Instructions:

1. Add your school/district logo.
2. Add information from your school/district where indicated.
3. Adapt other text as needed to highlight how your program has operated during the pandemic. For example, take out references to in-person learning if you’ve only had distance learning or adapt the reference to grocery menus if you’re rolling them out in the future.
4. Email to your local media contacts.

**Six Trends Shaping School Nutrition Programs**

**During COVID-19 and Beyond**

***[SCHOOL/DISTRICT NAME] Gives a Glimpse into What’s Next***

**[CITY, State, Month DATE], 2021** – According to [FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR FIRST AND LAST NAME], foodservice director of [SCHOOL/DISTRICT NAME], several trends have emerged from the COVID-19 era that will shape school nutrition programs in 2021 and beyond.

“School foodservice directors like me have made significant changes to ensure well-balanced meals continue to get into the hands of students during the pandemic,” [FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR’S LAST NAME] said. “We’ve had to adapt our menus to minimize contact and mitigate the spread of contaminants while tackling significant logistical challenges with changing USDA guidance and shifting between in-school, hybrid and distance-learning.”

This volatile landscape has reshaped school nutrition programs, affecting not only the types of food being served, but how it is procured and served to students.

**1. Creative packaging**

To reduce the possibility of contamination, [DISTRICT/SCHOOL] has used 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 for to-go packaging. [USE IF APPLICABLE: The district/school invested in vacuum sealers to prepare and freeze meals in advance. This gives it more options for meals and minimizes waste when compared to traditional to-go packaging.]

**2. Grocery meal kits for at-home meals**

Rather than providing five defined breakfasts and five defined lunches in distance-learning meal packs, [DISTRICT/SCHOOL] is providing 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.

**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 and schools, including [DISTRICT/SCHOOL NAME] 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 in demand 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 and may gain acceptance in school lunch menus. Meatless Mondays may have been sidelined during distance learning, 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 be popular in schools nationally.

**5. Creative use of commodities**

Foodservice during the pandemic has disrupted districts’ normal use of commodity foods offered by the federal government. With pallets of commodity foods in cold storage in spring 2020, [SCHOOL/DISTRICT] adapted its menus to use those commodity foods for distance-learning meal packs. Quick-cook, scratch-made recipes, such as [SCHOOL/DISTRICT]’sfiesta chicken wraps and pesto chicken pasta, which use commodity chicken and pasta or wraps, can be served hot or cold, making them suitable for meals at home or in school.

**6. 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 seven-day meal packs, which could lead to schools more proactively providing weekend meals.

###

**Contact:** [INSERT FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR’S NAME, PHONE AND EMAIL ADDRESS]