. Jennifer underscores that “through this close partnership between food services and afterschool, OUSD is able to serve tasty, nutritious food while staying within budget.”



Impact

OUSD is getting very positive feedback from students, families and afterschool staff. Afterschool program coordinator Jason Peters says the hot supper, which comes at the end of the afternoon’s activities, has had a noticeable positive effect on the students. He says there is less fighting and aggression this year, and the kids are showing more patience with each other.

Recommendations

Jennifer recommends, “Any district or afterschool program considering serving supper should find programs and partnerships willing to help make it happen, and just do it.”

South Bay Union Elementary School District

Background

The South Bay Union School District (SBUSD), located in Eureka, serves 500 students in grades K-8. In this rural district, 63 percent of students qualify for free and reduced-price meals. “The children were asking for more food than the snack. And, the supper helps subsidize families’ food budgets by providing nutritious meals to children who need it most,” shared Susan Maschmeier, Healthy Start and After School Director.



Implementation Strategies

SBUSD began serving meals at all three of its afterschool program sites in December 2011 and currently serves about 230 meals per day district-wide. The district chose to serve cold, simple, prepackaged food items with a focus on offering a good variety for the students.

The district sponsors the Meal Program, and afterschool staff choose the menus, purchase, store the food and take necessary meal counts and serve the meals—after some basic training to take on these responsibilities. Food is stored in refrigerators, freezers and cooler bags, which belong to the afterschool program. Student satisfaction is addressed by using mini-student council meetings in which students voice their concerns and preferences about the meals served.

Challenges and Solutions:

Although the district’s food services department was supportive of the Supper Program and agreed on the need, it was not feasible at this time for that department to take on implementation. However, they were willing to work with the afterschool program to at least act as fiscal sponsor.

To carry out the program, South Bay USD’s afterschool program worked with the representative of the local food distributor to make a menu encompassing healthy, easy to store and serve items. SBUSD opted for prepackaged food to get the healthiest options while addressing the facilities issues of preparing and transporting food. To that end, Susan advises, “Afterschool programs should reach out to their food services department and food distributors early to get their input and limitations—ensuring their complete buy-in will help build the most effective meal program.”

A few simple strategies SBUSD used to make administering the Meal Program easier include streamlining paperwork and using weekly menus. They created a form that allows the afterschool staff to take attendance and meal counts. Rotating weekly menus provides consistency for both the children and food preparation staff.

Impact

Susan shared that student behavior, attendance and performance have all improved with implementation of the Meal Program. Site leads report that students are calmer after they have had a healthy meal and there are fewer referrals for disruptive behavior.

Recommendations

In summary, Susan advises, “A philosophical approach will not make this work. Understand budgeting and find a mentor. Know your district and its challenges (especially in a small district in a rural context), and be prepared to address the issues.”