

FRESH BITES NEWSLETTER

February 2021

Featured: Grocery menus simplify SFSP service



NutriStudents K-12®
Menu Freedom. Tools for Success.

Grocery Menus for SFSP Service

FREE DOWNLOAD

Pyrex and Meatballs
Chili and Corn Bread
Turkey with Mashed Potatoes & Gravy
Beef Soft Tacos
Teriyaki Chicken

Grocery menus have been called the “secret sauce” to COVID-19 meal service. If you’ve yet to put them to use for your COVID-19 distance-learning school meals, you may not understand what they are or why you should consider them.

Initially, 5-day or 7-day meal kits for distance learners included 5 or 7 defined breakfasts and an equal number of individual lunches. You’d order the ingredients for each individual meal, assemble each of those meals and bundle them with the rest of the meals for the week.

Grocery menus allow you to provide families bulk ingredients – a pound of hamburger, spaghetti or pasta, pasta sauce, fruit, veggies and a half gallon of milk – from which they can batch cook one meal for the 5

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Grocery menus simplify SFSP service

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days of lunches. They can also ad lib using the ingredients you provide. Either way, you meet the requirements of the Summer Food Service Program and earn reimbursement dollars.

These menus can help you save packing time, simplify procurement, incorporate commodity foods and minimize waste vs. single-serve, prepackaged foods. And, they can be used whenever your students are away from school for multiple days (distance learning, hybrid learning, spring break, summer, etc.).

Communicate to parents

You'll want to give your parents a heads up before you transition to grocery menus. They may see these menus as more work, so highlight the advantages:

- Grocery menus allow the district/school to provide options that are healthier than prepackaged, single-serve items, such as string cheese, chips and nut butter sandwiches.
- These menus result in less waste compared to many individually wrapped items.
- The recipes are simple enough that teenage kids could cook for themselves, or parents can cook with their children.
- The menus allow the school/district to provide families with a fresh variety of meal options not previously possible.
- For meals help save the school/district's busy foodservice team time.

You can use our latest issue of Cafeteria Connection to fill parents in grocery menus. Download it via the links below.

If you have questions, contact us via email: customerservice@NutriStudentsK-12.com.

It's a Free for ALL! Download free grocery menus now!

NutriStudents K-12 is currently offering any foodservice program in the country 5 free weeks of grocery menus for downloading.

The downloads for the 5 menus include:

- Lists of groceries for 5-day meal packs
- Food production reports
- Recipes for batch cooking

NutriStudents K-12 users, access the menus [here](#) or from the lunch drop-down menu. Not a client? Click the download button now for these menus.

New Cafeteria Connection introduces grocery menus to parents

Grocery menus may be new to you as well as your families. This month's edition of Cafeteria Connection explains what they are and how they benefit both families and your foodservice program. "Bulk ingredients and recipes now included in meal packs" is now available for downloading. We've again included a form field where you can add meal distribution details, including days, times and locations. Download it today from the [client portal](#) or via [our subscription page](#).

Download Now!

Break even with just 5 additional meals a day

Need hard numbers to justify subscribing to NutriStudents K-12?
Want to know the financial ROI from NutriStudents K-12?

Consider in a normal school year:

- It takes just 5 additional lunches each day to recuperate the cost of the monthly subscription for NutriStudents K-12.
- 5 lunches = an additional \$18 a day in revenues. Compound that over one month and you'll have revenue increases of about \$320.
- At most schools, an additional 5 lunches a month is less than a 10% increase.
- Any district that uses NutriStudents K-12 as it's intended should experience a 10% or more increase in their first year.
 - Prairie Seeds Academy experienced a 40% increase in the first year.
 - Staples-Motley School District saw a 5-6% increase in the first month and 10% overall for the first year.
- Many clients report serving 5 additional lunches just to adults after switching to NutriStudents K-12 menus.



These factors only consider participation and revenue increases. NutriStudents K-12 ROI is greater when reduced waste, improved use of commodities and hours saved on menu planning, compliance reports and ordering are added to the equation.

1,000 student district/building (Assuming 180 days @\$3.60/lunch)

Participation rate
50% participation
60% participation

Revenue
\$324,000
\$388,800

Total annual revenue increase
Annual revenue increase
per student/year:

\$64,800

\$648

Breakfast Has Untapped Potential

Every school day, more than 90,000 schools/institutions participating in the USDA's School Breakfast Program provide a nutritious, balanced breakfast to 14.71 million kids – 2.42 billion breakfasts annually.⁶ School breakfasts deliver the nutrition students need to concentrate on their studies and fuel them until lunchtime.

While the School Breakfast Program is widely available, student participation lags significantly behind the National School Lunch Program, which serves 4.9 billion meals annually. Among low-income students, 22 million eat school lunch whereas about 12 million eat school breakfast.

Many districts have found that increasing student breakfast participation is a relatively easy way to increase foodservice revenues. The 2020-21 federal reimbursement rate for school breakfast is as high as \$2.20 in "severe need" schools. With proper planning and smart purchasing, districts can source breakfast for much less, with the difference helping fund other foodservice operational costs.

Schedule a demo today to see how we can help your program run faster, cheaper and better.

Schedule a Demo

First year director achieves win-win-win

Starting a new job as a foodservice director or head cook can sometimes be likened to drinking from a fire hose. For those who are going it alone without a background in nutrition or a partner like NutriStudents K-12, it can be even more challenging. Alice Westrich can attest.

Westrich is head cook and co-food director at Upsala Area Schools, a public district about 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis. The district operates out of a single campus serving 345 preK-12 students from Upsala and surrounding communities.

“When the former head cook resigned, the school called me and wondered if I’d be interested,” Westrich said. “We are farmers raising corn, alfalfa and barley in addition to about 100 head of beef cattle. The school said they needed someone who wasn’t afraid to get up early! I was intrigued and health insurance was an attractive benefit. So, I interviewed, passed ServSafe and was offered the position.”

That was 16 months ago. At first, Westrich followed the menus and processes of the previous head cook, serving two entrées per day.

“We were wasting so much food,” she said. “One entrée was always more popular than the other and food leftover from the second entrée got discarded. Trying to figure out what entrée would be more popular on any given day was challenging at 6 a.m. – even for me. It made matters worse to see the disappointment on the kids’ faces when the entrée they wanted had run out.”

In fall 2020, a colleague of Westrich’s from a nearby school district told her about NutriStudents K-12.

“I was skeptical at first,” Westrich said. “I just wasn’t sure it was a good idea to make a change when I was so new to my job. But she highly recommended it and after a discussion with administration, I decided to try it. I am so happy I did! NutriStudents K-12 has been a win-win-win for me, our foodservice program and the students.

“We are in ‘meat and potatoes country’ here in central Minnesota,” she said. “Even so, the kids were ready for a change and I was too. They immediately liked it because every day seemed to be something new. The chicken nachos, chicken patty on a bun and the queso meatball sub were all hits.

“It’s fun to expand their horizons and serve food they haven’t experienced before. Like the queso meatball sub – the little kids were fascinated, wondering why the meatballs were on the bun! We also recently served chicken nachos and quite a few kids had never had cilantro before – and liked it.”

Another advantage of NutriStudents K-12 menus Westrich discovered is that she could serve one entrée instead of two. “Offering just one entrée concerned me at first,” she said. “But in addition to being very well received by the kids, it has been hugely beneficial to me and the kitchen staff. In addition to less waste, it has made our work more enjoyable. Prepping ahead of time is easier and we are all working toward one common goal – preparing one entrée and making it the best it can be.”

“NutriStudents K-12 has been a win-win-win for me, our foodservice program and the students.”

Alice Westrich
Foodservice Director
Upsala Area Schools

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First year director achieves win-win-win

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After just a few months using NutriStudents K-12 flexible, student-approved menus, Westrich has received very positive feedback from the school administration team and the students.

“Now I leave work each day feeling much less stressed and lighter, knowing someone has my back.”

Alice Westrich
Foodservice Director
Upsala Area Schools

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“I was at a basketball game recently and a student walked over just to say thank you,” Westrich said.

She is also feeling much better about her first USDA Administrative Review, scheduled for the 2021-22 school year.

“It used to literally keep me up at night,” she said. “I wanted so badly to follow all the rules, but it was daunting at times. Now I leave work each day feeling much less stressed and lighter, knowing someone has my back.”

NutriStudents K-12 training resources have helped ease her concerns about operating her program according to USDA procedures. NutriStudents K-12 background and videos on offer versus serve helped Westrich understand meal components required

for a reimbursable meal and offering students components they willingly choose rather than throw away.

“When people ask me if I like my job, I say yes! It’s like getting to host a graduation party every day,” she said.

“NutriStudents K-12 has been a huge help and confidence booster. It saves me time researching and planning, knowing the menus are USDA compliant. They are also so supportive – I can call them anytime with questions. It’s like having a partner who really understands the system and is always there to help.”

We have lots of success stories!
We’d like to share yours as well. Email us at
customerservice@NutriStudentsK-12.com.

[READ MORE](#)

National School
Breakfast Week

March 8-12, 2021



SCORE
BIG
WITH SCHOOL
BREAKFAST

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It’s not too late to plan your “game-day strategy” for National School Breakfast Week, March 8-12, 2021. Start today and score big in March! Revisit our [January story/blog post](#) for ideas.

7 School Nutrition Trends for 2021

There's no doubt COVID-19 has reshaped child nutrition programs for the foreseeable future. Since March 2020, foodservice directors have had to adapt nearly every aspect of their programs on the fly to respond to changing guidance at the federal, state and district level. While we're hopeful the country may see some sense of normalcy by fall 2021, there are several trends from the COVID-19 era that will shape school nutrition programs – from the menus to procurement to service – in 2021 and beyond.



1. Creative packaging

To reduce the possibility of contamination, districts have moved to prepackaged meals – sometimes relying on pre-packaged, single-serve items, such as bags of mini carrots and sliced apples, and seed-butter sandwiches, to comprise a weekly meal bundle, or preparing and assembling meals in take-out packaging. Some foodservice directors have invested in vacuum sealers to prepare and freeze meals in advance. This gives them more options for meals and minimizes waste when compared to traditional to-go packaging. When operations return to normal, could we see vacuum sealers used to preserve leftovers for service at a later date?

2. Grocery meal kits for at-home meals

Rather than providing five defined breakfasts and five defined lunches, many districts will provide grocery meal kits. With ingredients like a pound of hamburger, spaghetti, pasta sauce, fruit and a half gallon of milk, families can prepare the batch-cook recipe included in their weekly meal kits. The menus meet the nutritional requirements of the Summer Food Service Program and help foodservice staff save packing time, simplify procurement, incorporate commodity foods and minimize waste vs. single-serve, prepackaged foods. Under current USDA waivers, grocery menus can be used whenever students are away from school for multiple days.

3. Supporting local communities

While efforts like buying local and farm to school aren't new, the pandemic has given rise to their importance. Districts will continue to partner with local businesses to help them survive the effects of the pandemic while helping to keep their neighbors employed during these trying times and beyond.

4. Foods for wellness

Immunity-boosting foods like citrus fruits and certain vegetables are popular as people seek to protect themselves and their families from the coronavirus. As people make healthier food choices, vegetable substitutes like cauliflower rice and crusts, and zucchini and squash noodles will also continue to gain traction, making their way onto districts' school lunch menus. Meatless Mondays may have been sidelined with 5-day and 7-day meal packs for distance learners, but heat-and-serve meatless options like garden burgers, queso omelets and bean and cheese burritos are still in use. When students are back in the buildings, Meatless Mondays and plant-based entrees will surge in popularity.

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7 School Nutrition Trends for 2021

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5. Doing more with less

With many school foodservice programs operating in the red, foodservice directors will get creative to stretch budgets, particularly if they lose staff due to budget cuts or attrition. More will discover the benefits of using foodservice software that can streamline operations and increase participation, such as NutriStudents K-12.

When school returns to normal, we expect students to be invited back into kitchens to help with the food preparation process, clean up and delivery of meals to classrooms. The culinary arts training program for high school students, [ProStart](#), introduces students to careers in foodservice, sometimes starting in students' own high schools.

6. Creative use of commodities

Foodservice during the pandemic has disrupted districts' normal use of commodity foods. With pallets of commodity foods in cold storage in spring 2020, foodservice directors adapted their menus to use those commodity foods for distance-learning meal packs. Quick-cook, scratch-made recipes, such as NutriStudents K-12 fiesta chicken wraps and pesto chicken pasta, which use commodity chicken and pasta or wraps, are designed to maximize commodity use while providing flexibility to serve hot or cold, in-school or provided in distance-learning meal packs.

7. Future of foodservice assistance programs

The federal government's COVID-19 emergency feeding programs have set the stage for a bigger push for universal free meals, which will gain steam post-pandemic under the new administration. Families have also become accustomed to receiving 5 or 7-day meal packs, which could lead to schools more proactively providing weekend meals.



"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

Get In Touch!
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MenuFreedom.com

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