

Lessons Learned: Meals and Snacks

Notes from the 2005 Preserving Early Childhood Conference Round Table Session

USDA Food Programs: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides cash reimbursement for snacks and meals served to children in schools and non-school programs. The two programs available are:

- Children enrolled in schools are eligible to participate in USDA and state-funded child nutrition programs offered by schools. Reimbursement is based on the number of meals served to children eligible for free, reduced price and non-needy meals. Programs available to schools include the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Special Milk Program, the After School Snack Program and the Wisconsin School Day Milk Program.
- Children enrolled in qualified outside-of-school-hours care centers such as child care and Head Start are eligible to participate in USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program. The site must be organized for the purpose of providing child care services and is distinct from extracurricular programs organized primarily for scholastic, cultural and athletic purposes. Reimbursement will be based on the percentage of enrolled children in the categories of free, reduced price and non-needy; the number of snacks or meals served; and the prevailing rates of reimbursement.
- Snacks served to children may also be reimbursed at the "free rate" at qualified "At-Risk Snack Sites" participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. "At-Risk Snack Sites" establish eligibility by being located in a school area where 50% or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals or where eligibility is documented using census tract data. For additional information call 608-266-3509.

Implications for Community Approaches: Child care and Head Start programs have requirements related to nutrition and will include the provision of snacks and meals as a component of the program. Schools have no requirement to provide snacks or meals during 4K programs. Public or private nonprofit child care centers, Head Start programs, and some for-profit centers that are licensed or approved to provide child care may serve meals and snacks to infants and children through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). In collaborative programs, agencies may find that having one partner provide the meals and claim the reimbursement is an appropriate approach. Since DPI administers the CACFP and the school food reimbursement programs, DPI staff will assist in determining an appropriate approach to these expenses.

Curriculum Implications and Value:

- Socialization is a critical part of meal time for young children.
- Many concepts can be learned during meal time.
- Meal time is an excellent time to observe fine motor skill development.
- Children should have input into preparing some of their food to develop an understanding of nutrition.
- Meals should be family style if possible.

Challenges Identified by Communities:

- Food allergies, lactose intolerance, peanut allergies.
- Childhood obesity.
- Dealing with situation where child is scheduled for two meals in two different facilities in one day.
- Varying menus to keep interest.
- Keeping mealtime a social learning experience in school buildings where children may need to go through a line and sit at big tables.