

## MINDFUL MUNCHERS

# School Cafeteria Toolkit Volume 3

*Special diets, breakfast programs, and long-term culture change.*

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### About This Toolkit

Volume 3 addresses some of the most complex cafeteria challenges: managing special dietary needs at scale, maximizing breakfast program participation, and building a lasting culture of health in your school's food environment.

### Managing Special Dietary Needs

#### Building an Allergen Management System

Maintain a current list of students with documented food allergies, updated each semester with the school nurse. Train all food service staff on the 8 major allergens: milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans. Use color-coded serving utensils and clear allergen labeling on every menu item. Have a written emergency protocol for allergic reactions.

### Accommodating Religious Dietary Requirements

| Requirement      | Key Considerations                                                                   |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Halal            | No pork or pork byproducts; meat must be halal-certified; avoid alcohol in food prep |
| Kosher           | No mixing of meat and dairy; pork prohibited; requires kosher certification          |
| Hindu vegetarian | No beef; many also avoid all meat. Offer substantial vegetarian protein options.     |

|                     |                                                                                         |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Buddhist vegetarian | Many avoid meat, fish, eggs, and pungent vegetables. Offer diverse plant-based options. |
| Rastafarian (Ital)  | Prefer natural, unprocessed foods; avoid pork and shellfish; some avoid meat entirely   |

## Maximizing School Breakfast Participation:

### Why Students Skip Breakfast

- Not enough time before school
- Stigma in some schools: free breakfast is associated with low income status
- Do not like the options available
- Not hungry first thing in the morning

#### Breakfast After the Bell

Moving breakfast to after the first period dramatically increases participation. Students who are not hungry at 7am are hungry by 8:30am. This model has increased participation by 30 to 90 percent in schools that have implemented it.

#### Grab and Go Breakfast

Pre-packaged breakfast items available at multiple points in the school make breakfast accessible for students with tight schedules.

#### Universal Free Breakfast

Eliminating the stigma of school breakfast by making it free for all students consistently increases participation across all income levels. Advocate for this model with administration.

### Breakfast Menu Improvements

- Offer whole grain options: oatmeal, whole grain toast, whole grain muffins
- Include protein: eggs, yogurt, cheese, peanut butter
- Reduce sugary cereals. Save them for occasional options, not the daily default.

- Always offer fresh or canned fruit
- Make water available alongside milk

## Building Long-Term Culture Change

### Starting with Staff

Culture change starts with adults. Ensure staff have access to healthy, affordable meal options themselves. Brief teachers on cafeteria improvements so they can reinforce messaging in classrooms. Include cafeteria staff in school culture events. They are educators too.

### Embedding Nutrition in School Identity

Name your school's wellness initiative. Include nutrition goals in the annual wellness report. Celebrate Food Day and National Nutrition Month each March. Partner with the student council to make healthy eating a student-led value, not an adult-imposed one.

## Measuring Culture Change Over Time

| What to Measure                     | How to Measure                             |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Meal participation rate             | Monthly participation records              |
| Breakfast participation rate        | Monthly participation records              |
| Plate waste (% discarded)           | Quarterly waste audits                     |
| Student satisfaction scores         | Annual student survey                      |
| Fruit and vegetable selection rates | Tray observations 2x per year              |
| Student knowledge scores            | Annual quiz administered by health teacher |

## Annual Cafeteria Checklist

| Habit | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

|                                            |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Updated allergen management system         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Improved religious dietary options         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Added plant-based protein option           |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Improved breakfast participation strategy  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Surveyed students on breakfast barriers    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Conducted school food culture assessment   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Briefed teachers on cafeteria improvements |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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