

## **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

### **At-Risk Afterschool Meals**

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal nutrition program that provides healthy meals and snacks to several specific populations. To schools the most pertinent part of this program is the ability to provide meals to students participating in afterschool programming. The schools or organizations providing meals in afterschool programming receive a reimbursement for each eligible meal served. All meals must follow a specific set of nutritional guidelines established by the USDA. Sites have the ability to offer a snack or a meal, or both, on a daily basis through the program. In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act expanded the At-Risk Afterschool Meal option in all 50 states, prior to that time, this program was only available in a few select states.

#### **Eligibility Requirements**

In order to be eligible to offer meals through CACFP the following two criteria must be met.

1. At least 50% of the students within the school attendance zone must qualify for free or reduced-price meals.
2. Enrichment programming must be offered onsite alongside meal service. However, it is important to note that students not utilizing the enrichment program can still be served reimbursable free meals.

#### **Benefits and Limitations**

There are many benefits for schools that choose to implement CACFP, including:

- Provides a new source of meals or more food than previously served with snacks that can help hungry kids focus on afterschool activities.
- Can increase the number of students taking part in afterschool activities.
- Helps feed students who might not have enough, or healthy, food to eat at home in the evenings.
- Can serve all students 18 and younger, regardless of participation in provided afterschool activity.
- No paperwork or identification is required for participating students.

There are some potential challenges with operation of afterschool meals but with staff input, proper training and planning, challenges can be avoided or overcome. Some challenges include:

- Ensuring proper staffing to oversee meals.
- Afterschool program staff members are less familiar with meal counts required with meal service.
- Limited amount of time available during afterschool programs.

### **Ways for Schools to Engage**

There are several ways schools can engage in at-risk afterschool meals.. One of the easiest ways to engage with CACFP is for schools already operating afterschool programs to switch from serving after school snacks to meals. Many schools currently offer snacks through the National School Lunch Program. Switching to CACFP meals not only provides more food to students, but it also provides a higher reimbursement rate per meal served.

If you are already operating an afterschool program but aren't currently offering meals or snacks now is a great time to explore the possibility. How you operate your school breakfast and lunch programs will likely influence how best to offer afterschool meals. Does your district deliver meals to your school ready to serve? The Nutrition Navigator can work with you and district Nutrition Services staff to see if they can also provide CACFP meals. The benefit of this approach is that the district acts as the program administrator and handles much of the administrative burden of the program. If you work with a catering company to provide meals you can approach them about the possible addition of afterschool meals.

If you don't already offer an afterschool program, but have thought about it and have the capacity, serving a meal could help draw students to a brand new program. Alternatively, you could connect with other nearby organizations that have existing youth afterschool programs to provide meals at that location. Then as a school you can help promote this site to your students to increase the number of students receiving meals. The Second Harvest Heartland Nutrition Navigator can help identify and reach out to potential organizations to collaboratively plan an afterschool meal program.