

# School/District-Specific Food Service Background Research Questions

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**Some of these initial intake questions can be found through online research, some of these questions are easier to answer by asking the food service teams at schools.**

## Basics

- Is the district/school contracted with a food service management company (Aramark, Chartwells, Sodexo, etc...)
- If so, what's the contract structure?
  - Does the FSMC build the menu or just source/supply?
  - What's the menuing process with that company?
  - Who makes the decisions?
  - Are there any contractual specifics about the kinds of food they can/can't serve? [example, are they required to purchase exclusively Tyson chicken nuggets, etc...]
- If self-op, do they have a centralized supplier or do they contract with many different suppliers/vendors?
- Who in the district makes food service decisions?
- Do individual schools have any autonomy/flexibility? If so, in what ways?
- When parents/students want to engage with food service team, who is the point of contact? What's the process for them to meet with/communicate with the team?

## Participation

- How many students/what percentage of students participate in meal service?

- Breakfast
  - Lunch
- What percentage of food service is free/reduced?
- Are there meals/items that increase and/or decrease participation numbers?
- Are there any state-wide policies to encourage participation? (universal free meals, etc...)
- Does the school/district have any initiatives to ensure the food service is culturally-relevant? How are those decisions made?
  - Relevancy for student demographics
  - Geographical location
  - Religious accommodations
  - etc...

## Kitchen model & meal service

- Is the school/district heat & serve, brown bag, semi-scratch, scratch, combination of various models?
- Is there a centralized kitchen for the district or does each school prepare their own meals?
- How many stations/lines of food are served?
  - Hot meal/main
  - Deli
  - Pizza station
  - Salad bar
- Do students inform the kitchen of their meal selection prior to meal service?
- How long is meal service?
- What is the food storage capacity of the district/school?

## Staff

- What's the org structure of food service in the district?
- Are there requirements (education, experience, expertise) for any of the nutrition team members?
- Is there any culinary expertise/leadership on the team?
- How many people work in each kitchen?
- What's the process for training staff?
- What are the primary training priorities?
- What are the barriers for training staff on new menu items?
- Is there any concern re: staff shortage?

## Menuing & Recipes

- How far in advance are menus designed?
- How are meals selected?
- How are menus/meals rotated?
- Do you have an RD at each school? At the district level?
- How are meal accommodations planned (allergies, special diets, etc...)
  - Is there a formal process for requesting meal accommodations
  - Are there requirements for meal accommodations (doctor's note, parent's note, etc...)
- How are recipes for meals selected?
- Do you taste-test new recipes or menu items?
- What are the criteria for adding new recipes or menu items?

## Procurement: [some of these questions may be addressed in the basics section]

- What is the procurement process for the district/school?
- How far in advance are orders placed?
- What's the process for changing an order or modifying a purchase?
- What foods are purchased using commodity dollars?
- What's the process for changing/adding a new vendor?
- What supply chain issues are most disruptive to meal service?

## Finances:

- What cost concerns come up most for food service?
- Do you have competitive food service to offset cost of school meals? (a la carte items for purchase, for example)
- Are there menu items you keep on the menu because they're the least expensive?
- Are there menu items you keep on the menu because they're profitable?

## Misc:

- Is there a sustainability and/or wellness policy in place that includes school nutrition? If so, what are the details? If so, how is the school/district already implementing those policies?
- What's the current student demand for new menu items (specifically plant-based)

