

FRESH BITES NEWSLETTER

October 2020



Featured: Operational tips for improving participation



Across the country, school meal participation is down significantly since COVID struck. Your participation may be down so much that you might be panicking. COVID-19 has changed school meal programs for the foreseeable future.

These participation declines are not unlike the lackluster participation that many Summer Food Service Program operators traditionally experience. According to this in-depth article, “A reduction in the number of students participating in government meal programs when schools are closed should be expected, according to research published in the American Journal of Public Health this month. The study found a small fraction of children who rely on free or reduced meal programs during the school year show up for summer meal programs. Those kids may spend summer months hungry.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: It’s evident based on our conversations with foodservice directors and media coverage that participation in school meals is down significantly across the board. With many students not in school full-time, school meals are not as convenient or part of the daily routine. It’s time to get creative and double-down on marketing with this issue of Fresh Bites.

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Featured: Operational tips for improving participation

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While declines are discouraging and concerning, the article also suggested that students may not be accessing school meals because they could be getting food from food banks, had been receiving benefits through the Pandemic Benefit Transfer Program or they previously ate school meals because the meals were convenient, not for lack of food at home.

The only way to achieve optimal participation levels again is to return to school as normal. Short of that, here are a few operational ideas you can try to help improve your participation:

- **Vary your pick-up times.** If you're offering meals to go for hybrid or distance learners, be sure to offer a pick-up time or times that may be most convenient for parents. A mid-day pickup may not be convenient for parents who are working during the day. Try experimenting with an early morning and/or afternoon options or even Saturday morning.
- **Add pick-up locations.** Sometimes school isn't the most convenient location to pick up meals. Local parks, community centers and churches may be more centrally located. Multiple pick-up locations may be necessary to reach kids who are not within walking distance of the school. To help accommodate more distribution sites, explore partnerships with churches and civic organizations like the Lions or Rotary Clubs that may provide volunteers to help. In more rural areas, delivery via vans or school buses may be necessary.
- **Offer hot meals.** Cold deli sandwiches and pre-packaged, shelf-stable foods are convenient for bundled meal boxes/bags for distance learners or for delivery to classrooms, however, students need variety and want hot meals. Use National School Lunch Program menus with student-favorite hot meals to interest students. The NSLP nutritional guidelines surpass those of the Summer Food Service Program, so you won't risk non-compliance by using these menu weeks even intermittently. For meals in the classroom or grab & go stations, provide the meals in individual to-go containers or plated. If you're sending meals home, prepare simple hot menu items, package them in single-serve containers, provide them cold to families along with instructions for refrigeration and reheating.



This week is National School Lunch Week, a prime opportunity to promote the value of your school lunch program to parents, students, staff and elected officials. How are you marking the occasion? Share your photos on social media with the hashtag #NSLW20. Drop us a note about your celebration as well!

Free resources and downloads

Have you taken advantage of all the free resources and downloads available from NutriStudents K-12? Since the outbreak of COVID-19 last spring, NutriStudents K-12 responded to help school foodservice programs everywhere continue to feed kids. Here are free offers still available to you:

- Emergency menus for SFSP and SSO. [DOWNLOAD THESE MENUS NOW](#)
- COVID-19 Back-to-School Guide, which can help you improve your current procedures or shift when your district moves to a new learning model. [DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE NOW](#)
- A subscription to Cafeteria Connection, our customizable newsletter to send to parents. We'll email you each month when a new issue is available. [SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)
- Administrative Review Toolkit to help you shore up operations prior to your audit and compile all the necessary documentation for your review. [DOWNLOAD THE TOOLKIT NOW](#)

Mobilize your marketing!

COVID-19 has placed tremendous financial strain on school meal programs. While schools across the country valiantly continued feeding kids when schools shut down, participation was well below normal. Now that students have returned to their studies and foodservice programs are in full swing, marketing is critical to increase participation and reassure parents of the safety and quality of school meals.

The School Nutrition Association recently published a special editorial supplement, "[It's Time to Mobilize Your Marketing](#)," with support from NutriStudents K-12.

According to the article, "In this most unusual and uncertain year, there are So. Many. Messages. to market about your program. School meals are safe. School meals are for everyone, regardless of income, regardless of whether you are learning at school or home. They are important to education and well-being. Our school meals are delicious and nutritious. They have value to busy parents. They connect kids with pre-pandemic normalcy. We have an awesome team and we all miss the kids. We still want to engage with our students, no matter where they are, keeping the fun in our program. Plus, there are many logistical updates that parents need to know. Whew!"

We would add, "School meals are safe!" The CDC's [Food and Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) states, "The risk of getting sick with COVID-19 from eating or handling food (including frozen food and produce) and food packages is considered very low."

Marketing your program via traditional and digital media is more important than ever. Check out the article and adopt practices recommended by your peers. And, share the content with your administration, business manager and marketing point person.



It's Time To **MOBILIZE YOUR MARKETING**

BY PATRICIA L. FITZGERALD

Promote your school meal program as if your job depends on it—because it just might.

Ensure your successful USDA Administrative Review

NutriStudents K-12 clients testify to many benefits of our easy-to-use system, perhaps none more so than our Administrative Review support. Repeatedly, we hear how we helped take the stress out of schools' USDA Administrative Reviews with our fully compliant menu weeks and compliance reports, training tools, Administrative Review Toolkit and one-on-one support. If you're due for your USDA Administrative Review this year, don't go through it alone!

FREE DOWNLOAD: Administrative Review Toolkit

To help FSDs get ready for their Administrative Reviews, NutriStudents K-12 provides several online and downloadable resources, including our Administrative Review Toolkit. This step-by-step guide covers requirements and documentation for:

- Breakfast, lunch, after-school meals
- Offer vs. serve
- Access and reimbursements
- Civil rights
- Food safety
- Local wellness policy
- On-site monitoring
- Outreach
- Professional standards

Download Now!

It walks you through what's needed, from CN labels and Food Production Reports to cafeteria signage and point-of-sale location. It also provides links to helpful outside resources.

For a limited time, you can download this resource for free.

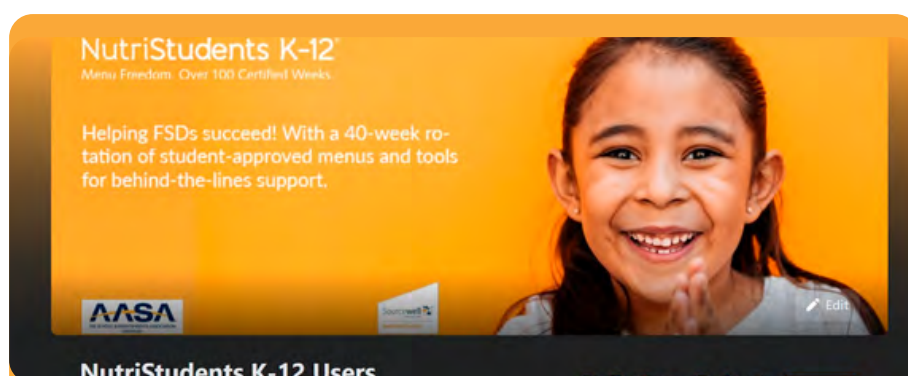
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"We had our review yesterday and everything was perfect! Everything the reviewer wanted, we had ready. And we knew everything was right. She only spent an hour of the day with us. It was so easy."

Kelly Carnell
Hope for Hyndman
Charter School

NutriStudents K-12
Menu Freedom. Over 100 Certified Weeks.

[Read the complete case study](#)



NutriStudents K-12 users! Join our private Facebook group.

Here's another benefit of becoming a NutriStudents K-12 user: our [private Facebook group](#), where you can share ideas, help one another overcome challenges and learn to use our system to its fullest. If you've been intimidated by national Facebook groups for school foodservice, you'll appreciate sharing ideas with other FSDs at smaller, generally more rural, districts. Click the link and request to join today. (We will confirm you're a user before allowing access to the group.)

Ensure your successful USDA Administrative Review

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NutriStudents K-12 also helps you with your successful review with:

Fully compliant, complete menu weeks and compliance reports

The starting point for your successful audit is using at least one NutriStudents K-12 menu week with no modifications. Our 40-week rotation is 100% USDA-compliant with all the requirements of the National School Lunch Program and Seamless Summer Option. Our free COVID-19 Emergency Menus for the Summer Food Service Program comply with all the guidelines of that program. (Please note: If you make modifications to a menu week, the system-generated compliance reports cannot be used for your review.)

Training tools and videos to help shore up operations

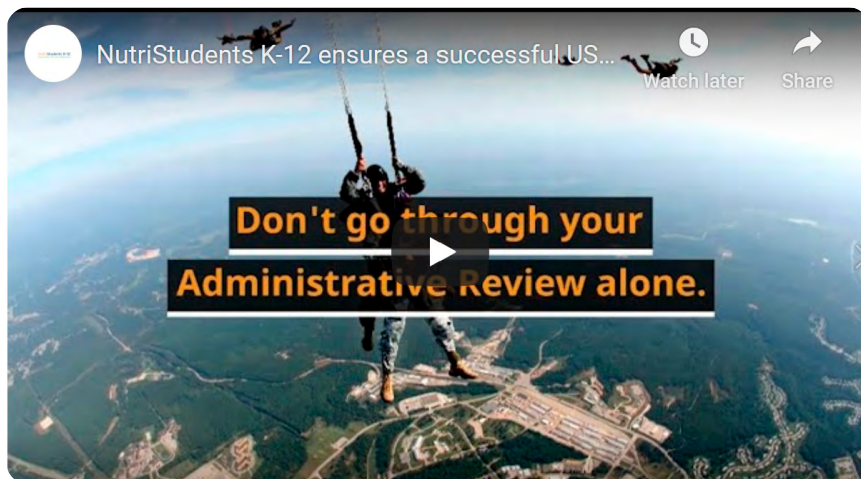
A smooth Administrative Review requires proper day-to-day procedures. Our tutorial videos on Offer vs. Serve and Food Production Reports, and our downloadable materials, including cafeteria posters, can help shore up your operations prior to your review.

One-on-one support

All the downloadable and online resources are great but sometimes you just need a quick answer or a little more help. No problem! We've walked many clients through their successful reviews and look forward to helping you!

Download the Administrative Review Toolkit and [schedule a demo today](#) to become a NutriStudents K-12 user. You don't have to go through your Administrative Review alone!

**Our Administrative Review support materials have been developed according to federal guidelines. Your state may have additional requirements that you should know and follow.*



"A huge THANK YOU for the simple recipes and information to make our review run so smoothly. It went great! Thank you for going the extra mile to help!"

Vickie Thompson
Foodservice Director
Verndale ISD 818

NutriStudents K-12
Menu Freedom: Over 100 Certified Weeks

[Read the complete case study](#)

Step up your marketing with resources from NutriStudents K-12

NutriStudents K-12 has several resources available to support your marketing, including:

- **CAFETERIA CONNECTION**, our newsletter for you to send to parents. Sign up for a free subscription today and get several issues immediately. We'll send you an email each month when a new issue is available. We're limiting this to only 100 people, so sign up now. (Clients can find all the issues in the [client portal here.](#))

Recent editions, and those planned in the coming months, are particularly relevant for COVID-19 times. If you find many students bringing lunch from home, you may want to share our "brown bag" edition, "[Bag lunch versus school lunch – which is better?](#)". Coming soon will be an issue on the safety of school meals, before, during and after COVID-19.

We know you're crazy busy and may not have time to get Cafeteria Connection out to your parents. Enlist help from your communications/PR person, a secretary, the IT person or even a volunteer. Communications are going out to your parents already - get in on that action!

- **PICTORIAL MENUS**, using our Custom Calendar Creator. This interactive tool lets you build a promotional photo calendar with the NutriStudents K-12 menu weeks in the order you plan to serve them.
- **DOWNLOADABLE MENU IMAGES** for use on your website and social media, and in email newsletters. For PC users, simply right click on any of the menu images on our NSLP menu pages in the client portal and choose "save as" to save it to a location on your computer.

Watch the [Fresh Bites blog](#) for more marketing ideas and resources soon. Need to brainstorm ideas or have a request? Drop us a line at customerservice@NutriStudentsK-12.com.

"We're getting positive feedback on our new menus from NutriStudents K-12. Kids are loving the food and staff are eating in the cafeteria more."

Wayne Stephens
Foodservice Director
Brandon-Evansville ISD

NutriStudents K-12
Menu Freedom. Over 100 Certified Weeks.

"We had the best Administrative Review ever for our district. Thanks to NutriStudents K-12, the menu planning and paperwork were easy and correct for all standards."

TRINA LEWIS
BETHUNE SCHOOL DISTRICT R-5

NutriStudents K-12
Menu Freedom. Over 100 Certified Weeks.



Get In Touch!
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MenuFreedom.com

[Fresh Bites Blog](#)

[Schedule Demo](#)

LinkedIn



Outside resources to support your marketing

#SupportSchoolMeals
to support your family and your community.

Everything you need to know about free school meals.

WHY IS IT AVAILABLE?
To help ensure children have access to nutritious food as the country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.
1 in 4 kids in the U.S. could face hunger this year because of COVID-19.¹

WHO IS IT FOR?
Any child age 18 and under.

WHERE?
Check with your school district to learn more about free meals this fall.

Why you should participate:

COMMUNITY BENEFITS
Every day, **30 MILLION** kids rely on school meals for their daily nutrition.²

MORE MEALS = MORE FUNDING

MORE FUNDING means we can serve **MORE STUDENTS.**

FAMILY BENEFITS
Free meals help lower your grocery budget and reduce the stress of meal preparation.

YOU GET FREE MEALS FOR YOUR CHILDREN while supporting your community.

Research shows that students who participate in the school meal programs consume more milk, fruits, & vegetables during meal times.³

Brought to you by **General Mills**

1 <https://www.nokishungry.org/coronavirus>
2 <https://frax.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program>
3 <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npe/schoolmeals.htm>

Schools' cries over lagging participation are being heard by associations and manufacturers. Here are several "grab & go" marketing tools to help increase participation. If you know of others we can add to this list, please email them to customerservice@NutriStudentsK-12.com.

General Mills recently released [infographics](#), a [video](#) and [social media graphics](#) in both English and Spanish to help #SupportSchoolMeals. The materials highlight the availability of free meals for all students regardless of income eligibility and the benefits to families, schools and the community.

School Nutrition Association created a flyer stressing the safety and nutritional value of school meals offered during COVID-19. Download the flyer in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

Tyson Foods also offers off-the-shelf activity sheets and social media resources as well as customizable posters (for Tyson customers) to support your marketing and nutrition education. It posts to social media with the hashtag #FeedingTheFuture. Need help getting started with social media? Check out Tyson's [social media toolkit](#).

USDA Team Nutrition offers many resources to market school meals. While not specific to the COVID-19 climate we're in, [these resources](#) can help raise awareness for the healthful and convenience benefits of school breakfast and lunch. There are also [resources for CACFP operators](#). Games and activities sheets can easily be shared with parents for use in distance learning. Materials for both school meals and CACFP are available in English and Spanish.