

Let's Do Lunch Worksheet

Instructions:

Keep your eyes open when you visit for lunch, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Learn all you can about different areas of the food service program. Keep track of your observations and consider the following aspects as you eat with your child. There are guiding questions for each section, and some can be answered before or after your visit through online research and examining your school's website. Don't feel that you need complete details for each section. This is meant to be a guide to get you thinking about all aspects of school food.

Cafeteria Logistics

Describe what you observe about the cafeteria logistics. Consider the following questions: Are students being served their food or serving themselves? Do kids get to choose what they eat?

Are the lines long, or short & do they move quickly, or slowly? Is there a salad bar? How are menu items arranged on the service line (for example, healthier items placed in front of less healthy items)?

Dining Atmosphere

Describe what you observe about the cafeteria atmosphere. Consider the following questions:

How is the cafeteria designed? How loud is the room? Is it clean and bright? Is it a welcoming or friendly atmosphere? What types of flatware and silverware are in use (disposable, compostable or reusable)? Are all students eating? Are faculty and staff eating in the cafeteria as well? Are kids focused on eating?

The Lunch Period

Describe what you observe about the lunch period itself. Consider the following questions: How much time does your child have to eat? Can you finish your meal during the lunch period? Is lunch before or after recess?

Nutritional Quality of the Food

Describe what you observe about the nutritional quality of the food. Consider the following questions: How much of the food is fresh, and how much is processed? Is the food tasty?

Is the food healthy? Is dessert offered as part of the meal? Review the ingredients and nutritional information (ask a food service staff member for this information if it isn't readily available online). How much sodium, fat, and sugar does the meal contain?

Menus

Describe what you observe about the menus. Consider the following questions: Is there a wide variety of options? Are there vegetarian options? Do the menu items reflect diverse cultures? Do the items reflect your community? Is fresh fruit and/or vegetables offered with every meal?

How often are less healthy options (like french fries and pizza) available? What types of foods are sold? Are entrées sold that can compete with the school food program? After your lunch visit, review the weekly menus.

Staffing

Describe what you observe about the staff. Consider the following questions: Are the food service staff friendly and available for quick questions? Are there lunchroom monitors or volunteers to help out in the dining area? How do they interact with the students? Keep in mind that food service staff may be busy with service, and unavailable for long conversations.

Marketing of Food

Describe what you observe about the marketing of the school's food. Consider the following questions: Where / how is the school meal program marketed to parents and families (i.e. school website, email newsletters, social media, etc.)? Where / how are cafeteria and other foods for sale marketed to students? What information is emphasized? What types of foods are sold? Where /

how are Smart Snacks sold (all foods sold during the school day are required to meet Smart Snacks nutrition criteria)?

Additional Considerations

Here are some additional aspects of school food at your child's school that you may want to learn more about. Consider the following questions, which may be best directed towards a school administrator and/or food service director.

Breakfast Program

- Does your school serve breakfast?
- Is it before the start of the regular school day, or is it "after the bell"?
- Is it served to all children or just to those who qualify for free and reduced-price breakfast?
- Is it served in the cafeteria or in the classroom?
- How much of the food is fresh and how much is processed?
- Is the food tasty?
- Is the food healthy?
- Do kids get to choose what they eat?
- How much time do the kids have to eat? Is it sufficient?

Planning & Procurement

- How are menus developed?
- How are the lunches at our school funded?
- Where / how is the food purchased?
- What's your approach to fresh food and local procurement?
- Is food preparation outsourced?
- What do sales of Smart Snacks fund for your school?