

Nutrition Chair Update | Julie Kronabetter

Let's Celebrate National Nutrition Month this March!

In my opinion, school food service employees are poised to have the opportunity to be some of the healthiest individuals in the nation. In my roles as a school district food service director, registered dietitian, and MSNA Nutrition Chair, I'll share some thoughts about how I think nutrition and working in school food service affects our body, mind, and soul and has a strong connection within ourselves and those in our community.



For schools that participate in the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program, the USDA allows for the Food Service budget to provide for employees to receive a free school lunch meal each day. What a great perk of employment! Per federal regulations, this meal includes whole grains, lean meats/meat alternates, low sodium and reduced fat foods, low-fat dairy products, and fruits and vegetables. These meals also have dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, added sugars and sodium. Isn't it awesome to have a pre-planned, well balanced, nutritional meal available each school day? While growing up and attending public school to working in school districts, I figure I've eaten school lunch for about 40 years of my life. Some of you, I'm sure have done the same, are on track to, or have for an even longer time. I truly appreciate the convenience of these meals and believe they've helped me maintain a healthy diet.

For most of us, we generally strive to balance our nutritional intake with our activity output. Employees working in school kitchens have physically demanding tasks: standing or walking all or most of their day, in addition to bending, reaching, twisting, lifting, etc.. This is tough work and you are stronger because of it! Being active on the job should be seen as a benefit. You're getting a free workout and one in which others would pay for at a fitness center. The consistent fast pace, frequent use of multiple muscle groups, and weight bearing exercises coupled with consuming a healthy meal, that includes an 8 ounce carton of milk, is a great way to keep your body in shape and prevent osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases, and other major medical conditions.

Having a healthy school meal allows us to fuel our bodies for learning, just like for the kids. Those who work in school kitchens have several tasks and responsibilities to keep their mind sharp. Remembering where scoops and spoodles are located and what you went into the freezer to retrieve are good brain exercises. It is mentally challenging (and sometimes exhausting) to operate multiple ovens, navigate computer software programs, analyze trays for offer versus serve compliance, and keep up with policies, procedures, and the plethora of federal, state, and local regulations.

And finally, working with like-minded colleagues and sharing common goals of providing access to and serving nutritious meals to students is good for the soul. Knowing you and your friends are providing nourishment to children and teenagers during their school day brings a sense of meaning and fulfillment to your life. Purposeful work increases our engagement, reduces stress, and provides for overall increased satisfaction. Plus, eating a school lunch shows you care for your own health and well-being. This year's theme for National Nutrition Month is "Food Connects Us". Whether it's

connecting our own body, mind, and soul or connecting with others we care about, the position you hold has an incredible positive impact on students' health, your health, and the health of our entire society. It's a great time to be working in school nutrition!

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