

January • February 2023

SN

SCHOOL NUTRITION

The Official Publication of the School Nutrition Association

You're IMAGINING THINGS

(And That's A Good Thing)

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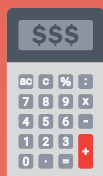


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The Official Publication of the
School Nutrition Association

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Cover: www.gettyimages.com

All photography/illustrations courtesy of
www.gettyimages.com unless otherwise noted.

SCHOOL NUTRITION (ISSN 1075-3885) is published six times a year by the School Nutrition Association (SNA), 2900 S. Quincy St., Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22206. The appearance of editorial matter and advertisements does not imply SNA endorsement of ideas expressed or products offered for sale. Periodicals postage is paid at Arlington, Va., and additional mailing offices. Subscription price: \$100 per year for nonmembers (with addresses in North America) and \$2 per year from qualifying member's dues. All material in this magazine is copyrighted by SNA and may not be reproduced without written permission. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to School Nutrition, SNA Member Services, 2900 S. Quincy St., Suite 700, Arlington, VA 22206.



First Word

Patricia Montague, FASAE, CAE | SNA Chief Executive Officer



Just Imagine the Innovations That Lie Ahead

CONTINUAL INNOVATION IS A "MUST" ELEMENT FOR AN ORGANIZATION'S SUCCESS—AND SURVIVAL—IN TODAY'S FAST-PACED, TECHNOLOGICALLY CHARGED WORLD. So, I'm excited that we are kicking off the new year by devoting an issue of SN to the subject of imagination, which is essential to innovation. Businesses, including school nutrition programs and professional associations, cannot afford to stand still and keep doing the same thing year after year and expect to remain vibrant and relevant. Not only do customers and employees demand changes that keep up with the times, but innovation is also critical to enhancing operational efficiencies in the face of doing more with fewer resources.

Indeed, this last point is itself a common obstacle to innovation, especially as we struggle with staff vacancies, rising costs and supply chain disruptions. But this is exactly when imaginative problem-solvers step up! One of the greatest leaders of the 20th century, Sir Winston Churchill, is credited with advising, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." When the pandemic hit in March 2020 and school nutrition programs had only a day or two to imagine new processes for getting meals to the most vulnerable children in the community, you had no choice but to innovate. And as schools remained closed, eventually transitioning to a hybrid learning model before fully reopening, you kept innovating, even when pandemic ripple effects kept bringing new challenges to address.

SNA also had to pivot quickly when the pandemic took hold, and staff and leaders applied their imaginations to develop innovative new ways to provide member support. *SN Plus*, our supplemental series of digital articles (originally about pandemic solutions but since expanded), was one of several steps leading us to today's digital transformation projects. Virtual meetings and events were other early innovations that carry on in various forms today, such as our Supply Chain listening sessions.

The pandemic was an extraordinary period, but our collective response to it affirmed that we are capable of ongoing innovation, and it is something that shouldn't be reserved only for a periodic strategic planning session or staff retreat. It is a continual process that should involve your entire team. Supply and staffing challenges are likely to be with us for a while—and new problems (and opportunities!) are always on the horizon. You all have bright, creative and technologically savvy staff who should be encouraged to imagine solutions and devise new initiatives.

And when they do? Please tell us about these innovations, so SNA can share them with your peers through a magazine article, social media post, webinar session or conference presentation. Innovation can be wonderfully contagious! **SN**



Our collective response to the pandemic affirmed that we are capable of ongoing innovation.





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President's Perspective

Lori Adkins, MS, CHE, SNS | SNA President



Imagine a Year of Playing with Possibilities!

JANUARY IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE MONTHS BECAUSE IT KICKS OFF A FRESH NEW YEAR—ONE THAT'S FULL OF POSSIBILITY, WHICH I FIND REALLY EXCITING! Whether you call them “resolutions” or “intentions” or “goals,” many of us begin January by identifying priorities and plans for the months ahead. These might be as simple as making an effort to be more patient or kind. They might be perennial, like pledging to get more regular exercise. They might be audacious, both personal (learning a new language in anticipation of a bucket list vacation) and professional (launching a catering program, inspired by the content in *SN*'s November/December issue).

I want to encourage you to really embrace the imagination theme of this edition of the magazine. You can apply imagination in dreaming up your 2023 goals *and* in developing the steps you will take to make them a reality, despite the challenges of following through.

Tapping your imagination is as simple as thinking like a child—not being childish, but being *child-like*, starting with a belief that anything is possible. It is about being curious and wondering. It's about the power of “what if?” What if I did this or tried that? Curiosity drives imagination, and together they drive problem-solving. So, in 2023, whether you're looking to come up with fresh solutions to longstanding problems or want to get excited about something brand-new to you, begin the year with imagination!

Where do you get *your* best ideas? In the shower? Driving to work? Maybe it's when you're on the verge of falling asleep or when you first wake. This is because experts believe our creative minds work best when the brain isn't crowded with active thoughts. I keep a pen and notebook on my nightstand to capture those fleeting thoughts when they come.

Another key to imaginative thinking is to indulge in a bit of play. At SNA's 2022 Annual National Conference, Keynote Speaker Duncan Wardle captivated the audience with playful exercises designed to bring imaginative solutions to the surface. I urge you to check out his inspiring YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/c/duncanjwardle.

During the pandemic, you put your imagination to work every day, devising creative solutions to unprecedented challenges that no one had... well, *imagined*! The results were incredible, and we should all try to recapture that way of thinking even as things are now a bit more “normal.” Consider scheduling periodic brainstorming activities with your team, tapping your collective brain power! Also, develop a process that invites everyone to submit creative suggestions and ideas whenever they come to mind. Get ready to explore all the wonderful “what ifs” that are in store for 2023! **SN**



“Tapping your imagination is as simple as thinking like a child.”



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The Time Is Right to Digitize Your Cafeterias

HOW TO EVALUATE NEW SOFTWARE

Digital transformation, and being asked to adapt to new processes, can be intimidating for many people. When reviewing the various features of technology solutions, consider asking the following questions.

1. What is the company's product focus? Choose a company solely focused on K-12 nutrition. They will continue providing enhancements and features that school nutrition professionals need because that's the only audience they cater to. This ensures they understand your industry, the mission and the devotion behind it.

2. What is their customer service like? You should experience a seamless transition and receive training and service long after implementation. Does the vendor make proactive check-ins? Ensure support is available via phone, email and chat for your team and for families. Ask if they offer extended support during back-to-school season or for state reviews.

3. How good are their references? Look for references that match the size and scope of your organization's needs to discover if the software provider is reliable and has sufficient experience. Feel free to ask the company for references or ask school nutrition colleagues working in other districts to share experiences, recommendations and advice.

Consider digitizing your cafeteria with integrated solutions like SchoolCafé and PrimeroEdge, brought to you by Cybersoft Technologies, a leading provider of innovative software solutions that assist state agencies and school districts. These platforms are intuitive, cloud-based, secure, and accessible on any device and through any browser. Best of all, they are produced by passionate people, many of whom come from the school nutrition industry and share in your mission! Visit www.cybersoft.net to learn more.

DIGITAL PROCESSES ARE THE NEW NORM. From healthcare to education to manufacturing to retail, just about every area of society is technology-bound. The K-12 foodservice segment is no different. In increasing numbers, school districts are digitizing cafeteria operations, capturing new efficiencies and exceeding customer expectations.

Let's paint a picture of what this looks like. Imagine using technology that allows you to manage aspects of your operation from *anywhere*—accessing the real-time insights needed to make quick, effective decisions. Imagine having easy access to an all-in-one, fully integrated solution that addresses almost every area of your program, such as menu planning, inventory, financials, POS, eligibility and more. Imagine a single, user-friendly experience that serves everyone from administrators to nutrition professionals to students and their families. Choosing to digitize your cafeteria will bring these imaginings to life. Let's look deeper at four key advantages:

Efficient Operations. Information is streamlined when everything is managed within one platform. When modules communicate with each other, you can avoid errors and redundancy and gain end-to-end visibility. Best of all, you can forget manual paperwork and spend time pursuing innovation!

Boosted Participation. To serve more students more effectively, you must understand and respond to their wants and needs. Artificial intelligence and other technologies that monitor, automate and continuously improve operations also identify trends and patterns, and then generate helpful analytics. Students and families can interact with the cafeteria via apps, making it significantly easier for school districts to collect feedback, measure menu item popularity, implement online meal ordering and spark engagement.

Time Savings. When recurring tasks are made simpler, quicker or even automated, it frees up time, energy and mental space. Extra time allows teams to be more flexible, creative and proactive.

Increased Revenue. Technology can facilitate increased revenue via expanded a la carte sales, catering program enhancements or new points of sale, such as through vending machines and kiosks located around campus. Similarly, you can stay in the black by leveraging software solutions that feature revenue and expense analysis, accountability measures and on-demand data that give you tools to reduce food waste and increase participation.

Digitizing your cafeteria doesn't have to be an overwhelming technological leap. Seek solutions that meet your top priorities, whether that's a central office solution to manage meal applications better or a program to improve engagement with customers at the school level. Identify your key goals and select a platform that will give you the flexibility to stay focused on your unique needs. Cybersoft Technologies is committed to helping your team simplify operations and enhance the cafeteria experience. **SN**

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What's Cooking



Restaurant Industry Makes 2023 Predictions



The National Restaurant Association (NRA) has released its annual “What’s Hot Culinary Forecast,” revealing top menu trends expected for the year ahead. Remember that many of your students and their families are restaurant customers, so these trends reflect their needs and wants. Consider how your school meals program might adopt or translate some of these trends in the cafeteria:

- ▶ Experiences that reflect local culture and community
- ▶ Fried chicken and “Chicken 3.0” sandwiches (i.e., spicy and sweet-heat fusions)
- ▶ Charcuterie
- ▶ Comfort fare

- ▶ Flatbread sandwiches and “healthier” wraps
- ▶ Sriracha variations
- ▶ Globally inspired salads
- ▶ Zero waste/upcycled foods/sustainability
- ▶ Southeast Asian cuisines (Vietnamese, Philippine, Singaporean)

Eager to return to restaurant dining and reclaim a sense of community, guests are craving connection, value and convenience, says NRA. Seventy percent of respondents indicated a desire to socialize, celebrate and enjoy culinary explorations onsite. That said, inflation is shifting consumer spending habits, observes Hudson Riehle, NRA

Senior Vice President of Research. “While there is a heightened appetite for restaurant experiences and connection, diners are laser-focused on finding value.” NRA expects “value meals,” especially at breakfast, to be a draw for customers.

The “What’s Hot” report was produced through a partnership among NRA, the American Culinary Federation and Technomic. Download a copy at www.tinyurl.com/NRATrends-SNmag.



Delivery Surprises

The 2022 *Uber Eats Craving Report*, from the restaurant and grocery delivery giant, reveals some interesting insights into the food habits of Americans who increasingly turn to the convenience of app services for to-go meals and groceries, too. The most popular delivery combos certainly seem on par with expectations (burrito + cheese, French fries + salt, soup + bread, pancakes + sausage, quesadilla + sour cream, salad + balsamic vinaigrette). But the fourth annual snapshot also details some decidedly unconventional pairing requests, including:

- ◆ Ham + Cream Cheese
- ◆ Fruit Roll Up + Hot Cheetos
- ◆ Popcorn + Pickle Juice
- ◆ Pizza + Applesauce
- ◆ Sushi + Ranch
- ◆ Watermelon + Mustard

Uber also saw surprising trends that corresponded with particular days of the week. For example, on Mondays, the company sees a “spike in people holding back on the most foods; they’re saying no to onions, tomatoes and more.” In contrast, Tuesdays are “the most extra day of the week; it’s all



about the extra sauce and spice.” Wednesdays, customers prefer dishes without cheese and Thursdays, they want to hold the pickles. Fridays, people are all about the spice, says Uber. Saturday’s customers ask to hold the sour cream, and on Sunday, customers want their sauce on the side. What kind of customer surprises might *you* discover if you dig into your point-of-sale metrics?

Tomorrow's Black History Starts Today

To connect the cafeteria to educational activities in observance of Black History Month, observed every February, you might create a display of famous figures involved in America's agriculture and culinary history, such as agricultural scientist George Washington Carver, Chef James Hemings, who traveled to Paris with Thomas Jefferson, or Abby Fisher, one of the first black cookbook authors. But this month also provides a great opportunity to seek out the Black farmers, ranchers, butchers, grocery owners and restaurateurs/chefs who live and work in your community. Shine the spotlight on how these individuals are contributing to local food culture.

You can promote them through bulletin board displays, short newsletter articles or social media posts. Invite them to come dine with your students and offer the opportunity for them to give a short presentation about their professional journey, act as a guest server or both. Be sure to promote any current partnerships that exist between them and your foodservice operation, and take this



opportunity to explore future possibilities. For example, do you procure any ingredients from one of these growers or processors? Would a chef be willing to come conduct a training with your staff

or a demonstration for kids? How about conducting "field" trips and supermarket tours? Make this month your chance to honor individuals who are "making history" in agriculture and foodservice today.

The Heart of the Matter

February is American Heart Month, so it's the perfect time to make sure you know the facts about keeping your heart healthy. Heart disease is the No. 1 cause of death for both men and women in the U.S., yet the idea that it's a men's health issue persists as a prevalent—and dangerous—myth. Heart disease actually kills more women than men each year! Know (and share) the facts when it comes to protecting heart health for yourself and others in your life. Start by busting a few common myths:

- 1. Young people don't need to worry about heart disease.** Heart disease can affect someone at any age, and not just those with an underlying heart condition. Recent research finds an uptick in heart attacks suffered by people under age 40. According to *GoRed ForWomen.org*, from the American Heart Association, the combination of smoking and birth control pills can increase your risk by 20%. Various diet choices and a sedentary lifestyle also can make it more likely that you will experience problems down the line.
- 2. Heart disease won't affect me if I'm fit.** Regular exercise has been proven to help lower your risk of heart disease, but don't make the mistake of assuming you're immune. High cholesterol, poor eating habits and



smoking all increase the chances of developing heart disease—and being fit and/or at a healthy weight won't completely counteract those factors.

- 3. No symptoms = no urgency.** Movies and TV have convinced us that heart attacks always come with extreme, sudden chest pain, but that's often not the case—especially for women. Everyone should look out for sudden shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting, dizziness, lightheadedness, extreme fatigue and pain in other areas of the body like the back, jaw, lower chest or upper abdomen. **Read More:** "Debunking Myths About Heart Disease," *Harvard Health Letter*, www.tinyurl.com/HeartMyths-SNmag.

Study Examines School Meal Operations

USDA has published its *Child Nutrition Program Operations Study* (CN-OPS-II) a multi-year research project that provides the agency with important data from state agencies and school food authorities (SFAs) regarding policies, practices and needs related to operation of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

Although the study covers data collected in SY2017-18, the findings can be viewed from a lens of the increased burdens that school nutrition operations have faced since March 2020. Some of the top findings follow:

- ▶ While labor and food costs accounted for 80% of expenditures, USDA meal reimbursements accounted for just under two-thirds of SFAs' annual revenues.
- ▶ A little more than one-quarter of SFAs (28%) requested an exemption from the whole grain-rich requirement. A similar percentage (26%) used an exception to the Buy American provision.
- ▶ The percentage of SFAs that incurred unpaid meal charges—after recovery attempts had been made—decreased since SY2010-11. The median amount owed in SY2016-17 was approximately \$1,500.



Broward County (Fla.) Public Schools

- ▶ More than half of SFAs purchased foods from local sources in SY2017-18.

To read the complete report, visit www.tinyurl.com/CH-OPsRpt-SNmag.

Embracing Neurodiversity

CHANCES are, you know someone who is neurodivergent—some 30% of today's population is estimated to fall into this behavioral category—but do you know what the word means? Neurodiversity refers to the idea that there are a multitude of different ways in which people think, learn, behave and interact with others, beyond a singular definition of "normal." The neurodiversity movement advocates for inclusion and equity for people whose thought and behavior patterns fall outside of what conventional thinking deems "normal."

Neurodiversity is not a medical diagnosis but an umbrella term that describes people living with a variety of mental health disorders such as autism, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome and learning disabilities like dyslexia. Neurodivergent people do not need to be "cured." Nor should they be coaxed or forced to "act normally." In fact, that line of thinking demonstrates a profound disrespect of neurodivergent people.

Living in a world that favors neurotypicals—the term for those whose behaviors conform to societal definitions of "normal"—can be quite the challenge when your brain works differently. Difficulties may arise with certain communications styles, various methods of learning, overstimulation, organization or adaptability. On the flip side, being neurodivergent can come with certain *strengths*, including creative thinking, observational skills and staying focused for long periods of time.

So, if all neurodivergent people are different, how can you support, respect and embrace the neurodivergent people in your life? To start:

Be open to different methods of communication.

Neurodivergent people might struggle with certain methods of interaction, so be open to written vs. verbal communication, and be non-judgmental about behaviors like eye contact, speaking too loudly or quickly and misinterpretations in conversation.

Avoid labels like "high-functioning" and "low-functioning." You've probably heard these terms applied to people on the autism spectrum, but they are outdated and incorrectly assume or imply someone's level of functioning is based on how "normal" they seem.

Don't assume that neurodivergent people are unintelligent or incapable of living successful, fulfilling lives. Neurodivergent people may need certain accommodations to thrive, but that doesn't mean they're any less valuable or capable than neurotypicals.

Listen to them. Remember that neurodiversity encompasses a variety of disorders and disabilities, so one of the best ways to respect and embrace neurodivergent people is by including them in conversations and listening to what they need.

Read More: "The Neurodivergent Brain: Everything You Need to Know," *Verywell Health*, www.tinyurl.com/NeurodivergentBrain-SNmag.



"TUESDAY" TIDBITS



SNA Makes Requests for FY2023 Appropriations

SNA has cosigned a letter to Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow and Ranking Member John Boozman, urging them to **include critical child nutrition provisions in FY2023 appropriations legislation**. These provisions include streamlining meal pattern requirements across all school-based child nutrition programs; returning to a five-year Administrative Review cycle; maintaining the Keep Kids Fed Act federal reimbursement rates and more. Read the full text of the letter at www.tinyurl.com/FY23AppropsLtr-SNmag.

More Seafood Coming to School Lunches?

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has published a report recommending that **USDA establish a plan to purchase more seafood** for use in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). GAO was asked by three senators to review USDA's purchases of seafood, the factors that affect state and school district efforts to provide seafood to students (using a sample of 10 coastal states) and USDA efforts to address these factors. The report concluded that USDA lacks a plan to address barriers, such as parents' concerns about seafood safety, nor has it fully leveraged its relationship with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration about seafood vendors. The full report can be found at www.tinyurl.com/SeafoodRpt-SNmag.

USDA Looks Hard at Added Sugars

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has published **Added Sugars in School Meals and Competitive Foods**, a report that reviews foods served in school cafeterias that exceed an added sugars standard of less than 10%, which is consistent with the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The report found that 92% of schools prepared breakfast with 10% or more of calories from added sugars and 69% of schools prepared lunches with 10% or more of calories from added sugars. The main food source with added sugars in both meals was flavored fat-free milk. Access the full report at www.tinyurl.com/AddedSugars-SNmag.

Public Support for Free School Meals

Research conducted by Impact Social in collaboration with Food Fix indicates **public support for healthy school meals for all**. The analysis used a sample of more than 2,000 public social media posts in Colorado and nearly 200,000 posts nationally since January 1, 2022. The data revealed 43% support free school meals for all students, 3% oppose this policy and 54% were neutral. Read the report at www.tinyurl.com/FreeMealsSupport-SNmag.

Tuesday Morning is SNA's free weekly policy e-newsletter.
Subscribe at www.schoolnutrition.org/Newsletters/TuesdayMorning.



INGREDIENTS FOR HEALTH: TURKEY SAUSAGE



Sausage is arguably one of the oldest types of "processed food." Nearly every culture around the world boasts some type of signature seasoned ground meat sausage, usually packed into a thin, often

natural and edible, casing. Pork and beef sausages might be the most common varieties you buy at retail or order at a restaurant, but don't overlook the healthier (and just as delicious) alternative: turkey sausage!

NUTRITION. Besides being tasty, turkey sausage really shines nutritionally when it's compared to higher-fat varieties. Depending on how it's prepared, 100 grams of turkey sausage contains almost 24 grams of protein with only 10.4 grams of fat. The same amount of pork sausage has only 13.5 grams of protein and more than 37 grams of fat!

HOW TO EAT. Turkey sausage is available in various forms (links and patties) and flavors (smoked and seasoned)—or you can try making your own! To make homemade turkey breakfast sausage, combine 2 lbs. of ground turkey with 1 ½ tsps. ground black pepper, 1 ½ tsps. salt, 1 tsp. dried sage, ¾ tsp. ground ginger and ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper.

TRY THIS. Looking for a new, healthy breakfast recipe? Try this turkey sausage personal breakfast pizza! Preheat your oven to 375°F. Use an 8-oz. canister of reduced-fat crescent roll dough and shape it into a round crust and set aside. Crumble 12 oz. of turkey breakfast sausage (consider using the above homemade sausage recipe!) into a skillet and cook over medium heat until browned. Top the pizza "crust" with the sausage crumbles, 1 cup shredded potatoes and 1 cup shredded, fat-free cheddar cheese. In a bowl, combine ¼ cup fat-free milk, ½ tsp. salt, ⅛ tsp. black pepper, 8 oz. of liquid eggs and then pour the mixture over the pizza. Finally, sprinkle with grated Parmesan, bake for 25 minutes and enjoy!

FACT. The British nickname for sausage is "bangers." The term is said to have originated during World War I, when meat shortages meant a greater use of fillers and a higher water content that would cause the sausage to "explode" in the pan as it cooked.

Read More: For more turkey sausage recipes, visit www.tasteofhome.com/collection/turkey-sausage-recipes.

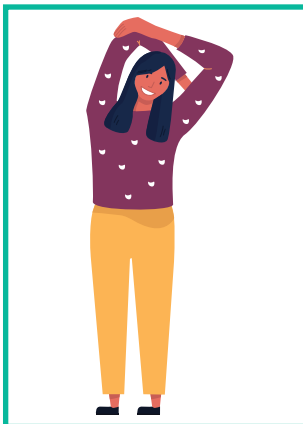
INVENTIVE EXERCISE

Simple Stretches to Help Prevent Injury at Work

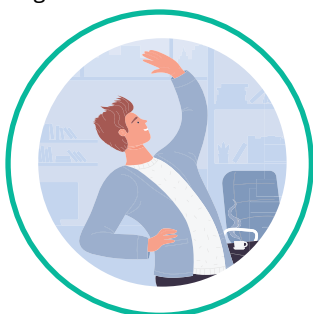
If you have ever tried physical therapy to recover from an injury such as a sprained ankle, twisted knee or pulled shoulder, then you know that the prescribed stretches and holds can work wonders. But did you know that many of these can also be used to help *prevent* injury from occurring in the first place?

School nutrition professionals spend a lot of time standing on their feet and performing repetitive motions when it comes to prepping and serving food. According to Dr. Malik Parker, PT, DPT, a physical therapist in College Park, Md., being in any one position for too long can cause problems. For example, if you spend much of your time standing over a table or counter looking down as you prepare food, you might be risking injury to your neck, back, knees, lower legs and ankles.

Parker's advice is to intentionally take a break every few hours to stretch and hold your body in the *opposite* of whatever positions dominate your time. This helps to reduce stress and strain. Just remember to keep your stretching maneuvers simple and go slow. If you have any pain, it's a good idea to review the following suggestions with your own health professional before continuing with your home/work regimen.



Neck: Retract and/or extend your neck repeatedly during work breaks. Shrug your shoulders, pressing them up near your ears and then pulling them down, holding for a few seconds in each position. Tilt your neck, ear toward the shoulder, slowly, first the left and then the right.



Back: This one can be tricky, depending on if you are leaning forward over a table or standing fully erect. The natural curve of your spine is another factor. Try slow, gentle stretches, such as leaning forward, trying to reach toward your toes or leaning backward in the opposite curve. See which stretch feels better—or keep doing both to build strength and flexibility.



Knees: Stretching your quadriceps (the muscles in front of your thighs) is generally considered best for strengthening knees. Bend your knee and see if you can grab your heel behind you. If you can't reach or don't have balance, that's okay. You can just hold it in that flexed position for a few seconds or use a wall or the edge of a table for stability. The point is that this flexing motion is the opposite of the fully extended knee that occurs when standing.

Ankles/Feet/Lower Legs: Since your leg muscle groups are constantly contracting to keep you balanced during standing, try doing calf stretches while standing, and when sitting down, pulling your foot and pointing your toes down to stretch the front of the leg.



For best results in avoiding injury, you should be stretching and strengthening at home on a regular basis. The ChoosePT.com website from the American Physical Therapy Association features three (easy, moderate, advanced) at-home programs to try for yourself (www.tinyurl.com/StretchatHome-SNmag). If you're watching your budget, there are many stretches and strength-builders that you can do at home using everyday items instead of buying special equipment and accessories. For example, you can swap water bottles for weights and bungee cords for resistance bands.

Just remember to warm up your body before starting *any level* of strength, stretching or resistance exercises. Walk briskly for a few minutes or march in place. ChoosePT also says to be mindful of keeping good form and posture through your routine. If you can't maintain that, reduce the weights you're lifting or don't move as fast or as far. Finally, keep breathing through each exercise. Avoid any temptation to hold your breath.

Check out the following 5-minute video from Society Insurance for demonstrations of exercises to prevent workplace injury: www.tinyurl.com/StretchingVideo-SNmag. Share with your team and practice together!

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What's Cooking@SNA



Cast Your Vote for SNA Leadership

Fifteen SNA members are candidates for election to SNA's Board of Directors, Industry Advisory Council and Leadership Development Committee—and now it's *your* turn to step up and cast your vote to select the leaders who will help guide the organization through the coming years. Get to know the candidates and make plans to vote in the SNA Election, **February 15-28, 2023**.

Details about voting eligibility and the process, as well as candidate biographies, are expected to be available in early January at www.schoolnutrition.org/election. For the position of Vice President, which begins the three-year leadership track to SNA President, interviews with candidates Paula De Lucca, MS, SNS, and Stephanie Dillard, MS, SNS, can be found beginning on page 18; watch for videos from all candidates to be posted on social media in early February.

SNA BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES

VICE PRESIDENT

- ✦ **Paula De Lucca, MS, SNS**, Wake County Public School System, North Carolina
- ✦ **Stephanie Dillard, MS, SNS**, Enterprise City Schools, Alabama

DIRECTOR

- ✦ **Daniel Ellnor, SNS**, Jefferson County Public Schools, Kentucky
- ✦ **Jessica Gould, SNS**, Littleton School District 6, Colorado
- ✦ **Keba Laird, MBA, RDN, SNS**, Clinton Public School District, Mississippi

- ✦ **Susan Maffe, MS, RD, SNS**, Meriden Public Schools, Connecticut

- ✦ **Mark Oswalt, MS, RDN**, Mead School District, Washington

- ✦ **Jessica Peña**, Red Wing Public Schools, Minnesota

- ✦ **E. Nichole Taylor**, Chichester School District, Pennsylvania

- ✦ **Aaron Wylie**, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District, Texas

INDUSTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL CHAIR

- ✦ **Jack Crawford**, Gold Greek Foods
- ✦ **Wanda McDowell**, Super Bakery, Inc.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE CANDIDATES*

MOUNTAIN PLAINS REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

- ✦ **Monica Deines-Henderson, MBA, SNS**, El Paso County School District 49, Colorado

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

- ✦ **Sharon Glosson, MS, RDN, LD, SNS**, North East Independent School District, Texas
- ✦ **Krista Hamilton-Neal, MS, RD, LD, SNS**, Stillwater Public Schools, Oklahoma

**There were no candidates for the Northeast Regional Representative position on the Leadership Development Committee. If there is no eligible candidate for a regional position on the Committee, the position shall be converted to an at-large position that will be appointed by the President-elect with approval by the Board.*

#LAC23: THE TIME IS RIGHT

"Right Time. Right Now." The advocacy imperative could not be made more clear than the theme of SNA's 51st Legislative Action Conference (LAC). Raise your voice and share your stories in the nation's capital, gathering with hundreds of other school nutrition advocates **March 5-7, 2023**.

There are many compelling reasons to make #LAC23 a conference priority. A recent report analyzing social media posts reveals that public sentiment favors healthy school meals for all (*page 13*), the Biden-Harris Administration pledged to expand access to free meals at September's White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, and more than 16,000 people have signed SNA's Change.org petition (www.tinyurl.com/SNAPetition-SNmag) asking lawmakers to make it a reality. As the Republicans take control in the House of Representatives, SNA leaders know that a renewed grassroots

campaign emphasizing real stories from real districts is critical for gaining bipartisan support in a divided Congress. In addition, USDA is expected to release updated nutrition standards this winter and the development of the next edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* is underway. Washington lawmakers need to hear from you!

The #LAC23 agenda is packed with opportunities to learn and connect, as well. Washington insider Charlie Cook will preview the political and legislative landscape in his keynote address. Representatives from USDA will provide updates about different initiatives and programs, as well as regulatory action. SNA's annual *Position Paper* will be presented, outlining the advocacy priorities for the year ahead. An SNF Dance Party will be a great opportunity to raise spirits while raising funds for SNA's sister organization.

Check out all the program details and register now! Visit www.schoolnutrition.org/lac.



2023
**LEGISLATIVE
ACTION
CONFERENCE**
— RIGHT TIME. RIGHT NOW. —



What's the best "building" block for daily success? Starting the morning with a healthy school breakfast, of course! The 2023 National School Breakfast Week (NSBW) campaign theme, "Dig In to School Breakfast," celebrates the many ways that your student customers can "construct" a healthy meal that will serve as a solid "foundation" for "towering" achievements!

The theme leverages the fascination

Join the Breakfast Builders for National School Breakfast Week

with building structures that many kids develop at an early age. With little ones captivated by giant construction equipment and teens hooked on TV home improvement shows, this theme is sure to resonate with your audience. NSBW 2023, **March 6-10**, is coming up fast; it's time to put on your hard hat thinking cap, assemble your tools and pour the foundation of your celebration.

Start by visiting www.schoolnutrition.org/nsbw to take advantage of the many marketing resources that SNA has developed with support from official campaign sponsor Kellogg's. You'll discover downloadable artwork, social media shareables and a Toolkit packed with ideas and advice. Plan to print and distribute fun coloring and activity sheets to engage students. Visit the SNA Shop (www.schoolnutrition.org/snashop) to place orders for themed products to set the scene (balloons, T-shirts, aprons, buttons, vinyl banners) and to give away to help

kids remember your event (plastic construction hats, key chains, bookmarks, pencils).

You and your team can use the whimsical images developed for this campaign as inspiration for your event. Hard hats, tool belts and road signs like "Breakfast Crew at Work" are just the tip of the safety cone when it comes to the creative approaches you can take to transform your cafeteria, inspire costumes and develop engagement activities. For example, invite builders, architects, inspectors and others in the construction industry to act as guest servers or make brief presentations. Research "did you know" building-related trivia and factoids for guessing games and signage. Challenge kids or classrooms (or your own cafeteria teams) to craft construction vehicles like dump trucks and bulldozers from milk cartons or larger boxes used to ship cafeteria products and supplies. What kind of enthusiasm can you "build" for #NSBW23? Get started today!

NEW MAGAZINE SCHEDULE FOR 2023

School Nutrition is now published every other month on the following schedule: January/February, March/April, May/June (featuring the Annual National Conference preview), July/August, September/October and November/December. These six

issues will be printed and mailed and will be available in multiple digital formats on SchoolNutrition.org. Note that SNA no longer sends the magazine to members in its Employee section. Managers and directors are encouraged to share copies and/or

PDFs with their team members. Contact the SNA Service Center, servicecenter@schoolnutrition.org, with any questions.

Awards Season Is Underway



Nominations are open for SNA's 2023 Awards, recognizing outstanding directors, managers and employees at the state, regional and national levels. The process is simple: Visit www.schoolnutrition.org/awards and click on each specific award category to review eligibility criteria, details about

judging and a link to the online nomination form. The submission deadline is **March 1, 2023**.

SNA Awards recognize achievements in school foodservice leadership, membership recruitment and professional development. Having an award winner on your team can raise overall morale and put your program in a welcome and much-deserved community spotlight. Nominate a staffer, a colleague or yourself today!

SNA PLANNER	
JAN 15-17, 2023	School Nutrition Industry Conference San Diego, Calif.
MAR 5-7, 2023	Legislative Action Conference Washington, D.C.
MAR 6-10, 2023	National School Breakfast Week
APRIL 27-29, 2023	National Leadership Conference Louisville, Ky.
MAY 5, 2023	School Lunch Hero Day
JULY 9-11, 2023	Annual National Conference Denver, Colo.
OCT 9-13, 2023	National School Lunch Week



Meet the Candidates for **SNA Vice President**

Q: What do you love most about working in school nutrition?

A: School nutrition is a noble profession that allows me to make contributions that positively impact students and their families. I enjoy working with others who share a common goal of doing their best to make each day great for the students and everyone else they serve. From a day-to-day perspective, I love the unique challenges and task variety. As a leader, it is especially rewarding to be able to help facilitate the development of others and create opportunities that bring them added joy.

I thrive on cultivating change that positively impacts people and processes for the good of all.

Q: If elected, what will you focus on during your eventual term as SNA President?

A: I believe we can enhance the membership experience by expanding opportunities for participation, sharing and growth. Lifetime friendships, rewarding experiences, career opportunities, improved programming for students and operators and Association health comes from the vitality of a strong membership that feels connected. We also have an amazing opportunity to further enrich the overall academic experience of children across the country by continuing our advocacy efforts.

» Paula De Lucca, SNS



SNA Member Since: 1997

School District: Wake County Public School System, North Carolina

Education: Master of Science, Management & Organization Behavior

Family: Husband Geoffrey, Son Nicholas (married to Caitlyn), Grandchild Leona; Dachshunds Tootsie and Wilson

Motto: Interwoven from Wayne Gretzky (we're a hockey family) and Vince Lombardi: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take, so try to make a difference knowing that while perfection may not be attainable, if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence."



Q: Why are you running to lead the organization?

A: My involvement in SNA—first with my state association and then as SNA Midwest Regional Director—provided exceptionally rewarding experiences that came from working alongside and getting to know so many members. SNA contributed substantially to my development as a leader, and through SNA, I have deepened my expertise in both operating school nutrition programs and advocating for program changes on behalf of students and their families. I would love to carry this forward, pass on the lessons I have learned and inspire the next generation of leaders.

Q: How would you describe your leadership style?

A: I thrive on cultivating change that positively impacts people and processes for the good of all, so I listen for the less obvious and try to tease out the small things from others that can have an important bearing on big decisions. I believe it is important to maintain an optimistic outlook, but keep a balanced view so potential constraints that challenge progress are recognized and managed effectively. "Work joy" is a top priority, so I encourage others to have fun, give grace when needed and sustain a collaborative and collegial work atmosphere.

Q: What's one career achievement that fills you with pride?

A: After an extensive career in school nutrition in the Midwest, where I lived my entire life, I decided to break from my comfort zone to pursue a new challenge in the Southeast. In addition to geographic and cultural shifts, I adapted to a significant change in operational oversight by transitioning from a fairly autonomous private system to a heavily involved public school system. It has been rewarding to apply past experiences and lessons learned to improve organization effectiveness in my current role. Making all these transitions concurrently was a tremendous undertaking that I am proud to have accomplished, but it was only possible through the development of a fabulous team that I am grateful for each day.

Q: Describe how being an SNA member has made a real difference in your life.

A: I feel part of something far bigger that supports me in my endeavors to provide the best possible service to our students. Membership also has enriched my life with cherished experiences and relationships. SNA also has provided exemplary learning opportunities that helped me develop program expertise and provided pathways to hone my leadership and relational skills.

Before you vote in February, get to know SNA's candidates for Vice President from their unique points of view.

Q: How did you find your way to school nutrition?

A: I originally wanted to become a nurse, until I realized I couldn't handle the sight of blood and changed my major to nutrition. I graduated with a degree in Nutrition Food Science and then volunteered for a child nutrition director as a way to learn the program. One day when I was volunteering, I learned a neighboring district had an opening for a director position. Twenty-six years and three wonderful school districts later, I'm still loving every minute of being a school nutrition director.

Q: Why are you running to lead the organization?

A: I love giving back to SNA, as it's given so much to me throughout my career. When I see our members achieve their own personal and professional goals, it brings a smile to my face. I'd love to lead SNA because its mission is to support professional growth—and I want to continue to be a part of helping our members succeed.

Q: If elected, what will you focus on during your eventual term as SNA President?

A: Advocacy. It's one of the most important things we do as members. Each SNA member should feel comfortable and knowledgeable about being an advocate for our programs! We must tell our stories loud and clear so Congress will understand why we need universal meals! I'd also like to make college students who are majoring in nutrition, culinary arts or family consumer science more aware of school nutrition as a profession, so it's no longer a "hidden secret." We need to educate others about the amazing work that takes place in our programs and encourage them to consider school nutrition as a career.

Q: How would you describe your leadership style?

A: I am a servant leader. I love helping others fulfill their goals and dreams. Over my career, I've worked with many individuals who have developed into leaders in our profession. Determination, discipline and dependability are qualities I value in good leaders, and I consider myself a very driven person. Once a goal has been set, I'm determined to make sure it's met. School nutrition directors face many challenges on a daily basis, so discipline and focus is essential to achieving goals.

Q: What are some career achievements that fill you with pride?

A: Serving as President of the Alabama SNA was an experience I'll always cherish and never forget. I was able

» Stephanie Dillard, SNS



SNA Member Since: 2006

School District: Enterprise City Schools, Alabama

Education: Master of Science in Business Administration

Family: Husband Perry, Daughters Elizabeth and Ellie

Motto: "Turning dreams into goals, turning dreams into actions, nutrition educators make a difference."



I love giving back to SNA, as it's given so much to me throughout my career.

to travel throughout the state, meet our members and share the good work of our state and national associations.

That year, Alabama SNA also had the highest increase in membership in our category. But perhaps my favorite achievement was as President-Elect, when I organized a partnership with the Montgomery Marathon to boost participation in our annual conference wellness activity. Most years, only a couple dozen would participate. But we had more than 200 members take part in a 5K road race, many for the very first time. I will never forget the stories I heard—and the smiles on everyone's faces!

Q: Describe how being an SNA member has made a real difference in your life.

A: The lifelong friendships I have made over the years have been invaluable to me, both professionally and personally. SNA provides the most amazing networking opportunities that allow you to grow and learn.

For bios of all the candidates standing for election and details about voting, visit www.schoolnutrition.org/election.



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Just Imagine...

Mindfully putting your inherent creativity in action could serve up delightful surprises throughout 2023.

You do it all the time, even if you don't realize it. You imagine the delighted expression of the student who gets the special Lucky Tray giveaway. You imagine the difficult conversation on tap with your daughter about her grades. You imagine the warm embrace that will greet you when you visit your parents next weekend. You imagine the worst when you await medical test results. You imagine how you might spend the cash if you win tonight's lottery jackpot.

So, it's silly to downplay your creative capacity when someone suggests putting it to *work* for you. "I'm just not very imaginative" is, quite frankly, a lame excuse.

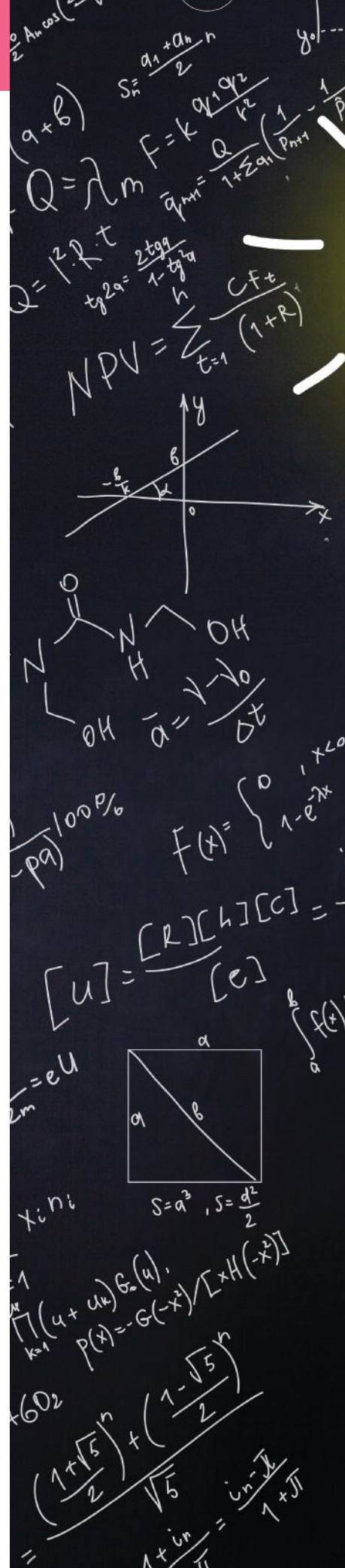
This is not to suggest that creative imaginings are handed out to all of us in equal measure. Some people do possess an enviable talent to dream up audacious initiatives and inventions with seemingly little effort. You don't have to make that a standard for comparison (although it's perfectly appropriate for an aspirational goal). Your imaginative skills are quite enough for successful application in numerous personal and professional endeavors; you just may need to exercise them a bit more mindfully and regularly to leverage their powerful potential.

With this issue of the magazine, the *School Nutrition* team invites you to resolve to make 2023 a year of imagination and innovation. It *will* require some effort, as it is very easy to get stuck in a combination of routines and "fire-fighting" the expected unexpected daily challenges. Set intentions, schedule time dedicated to creative pursuit, identify an accountability partner, make it a team goal—take proactive steps to make it a priority with follow-through. Even if your imagination time doesn't yield specific results, the very process is a benefit in and of itself; there is a natural high that results when you put imagination and creativity in action. You'll feel reenergized and excited, eagerly anticipating, rather than dreading, what comes next. What *does* come next for you? Where will you be this time next year? How about your program? Just imagine....

► **SNA Ideas Exchange:** *SN Magazine Live!* is a new webinar series that invites readers to turn on their cameras, unmute and participate in a live book club-style discussion related to content featured in your favorite professional magazine. This virtual event will not be recorded for on-demand viewing, so use the QR code here to register early and keep your calendar clear. The next Exchange is scheduled for February 16, when we'll discuss best practices and approaches to turn your imaginings into innovations. Be sure to read all the main feature articles in this issue and start thinking about how you and your team brainstorm, pitch new ideas to stakeholders and uncover great sources of inspiration.



Register Here!





LET YOUR

BY JOANNE ROBINETT, SNS

IMAGINATION

Everyone is creative—
a little practice will help
build your skills and
confidence.

TAKE FLIGHT!

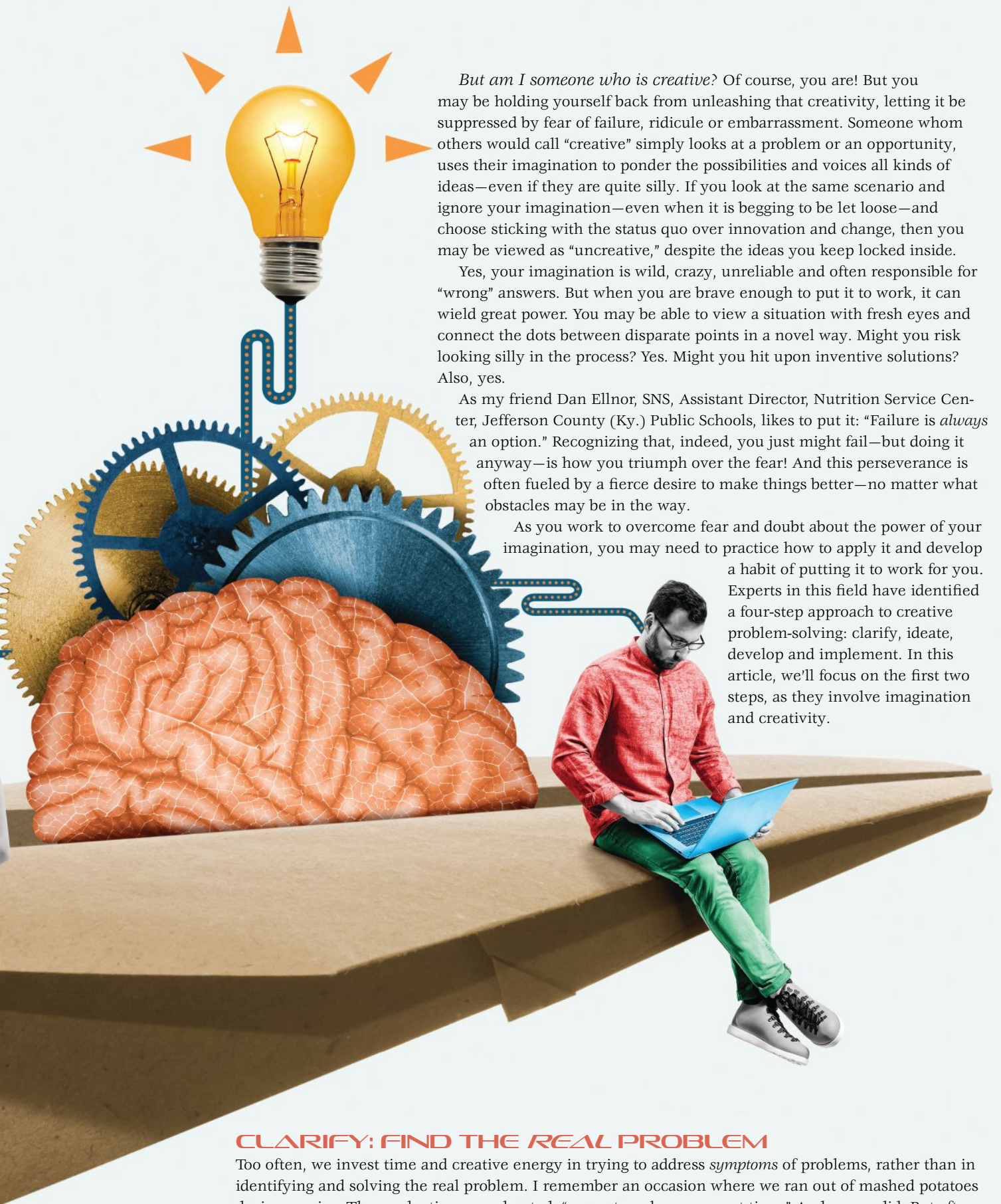
**"LOGIC WILL GET YOU FROM A TO B.
IMAGINATION WILL TAKE YOU EVERYWHERE."**

Albert Einstein

You might be a whiz at programming the combi oven to cook hamburgers to perfection, or perhaps you are the team member with mad Google Doc skills. Maybe you are the person who can find and identify all the tiles on the POS, convince a student to take a fruit, look up their forgotten PIN and get them on their way—all in five seconds flat. Mastery of such technical responsibilities is critical to job performance and even may have contributed to your being hired or promoted. But "hard skills" like these may not be enough for career success. In today's workplace, greater emphasis is being placed on competency with "soft skills"—those that are usually difficult to quantify or demonstrate, such as problem-solving, positivity, dependability, leadership and **creativity**, which was ranked at the top of the list in a recent LinkedIn survey.

Creativity comes when you put your imagination to work, and it leads to innovation, which is the machine of change. Innovation is the realization and implementation of ideas, which produce value by solving a problem or facilitating progress.





But am I someone who is creative? Of course, you are! But you may be holding yourself back from unleashing that creativity, letting it be suppressed by fear of failure, ridicule or embarrassment. Someone whom others would call “creative” simply looks at a problem or an opportunity, uses their imagination to ponder the possibilities and voices all kinds of ideas—even if they are quite silly. If you look at the same scenario and ignore your imagination—even when it is begging to be let loose—and choose sticking with the status quo over innovation and change, then you may be viewed as “uncreative,” despite the ideas you keep locked inside.

Yes, your imagination is wild, crazy, unreliable and often responsible for “wrong” answers. But when you are brave enough to put it to work, it can wield great power. You may be able to view a situation with fresh eyes and connect the dots between disparate points in a novel way. Might you risk looking silly in the process? Yes. Might you hit upon inventive solutions? Also, yes.

As my friend Dan Ellnor, SNS, Assistant Director, Nutrition Service Center, Jefferson County (Ky.) Public Schools, likes to put it: “Failure is *always* an option.” Recognizing that, indeed, you just might fail—but doing it anyway—is how you triumph over the fear! And this perseverance is often fueled by a fierce desire to make things better—no matter what obstacles may be in the way.

As you work to overcome fear and doubt about the power of your imagination, you may need to practice how to apply it and develop a habit of putting it to work for you. Experts in this field have identified a four-step approach to creative problem-solving: clarify, ideate, develop and implement. In this article, we’ll focus on the first two steps, as they involve imagination and creativity.

CLARIFY: FIND THE REAL PROBLEM

Too often, we invest time and creative energy in trying to address *symptoms* of problems, rather than in identifying and solving the real problem. I remember an occasion where we ran out of mashed potatoes during service. The production record noted, “ran out; make more next time.” And so, we did. But after we began experiencing shortages of other menu items, we eventually discovered that the server was using the wrong-sized disher!

When first faced with the problem, we took information at face value (the production record) and drew the most obvious conclusion: For whatever reason, we must have made an insufficient amount,



START WITH QUESTIONS

- To **Clarify** what it is you want to change, ask WHY (and why again).
- To **Ideate**, ask WHAT IF. This will engage your imagination.
- To **Develop** and **Implement** your ideas, ask WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and HOW.

so we will make more in the future. But we might have saved ourselves the grief of repeated mistakes had we taken the time to investigate a little more deeply. The *real problem* was that staff needed training on the importance of using the correct serving utensil—and part of the *real solution* was fostering an atmosphere that encourages staff to ask questions when in doubt. Here are three other real-world examples that demonstrate the importance of understanding the difference between a symptom and an underlying problem:

- ▶ Judy continually misplaces important papers, complaining that she's always drowning in paperwork. The real problem is not (necessarily) the amount of paper that crosses her desk, but the fact that she has no designated place or process for separating important papers from everything else; every paper gets treated in the exact same manner.
- ▶ Larry's meal counts are low. Larry cannot hope to address low meal counts without clarifying the possible reason—or *reasons*—why this is the case. And it will take time, as Larry needs to imagine all the different factors that might have a negative impact on student participation. Perhaps menu choices don't entice students, family preferences are for meals brought from home, bus drivers encourage kids to go straight to their morning homerooms, students are confused by the POS and so on. With a list in hand, Larry and his team can

take further steps to zero in on likely suspects before imagining innovative solutions.

- ▶ Miranda knows she is out of shape—and she knows the primary reasons are poor diet choices and insufficient physical activity. She blames the fact that she is too busy to focus on better health habits. But what Miranda needs to clarify is why she lets “busyness” be the higher priority in her life. Some situations may take multiple “why” imaginings before you get to the root problem, which is the one that will take creativity to solve.

Putting on your detective hat and clarifying the root problem is the first step, before summoning the full power of your imagination. Take care not to employ your imagination too early, as it will be more than happy to solve symptoms and allow you to feel a false sense of accomplishment.

NEXT, IDEATE

Ideating is where you move on from seeing a situation you hope to improve to asking how you can make the change, or how you can get to the outcome you envision. It starts with what I believe are the two most important words to wake up your imagination: “what if.” They're certainly common among kids! “What if I had super powers?” “What if this were a *real* dinosaur?” “What if I got locked in the school overnight?” *You* were once that kid, giving voice to your imagination. It's still within you!

Sadly, many of us consider this activity as mere child's play. But a child can make a rocket ship out of a cardboard box and entertain themselves for days on end. *What if I asked you to use a cardboard box to help you get your breakfast counts up? Would you take on the challenge or just laugh at my request? (I hope you would do both!)*

Some of us may need a little incentive to apply our imagination in this way. So, what if there were a \$100 prize awarded to the individual who uses this cardboard box successfully in a way that increases your breakfast count? Are the wheels starting to turn now? Are you imagining the possible size and shape of the box? Thinking about what you can do with that box—or just *part* of the box? Or maybe this inspired you to think *outside* the box! (You're invited to share your cardboard box ideas with me at americasmeal@yahoo.com.)

Don't stop at one idea. That's a fundamental maxim of the ideating process. Affirm to yourself and your team that there are no dumb ideas, and no person's idea is more important than another's. (See "Perfect Pitch," on page 34 for dealing with idea-killers.) Don't criticize or compare ideas—but do *build* on others' ideas.

Be sure to capture every single suggestion, no matter how ridiculous. Once upon a time, someone in a meeting suggested selling automobiles from a vending machine. And another said, "Let's make movies about sharks that fly through the air on a tornado." Pretty silly, right? Maybe, but pretty successful, too! Next, invite someone from outside your program—a teacher, student group or vendor—for their ideas about your problem. The goal is to produce a large quantity of ideas while reserving judgment.

TAPPING SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

How can you jumpstart your imagination? Inspiration is all around you. It can be found in nature—the inspiration for Velcro is said to have been the brainchild of someone picking burrs off clothing after a hike. It can come from the mundane—Wilbur Wright was idly playing with a cardboard box when he discovered the answer to a structural problem with the wings on the Wright Flyer. It can come at random—musician George Harrison picked up a book and set out to write a song based on the first phrase or sentence he flipped to. It was "gently weeps," and the result was The Beatles' mega-hit "While My Guitar Gently Weeps."

Inspiration can come from others—and not just those who exude creativity from every pore. CBS News correspondent Steve Hartman had a long-running series called "Everybody Has a Story." He would travel to a place on the map (determined by a dart throw), flip through a local phone book, pick a name at random and go interview the household. Over the course of 12 years, he visited more than 120 people, finding an interesting story to share every time.

Identify regular times of the day (or week) where you can free your mind from distractions and allow ideas to percolate a little. It might be during a nature walk, on a long drive, just sitting on the porch watching the sunset or even in the shower. Be sure to actively unplug—if you need your phone on hand, then turn off notifications of incoming emails and social posts. Disengage from busyness to give your imagination a chance to work and allow the fluency of creative thinking to flow.

IDEATION EXERCISES

The following exercises can help launch your imagination once you have clarified your problem or identified your goal:

- Create a grid with five columns and five rows for a total of 25 blocks. Fill every block with possible ideas that address your situation.
- Play "devil's advocate," arguing the other side of an issue. This helps you learn to reframe your thinking.
- Make an "A-B-C-D" list. Your ideas and/or steps must start with each letter. For example: "Annual assessments," "Brainstorming sessions with the team," "Coordinate with the science teacher" and "Ditch the old uniforms." Of course, feel free to carry on to "Z" ("Zero in on new partners"), if this exercise works for you!

- Create your "imaginary board of directors," identifying five or six people—someone you know, someone famous, someone from the past, etc., who will think differently than you in an imagined discussion of your ideas. On my imaginary board, I have people who are smarter than I am, one who is more patient, one who is kinder, someone who is all about the bottom line, someone who is resistant to change and one who will always encourage me. I imagine their reactions and opinions about my idea, and this helps me identify and confront its pros and cons.



Be sure to capture ideas when they come, whether you write them in a notebook or record them on a phone app. Don't count on your memory—those flashes of inspiration and possibility can be fleeting!

Your imagination runs best when *you* “run” best. You need good nutrition, ample exercise, a positive outlook and plenty of sleep. (More than once I have fallen asleep pondering a seemingly unsolvable situation and awakened with a clear solution in mind. I'm always thankful when my imagination does the heavy lifting and I get to snooze!)

BREAK THE “RULES”

You have permission to silence that nagging voice in your head that attempts to place limits on your imagination.

- ▶ “*There is only one right way.*” Nonsense! There can be a whole lot of ways to accomplish the same goal. Foodservice during the pandemic proved this to be true. Same goal—feed kids—but we discovered many new ways to do so.
- ▶ “*They won't allow that.*” Who are “they,” and how can you be sure your idea is something that will be prohibited

if you don't even ask? Give “them” the benefit of the doubt and discuss whether your idea—or some aspect of your idea—could work.

- ▶ “*There's not enough...*” Time. Money. Staff. Skills. Resources. This is a common argument against innovation, and yet humans have proven it wrong over and over again, getting the job done despite the odds. Start by making a plan based on what you would do if there was *more* than enough—of whatever—and then doing the reverse, modifying that plan to accomplish the same goal with only 10% of the valued resource. How would you begin?

BELIEVE

I believe you are creative—every single one of you reading this article. I believe you can put your imagination to good use to solve problems, launch initiatives and make the world a better place for your customers, your colleagues, your family and yourself. What will it take for *you* to believe this? A bit of practice, some courage and confidence.

Channel your inner four-year-old. Be willing to laugh at your silliest ideas. Don't let fear or judgment hold you back. Persevere. Thomas Edison never “failed” in his efforts to invent the light bulb. He just found 10,000 ways that didn't work. Imagination, make believe, creativity—such a fun process for everyone, and one that leads to innovation! **SN**

JoAnne Robinett, owner of America's Meals, is a popular speaker, trainer and consultant and currently serves as Chair of the School Nutrition Foundation Board of Directors.



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Imagi-FAME-tion in Action

Following the path from imagination to innovation—
reflections from the 2023 FAME winners.

BY DYLAN ROCHE

There's no such thing as a cookie-cutter approach to running a school meals operation. Every district has distinctive characteristics, and every leader in this profession brings a unique perspective, fresh ideas and individual strengths and skills. That's a sentiment shared by the four recipients of this year's Foodservice Achievement Management Excellent (FAME) Awards, presented by Basic American Foods:

◆ ◆ ◆
Jessica Shelly, MBA, REHS, SNS
GOLDEN SCHOOL FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR
Cincinnati Public Schools, Ohio

◆ ◆ ◆
Christine Clarahan, MS, RDN, SNS
SILVER LEADERSHIP
School City of Hammond, Indiana

◆ ◆ ◆
Lauren Koff, RD, SNS
SILVER SPIRIT
Houston County Public Schools, Georgia

◆ ◆ ◆
Melanie Romano, MS, RDN, LDN
SILVER RISING STAR
Alliance Charter Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina

These innovative imagineers (borrowing an appropriate term coined by the folks at Disney) all share the same core goal: fueling kids with healthy, delicious meals to help them thrive. They also share similar thoughts on the nature of imagination and creativity in school nutrition programs. It's less about cafeteria décor, menu aesthetics and engagement activities, although these elements certainly lift the cafeteria experience, along with team morale. It's more about developing improved processes, and ensuring their program always reflects smart, original, next-level approaches that serve both scholars and adult stakeholders.

It's also about recognizing the inspiration and best practices that come from others. This quartet credits the idea exchanges, collaborations and judicious repurposing of others' initiatives that were a valuable means of helping them to imagine their own award-winning innovations and solutions. In that spirit, they graciously gave their time to be interviewed about imagination and creativity during the busy ramp-up to the December holiday break. While this article has room for only an excerpt of these insightful interviews, you can find the complete transcripts among the online extras for this issue at www.schoolnutrition.org/bonuswebcontent/#articles.

Turn the page and let their reflections serve as inspiration for you and your team.



Jessica Shelly

As a FAME winner, your nomination reflected your achievements as an innovator. Do you view yourself as a uniquely imaginative, creative person?

I've always been one of those people who tries to not just think outside the box but completely tear apart the box—and stomp on it.

One of the reasons that we have been so creative and innovative here at Cincinnati Public Schools is because we work so well as a team. We have that trust and that honesty, where we're not afraid to bounce ideas—as crazy as they may seem—off each other. And sometimes those crazy ideas can get molded and massaged into something that is amazing and works really well. And sometimes they don't. We've had what we thought were amazing ideas that were incredible flops. But we've been able to learn from those failures and then reapply. We see failure as something of a start

for us; we can use them as a springboard to be even better.

A lot of my ideas come from watching what others do. Julia Bauscher, from Jefferson County (Ky.) Public Schools, calls it R&D: Rip Off and Duplicate. That happens a lot across the country, and it should. Sharing those ideas and innovations with each other helps us as individuals and as a profession.

When do you feel the spirit of imagination most often?

Usually in the middle of the night. I will wake up with an idea, so I will get up and immediately send a text message or an email to my team. They always ask, "When do you sleep? Do you ever sleep?" because they get these random texts from me at 3:00 in the morning with an idea to do a daily breakfast latte at our high schools.

Describe a few initiatives that represent you at your most imaginative.

I was in an airport bathroom that had this little station for you to click an image of either a happy or unhappy face about the condition of the bathroom. And I thought, "Well, that's interesting. What if I could ask my students if they had a happy face or a sad face experience in the cafeteria?"

It's really easy to get feedback from elementary students, but high school kids? They're like, "Whatever, I'm not going to do

that, that's stupid, that's dumb." They don't want to scan QR codes and give information. They don't want to put stickers on a wall. But giving them an ability to just stop as they're coming out of the line and report either a happy or a sad face? That quick, instantaneous feedback was something I thought would be really, really great to put in all our schools.

When we first launched salad bars, we weren't sure how to train students—especially those who qualify for free lunch and don't go to restaurants with options like these. So, we developed fun videos, kind of like the Goofus and Gallant series from *Highlights* magazine. In the videos, the teachers played Goofus, doing things the wrong way—refusing to use tongs, putting their head under the sneeze guard, eating off the bar—while we had students being the Gallant character and showing the right way. It was really impactful. This idea was eventually taken by a whole bunch of different school districts who were just starting out with salad bars, and they made it their own. It's all about joint success and celebration.

And on the home front, I have teenage triplets. That requires me to be creative every single minute of the day. There's always something I need to troubleshoot. There is always something I need to invent or figure out or have a system in place for success so that I can make sure that we keep the family wheels moving.

What is the hardest part of being an innovator?

You must have real tough skin and accept constructive criticism. You've got to be willing to be open and understand that some of your ideas may not be the best, or that your idea might actually lead to and be replaced by a better idea. I don't know anybody in the industry, including myself, who's had an idea and then been able to cultivate it in a vacuum. It takes time. It takes people looking at it from different angles. It takes them looking at your idea and finding the pitfalls and the roadblocks. Because that's how you make it a *better* idea and bring it to fruition.





Christine Clarahan

Do you view yourself as a uniquely imaginative, creative person?

For sure, I'm creative. I attribute a lot of that to my mom. If there is something that we need that doesn't exist, we always joke and say, "Oh, I will MacGyver it." And that sums it up for me: finding a way to create whatever it is that you need, and finding a way to make things happen. It's situation-based. I see creativity *everywhere*, and I like playing off the creativity of others to get to the goal.

Describe a few projects that represent you at your most imaginative.

I want to make sure staff feel acknowledged and celebrated. Each year, when School Lunch Hero Day rolls around, I'd love to be able to give them all gift certificates or even buy all 140 people flowers. But that's not something that I could personally afford or that we can use department money for. So, it becomes about being creative in finding ways for the staff to feel seen and celebrated.

Last year, I uploaded a couple hundred photos from our program into an app that used them to create a mosaic in the design of our department logo. When you look closely, you can see the individual photos. We shared the mosaic through social media and had a huge version of it printed and displayed in our Administration Building office. Every day, it reminds us that we are one team all across the district.

Another photo project is an annual desk calendar I make for my parents and siblings that highlights the best moments of the past year. It's almost like a time capsule, a keepsake of the year—and it's a gift that

means more as we get older. I really love this project, and it takes three to four weeks to put it together because I'm very picky about each month's theme and the photos that will work best.

What is the hardest part of being a creative person?

For me, it's twofold. I have ADD, which means that sometimes I have too many ideas, and it's tough to identify just one and methodically flesh it out. It's not possible. It's also frustrating not to have enough money or time, which affects about 80% of my ideas.

And what's the best part of letting your imagination run wild?

It means that every day can be different. My first few years out of college, I was a stereotypical millennial, getting easily bored and restless. But with this job, even on days where there's a lot of routine, I can be

creative every single day. And that means every day is different. I love that. There are a million challenges in school nutrition, and they've only gotten worse with COVID. But that also means there are a bunch of different opportunities to get creative. I have stayed at this job longer than any other—and I hope to stay here a really long time and never, ever get bored.

How do you nurture creativity and imagination among your team?

I'm lucky to work with quite a few naturally creative people like myself. We go big for National School Lunch and Breakfast Weeks. We created a competition among the school cafeterias to recognize their creative celebrations. The teams at the winning schools get to wear blue jeans to work for a week. That simple incentive nurtured more creativity and competition than I thought was possible! Ultimately, our students are the winners.



Lauren Koff

Do you view yourself as a uniquely imaginative, creative person?

It can come more easily to some, but the ability to be creative is definitely a skill you can hone over the years. A large part of it is simply not being afraid. Too often, we are scared to fail, scared of the possibilities of things going wrong and scared of public perception, especially in our field, where feeding kids is on the line.



Where and when do you get your best ideas?

I can ramble to myself in the car—out of stress, confusion or excitement—or I can hear something in a meeting that triggers an idea. It can often be a team effort, with suggestions being bootled around like a pinball. Also, we've taken some field trips to districts in other counties and states to learn from their programs.

Please describe a project that represents your best creative self.

I am responsible for training our staff—several hundred people—on offer versus serve and reimbursable meals. Initially, we did this in large auditoriums that weren't conducive to Q&A and, let's face it, staying fully awake. Then we broke it up into smaller classes, but found problems with this format, too, especially because not all groups asked the same questions and could benefit from the answers.

I decided that I would front-load the effort, using an early online learning platform. Employees take the course at their convenience and it tracks completion, scores and missed questions.

I created an instruction manual with a script that is general enough that other districts—especially those with a small central office team—can use it for employee training. Now, I'm looking at some of the newer systems that have come out in order to update the course.

What is the hardest part of being a creative person?

There are never enough hours in a day. You could have a hundred fantastic ideas,

but you have to find the people who can help make them possible—and there's just no way to implement them all. So, you have to be critical and examine new ideas, taking care to avoid tunnel vision and being open to better variations.

Do you make an effort to nurture creativity and imagination among your team?

Absolutely. I always push people to challenge themselves and their ways of thinking. The answer to "why do you do it this way?" should *never* be "because that's the way it's always been done." And while any employee or team member is welcome to come to my desk to complain about something, my first question is going to be, "And what do you think we should do about that?" When discussing problems, we should always be actively proposing solutions. We can try a 100 ways to do something, and 99 of them may not work. But when you find one that does, it can take off.

Melanie Romano

When and where do you find inspiration for innovation?

This is my third year as a school nutrition director, and I've realized it's important to not necessarily reinvent the wheel. So, I learn from other directors and people in my network, asking questions: "Hey, this is what's going on. What works best for *your* school?" Even though every school and every district is completely different, I can collect their ideas, brainstorm and figure out what will work best for me.

But sometimes, ideas just spark in a

quiet place, like when I'm driving home from work, taking a shower or doing dishes. Something pops in my head.

In school nutrition, there's always some way that you want to innovate your program to make it better, to make it a well-oiled machine, to increase your participation. I think there's always some sort of objective or goal you're trying to reach, but sometimes it is just completely random, where you're like, "Wow, this would be really good for this school," or an employee might spark something with what they said, or you'll just be in the kitchen and come up with an idea to get the kids excited about school meals.

What's an example you think best represents your most imaginative self?

When I was hired to my position, I had two charter schools that weren't on the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), so my top initiatives were to get them all on the NSLP and re-engineer the kitchens to be a self-prep program.

COVID shutdowns and the other challenges of the last three years meant thinking quickly and outside the box. What kind of equipment could I get with lead times being 6 to 8 months, and without being able to get contractors in the buildings to get the work done? How were we going to get meals to these students? I got a commissary kitchen and transported meals for almost an entire school year until all the construction was done. And *then* the issue became about labor shortages.



You're always critiquing and adjusting for whatever comes your way. And I think that project was probably where I had to really be the most innovative because I couldn't just follow a set plan. It was very chaotic at times, and I had to roll with the punches and just figure it out as we all went along.

What is the hardest part of being an innovator? And the best?

In this industry, it's that you are somewhat boxed in by federal regulations and can only be innovative within certain parameters. The best part is when you see it all come to life. When the kitchen was finished, or when the kids were able to see the new equipment come in, and you could just see their excitement for the new programs. They are excited when they come through the line and are ready to try new menu ideas.

Any words of encouragement?

Just continue. It can be tough, days can be long, but believe in what we're doing

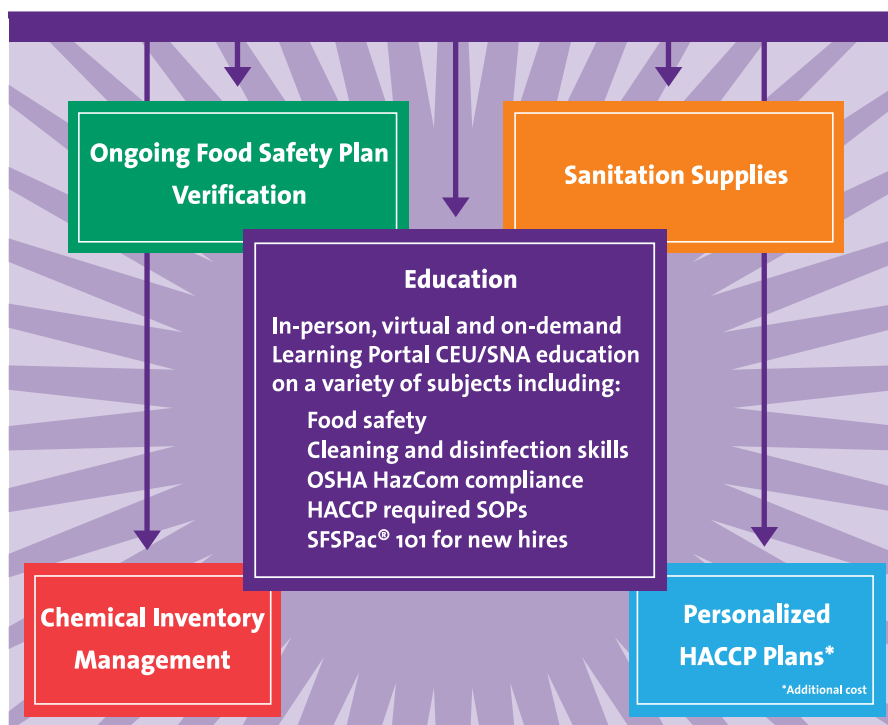


and just reach out to other people in your network, in your state or within SNA, for inspiration that will give you that extra edge to get past obstacles and reach your goals. **SN**

Dylan Roche is a freelance writer based in Arnold, Md., and an SN Contributing Editor. The FAME winners will be honored at a ceremony held in conjunction with SNA's School Nutrition Industry Conference in San Diego in mid-January.

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HOW TO PRESENT YOUR KILLER IDEA TO AN IDEA KILLER—AND GET THEM TO CHANGE THEIR TUNE!

Everyone knows an idea killer. You might call them a naysayer, a stick-in-the-mud, a curmudgeon or just a plain ol' pessimist! A person who, when you say “Ah-ha!” will respond with an “Unh-unh!” A person who hears “Eureka!” and immediately responds with “That’s crazy!” These idea killers are creativity crushers—always finding a way to say “No, but...” instead of “Yes, and!” to new ideas. These attitudes and encounters don’t just prevent the implementation of new initiatives; they can also have a dampening effect on overall team morale and enthusiasm.

In the school nutrition world, an idea killer might be a teacher, an administrator, a supervisor or an employee on your team, and it can be discouraging to have your creative spark dimmed, if not extinguished, time and time again. The good news is you can develop strategies to combat negativity and turn your idea killer into an innovation advocate—or at least neutralize the power of their pessimism and keep your ideas moving forward.



Perfect Pitch

BY CHRISTINA UTICONE

IDENTIFYING AN IDEA KILLER

Whether confronted by a simple change or an ambitious new initiative, an idea killer will usually react quickly and negatively. Do these typical idea-killing responses sound familiar?

- *"We've tried that before."*
- *"That won't work here."*
- *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"*
- *"We're too busy/overwhelmed/understaffed."*
- *"Why reinvent the wheel?"*
- *"We don't have the skills to make that happen."*
- *"You'll never get that approved!"*
- *"Where are we going to find the budget for that?"*
- *"It's not my job."*

You also may have encountered unproductive sarcasm, hostility or an uncomfortable stony silence.

If the idea killer is an individual you supervise, you can use different personnel management strategies to address their negative attitude, but that's not much help in the moment or if you are seeking buy-in or approval from stakeholders beyond your immediate team. But this doesn't mean you just have to grit your teeth and bear the disappointment!

You may be able to receive a different response if you tailor your idea pitch in ways that anticipate and counter likely idea-killing reactions. Sometimes this means presenting the idea one way to certain people and varying your ask when addressing others. The key is thoughtful preparation rather than indulging in a spontaneous "Hey, I just had this great idea!" In fact, there's a lot of value in investing time and attention to communications strategies that focus on building an idea-boosting *environment* that sets the table prior to the pitch phase. Consider the following tactics:

Anticipate criticisms. You may have sufficient experience with the usual idea-killing suspects to predict how they are likely to react. Be prepared with specific responses designed to counter their statement or put a pin in their negativity balloon. Even if you *don't* know the

audience particularly well, it's likely that *someone* is going to need some convincing. Spend some time preparing to address the most common arguments you might face. Practice scenarios with someone you trust.

Recruit an ally. Identify an individual who is ready to support you with wholehearted enthusiasm and bring them into your pitch process. This might be someone with a certain authority (your director, an administrator, a teacher) or someone who is particularly well-liked or respected by the individual or group you are addressing.

Gather your research in advance. Maybe you need to survey students to gauge their interest in your idea. Looking to implement an idea tried at another school or district? (Maybe you read about it here in the pages of this magazine!) Then get some details about their results, as well as barriers they encountered and addressed. Have this supporting evidence in hand to respond to those who can only envision problems and failure.

Engage your audience. Don't just "tell" them your idea and wait for possible pessimism. Get ahead of their questions by posing your own, always with a solutions-oriented spin. "I heard we've tried this before, so what do you think we could do differently this time to make it a win? How might we tackle this, so it doesn't add a lot to a busy day?" Engage them in a positive exchange of ideas. It will go a long way to building their ownership in the success of the new initiative.

PREPARING YOUR PITCH

Let's try a real-world example and explore suggested ways for turning a potential "no" into a "yes." Despite decades of success across the country, breakfast in the classroom (BIC) service can still face fierce opposition by different stakeholders.

Start by making a list of the candidates most likely to push back on this opportunity to expand school breakfast. The list might include the principal, a custodian, a teacher and cafeteria staff.



With practice and a few key strategies, you respond to negativity and start transforming problem-solvers.

Identify the specific concerns they are likely to raise. A resistant principal or teacher will have different issues than the cafeteria staff tasked with implementing the program or the custodian in charge of cleanup.

A principal or teacher might say, “We can’t use instructional time for serving breakfast” or “We don’t need that; kids who want breakfast can get it in the cafeteria!” By anticipating these types of pushback responses, you can point out that breakfast can be consumed while teachers take attendance, collect homework or make morning announcements such as previewing the day’s lesson plans, which can actually enhance instructional time! You can also show your principal data on how increasing breakfast participation will improve your school meal program’s bottom line, as well as how BIC has been shown to improve behavior, attendance and test scores.

You can construct similar arguments in advance for each stakeholder. A custodian’s possible concern about cleanup and/or pests can be countered with a cleaning and sanitation plan. If the cafeteria team has insufficient staff to make deliveries to classrooms, there are many schools and districts that have found successful BIC approaches, whether it’s having kids pick up their meals in the cafeteria and take them to classrooms or designating one or two student helpers to transport meals and materials on wagons or carts.

For any new initiative, your tactics and arguments will vary depending on the expected arguments and your relationship to the idea killer. Do they report to you, or do you report to them? Is it one sour apple ruining the bunch, or an individual who wields a lot of influence with others in the group? Be sure to consider these power dynamics when you are preparing for conversations.

TURNING “NO, THANKS” INTO “YES, PLEASE!”

In improvisational comedy, there is a general practice referred to as “yes, and.” The concept allows the actors in a scene to continually build an expansive scenario, fostering communication by forcing the participants to actively listen and (most importantly) accept the scenario at hand. Further, it forces everyone participating to theoretically agree on a shared reality instead of shutting down the lines of communication with a “no” response.



HELPFUL TOOLS

1. Learn strategies to help you become a more effective and persuasive communicator with the School Nutrition Foundation’s LEAD to Succeed™ training modules available in the SNA Training Zone. Learn more at www.schoolnutrition.org/LEAD.
2. SNA’s DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access) Webinar Series can give you a better understanding of the nuances in recognizing, working with and amplifying a diverse chorus of voices. Tapping that diversity can vastly improve innovation and creativity while creating a more equitable work environment. www.schoolnutrition.org/resources/featured-resources/diversity-equity-and-inclusion
3. Explore the SNA Training Zone for inspiration and earn CEUs! Filter your search by category (e.g., Careers & Training, Communications & Marketing, Personal Development) to reignite your creative spark.

can improve your ability to pitch ideas,
your idea killers into enthusiastic

Let's look at another common school nutrition scenario: installing salad bars in the site. As a site manager, you've read that it's a great way to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, you expect that parents will love the idea and it may even build participation in your program from teachers and staff. Now, it's time to present the idea to your team. If you're not encouraging a "yes, and" approach, your first conversation might sound like something like this:

You: *I think a self-serve salad bar would be a great addition to the cafeteria. It would encourage students to eat more fresh vegetables and attract teachers, too.*

Server: Who will oversee prepping the salad bar, keeping it refreshed and clean? Will the students serve themselves? They're going to make a mess.

Cashier: It's going to be difficult to track whether students are getting required amounts of reimbursable components.

Cook: How many options are we putting out? It sounds like a lot more prep work in the kitchen.

You: *Yes, the students will serve themselves, and I would like us to work together to create efficient processes for prep, cleanup and cashiering.*

Server: It's clearly going to be a lot of extra work for us. Plus, teachers always complain about the food—a salad bar won't make any difference. I don't think it's worth it.

You: *Managers in other schools in our district say it's working well for them.*

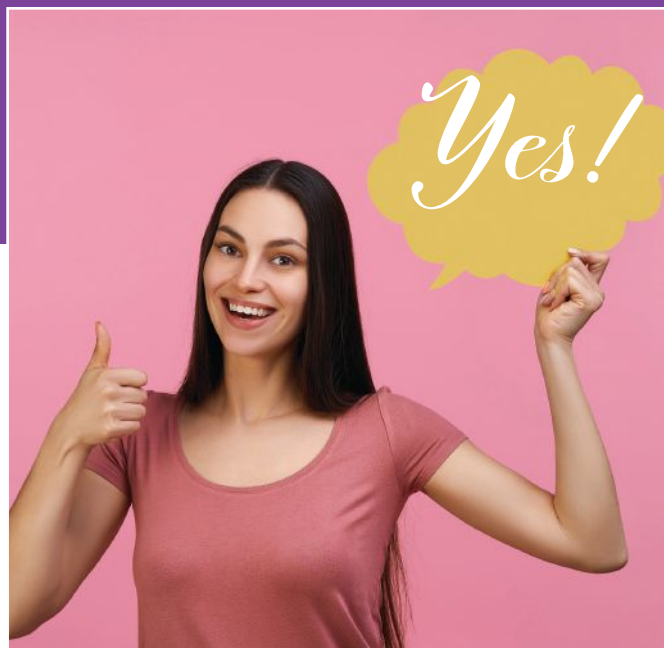
Cook: They probably don't have the same challenges we do.

Cashier: It's going to slow things up, and you know the principal won't be happy about that.

Server: There's so much going on right now. Can't we postpone this? Until after I retire?

Whomp-whomp. "No, but" has killed this conversation. Instead of an exciting brainstorming session, you are now looking at having to take a "do it because I said so" stand, which makes *no one* happy.

Now, let's look at how this interaction might go if you introduce a "yes, and" approach to the team. If you anticipate



negativity and reframe it as an opportunity to participate in a brainstorming session using "yes, and," you may just inspire your idea killer to become a creative genius.

You: *I think a self-serve salad bar would be a great addition to our cafeteria. It would encourage students to eat more fresh vegetables and attract teachers, too. I know you might have concerns about this, but let's try to stay focused on ideas that will make this work well for everyone. We will need to develop processes for prep, cleanup and cashiering. Any suggestions?*

Cook: We could probably do all the vegetable chopping at the end of the previous day and have them all ready to go without complicating breakfast service in the mornings.

Cashier: Yes, and if we post signs on the salad bar about minimum amounts, we can make it easier to ensure they have the required components.

Server: Yes, and if we check the salad bar between each lunch period or class arrival, then we can keep it replenished when popular items are running low. We could do a quick clean then, too.

While this practice isn't going to work all of the time with every idea killer in your circle, it's a good habit to adopt to improve the likelihood of positive reactions to new ideas. Flexing your persuasion muscle will help make it stronger, so just keep at it! With practice and a few key strategies, you can improve your ability to pitch ideas, respond to negativity and start transforming your idea killers into enthusiastic problem-solvers. **SN**

Christina Uticone is a freelance writer based in Houston and an SN Contributing Editor.

From “What if?” to “WOW!”

BY PATRICIA L. FITZGERALD



“I really wanted to write a children’s book,” recounts Shannon Ebron, MS, RDN, SNS.

She wrote down different content ideas, searched for an illustrator—and eventually found herself stuck in a common creative quicksand. “Perfectionism got to me. I really didn’t know how to pull it off, and I didn’t want it to be something I wasn’t proud of. I put the project aside.”

Ebron might have decided to let go of the project—but it didn’t really let go of her. A trio of enviable personality traits drove her to this point, an interview with *School Nutrition* about *Check-in & Color: A Coloring Book & Gratitude Journal for School Nutrition Professionals*. She considers herself creative, goal-oriented and tenacious. She sets intentions every New Year’s and works to make them manifest by creating an accompanying vision board. The book project has been on her list for a couple of years.

She follows a number of fellow dietitians on social media including Liz Jalkiewicz, RDN, LDN, The Dietitian Editor, whose business niche is “empowering dietitians to effectively communicate their food and nutrition messages to the world, one constructive edit at a time.” Last summer, Jalkiewicz launched an online course that caught Ebron’s eye, and she signed up to join the second cohort of Click to Publish: The Ultimate Guide for RDNs to Self-Publish on Amazon.

This was no casual commitment. The six-week course features more than 90 lessons, 7.5 hours of video and several assignments, and its robust content is matched by a correspondingly steep registration fee. But Ebron was determined. “I decided, I’m not going to put this project on the back burner anymore. I’m going to invest in myself.”

Ebron readily takes on projects that challenge and stimulate her creativity. “It resets me. I might pick up a paintbrush one day or make a wreath for my door another. I find it rejuvenates me,” she explains.

And she just couldn’t stop thinking about her goal to write a book. “I’m not ashamed to pay someone to take me to the next level. We all need help from time to time,” says Ebron. The course is based on creating “low-content

The inspiring story of how one woman’s fearless foray into self-publishing led to a pay-it-forward chain of restorative creativity.

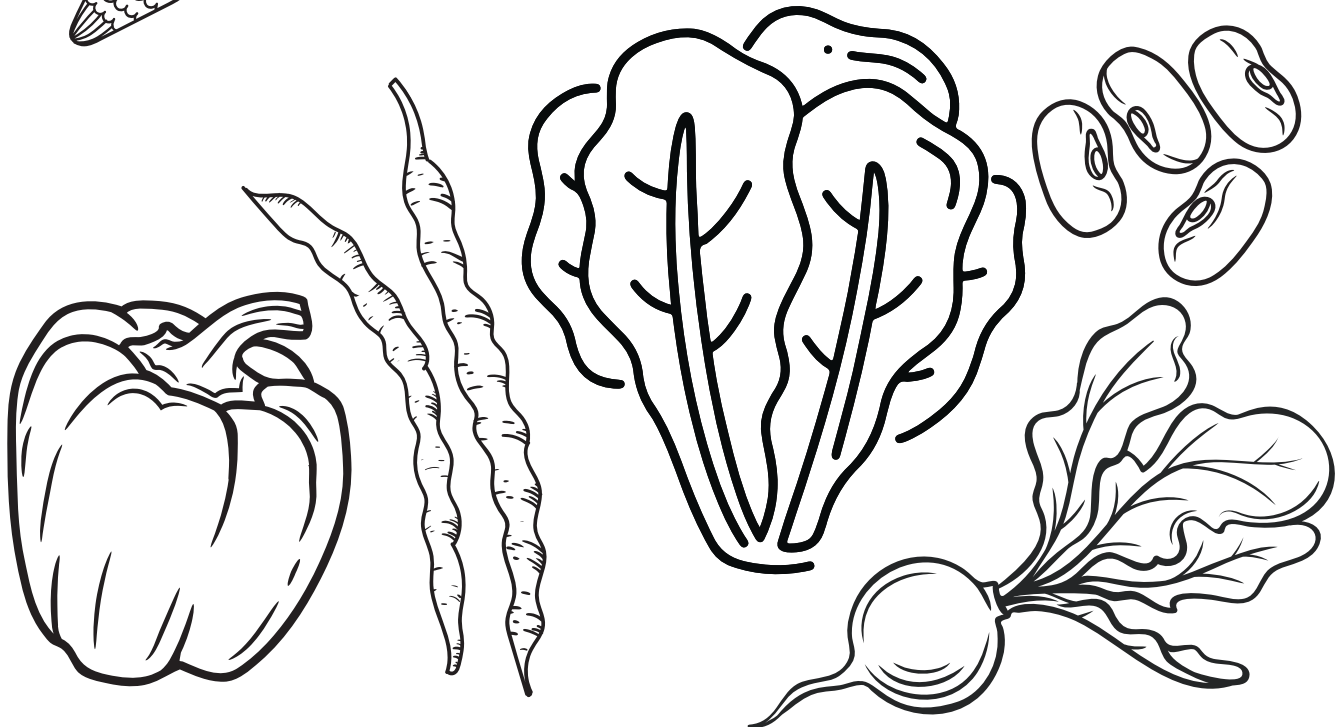
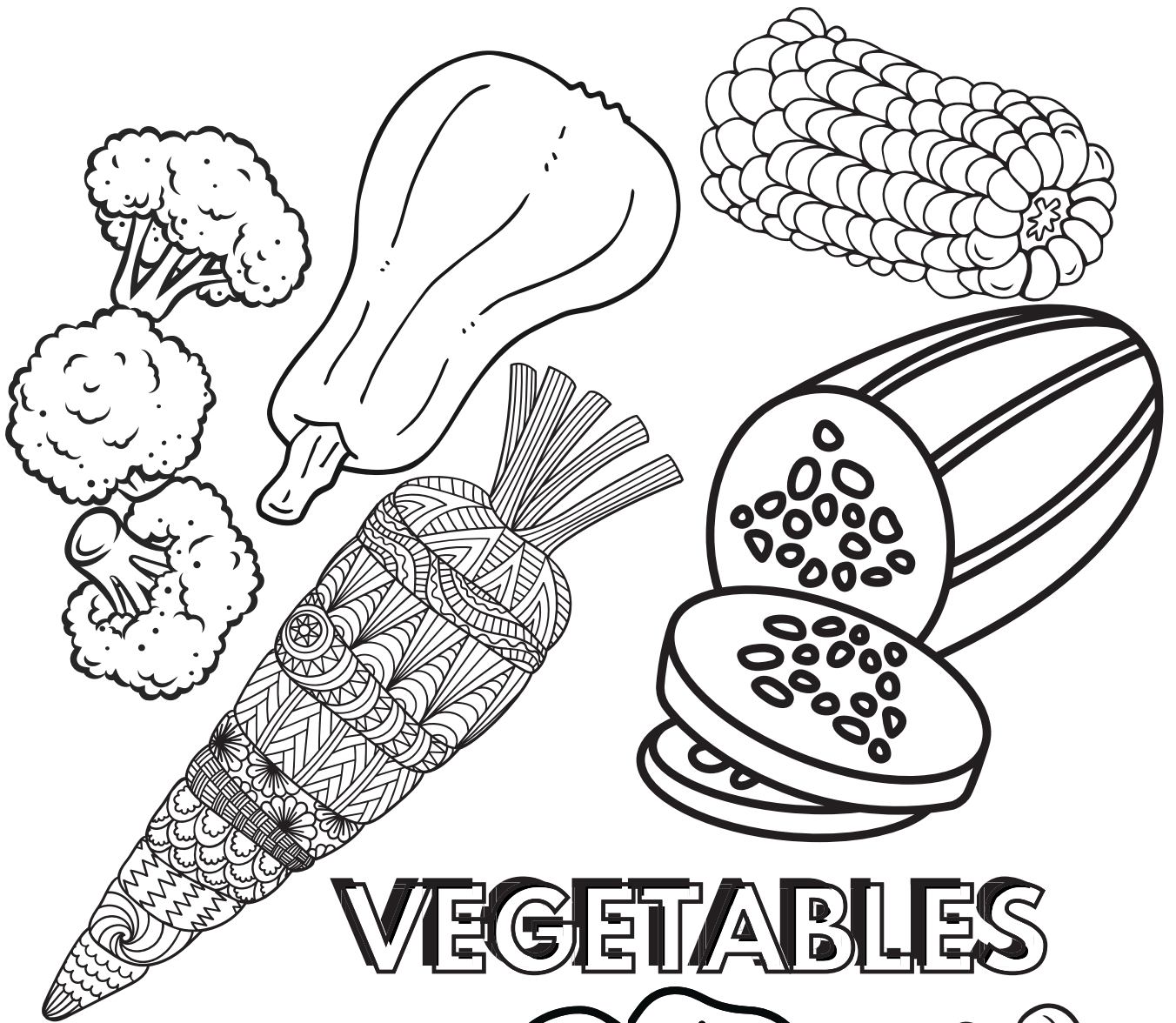
books,” which also appealed to her idea to produce a children’s book. But as the class continued—with sessions on book idea generation and validation—Ebron found herself continuing to struggle with the direction for a children’s book. “It just wasn’t coming together.”

School nutrition professionals like Ebron are masters of the pivot, as the crisis years of the pandemic proved. Keeping within the low-content scope of the course, and inspired by another dietitian’s publication of a coloring book, Ebron allowed herself to let go of the children’s book and consider a bold change of direction.

“I’m not an artist,” she insists, pointing to her initial efforts to find an illustrator partner for her children’s book idea. “And most of the adult coloring books that I’d seen were produced by artists, so this wasn’t something I’d considered before. But I’d been using Canva to design marketing materials and personal communications for a long time, and I was realizing the different ways that you could manipulate it.” It may not have been a singular “Eureka!” realization, but Ebron had finally found the inspiration she needed to move forward with her book project. “Ideas started flowing, and layouts were coming together!”

The self-publishing course required prospective authors like Ebron to do some market research, reviewing the competition and understanding various elements of success. This helped Ebron to land on a unique approach to her content. “I was thinking of different ways that we cheer each other on in the cafeteria, along with sayings and expressions that I’ve heard,” she explains. These gave shape to the coloring pages, but she wanted to add another component.

“I’ve been keeping a gratitude journal since 2018, writing in it most days,” says Ebron, wanting to share the benefits of this meaningful practice. “So, I joined things together that are important to me,” she says of the result: a book that celebrates her beloved school nutrition profession, helping to lift spirits with nourishing self-care activities.





It's a welcome and timely resource, as school nutrition professionals continue to struggle with burnout after three years of extraordinary challenges. Ebron sums it up in the book's introduction: "I created *Check-in & Color* to give yourself time to relax, reflect and laugh! ... I hope this activity book celebrates you and helps you to focus on the good things in life."

The book presents 30 coloring pages that feature a combination of witty and inspirational messages, along with several that provide some simple school nutrition knowledge activities. Ebron has graciously shared a sampling with *School Nutrition*, including a full-size page (page 39) you can remove and color right away!

There are an equal number of pages with a daily gratitude check, with writing prompts such as:

- Something good that happened to me today
- I am grateful for my coworkers/friendship with [Name], because...
- I am grateful for who I am because....
- Something funny, cute, nice, etc., that a student did that I am grateful for

In addition, Ebron includes a month's worth of dot grid pages for dot or bullet journaling, an approach that provides more structure than blank pages but greater freedom than lined pages.

Throughout the book's development, Ebron kept the project mostly to herself (and the other students in the course). When it was complete and ready for purchase on Amazon.com, her friends and family were amazed. "My mom's mind was blown," reports Ebron.

And what has blown her own mind is the speed with which word has spread throughout the school nutrition community. She received her proof copy the first week of November, and within days she was inundated with congratulatory messages and social posts with selfies of friends and colleagues posing with the book in hand. Days after this interview, the School Food & Nutrition Directors Association of Greater St. Louis purchased a book for each attendee at its general meeting (see photo above).

"I haven't even had time to really think about marketing

it," says Ebron. "It didn't even occur to me to connect it with gift giving at Thanksgiving or Christmas." But its anecdotal success has Ebron contemplating next steps and doing some Google research. "Do I need a book agent? A different distribution system? Should there be a sequel?"

In the meantime, she confesses that she hasn't yet checked sales figures on Amazon.

Ebron was raised to prize and prioritize creativity: "My grandmother did ceramics and had her own kiln, and you could give my mother fabric and a pattern in the morning and by evening she was wearing a new outfit. I was in dance classes until I was 18, plus I did marching band and initially majored in design at the University of Tennessee. These days, crafts are my primary creative outlet, although with this book finished, I may be moving more to digital arts."

But as this project's journey demonstrates, putting a creative idea into action isn't always a straight forward—or quick—process. Distractions, procrastination, insecurities and perfectionism are common barriers that can derail your best intentions. Ebron urges persistence. "Just do it. And remember that 'done' is better than 'perfect,'" she says. "Take a chance on yourself." **SN**

Shannon Ebron is Child Nutrition Services Director at Riverview Gardens School District in St. Louis, Mo. Patricia Fitzgerald is Editor of School Nutrition. Check-in & Color is available on Amazon.com for \$10.99.

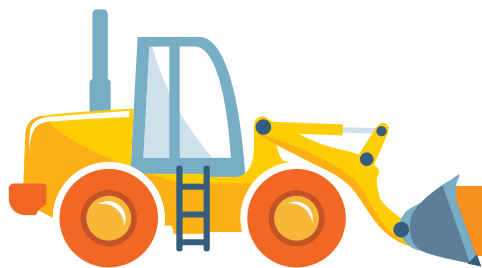


BONUS WEB CONTENT

From "What if?" to "WOW!"

Learn more about the appeal and benefits of coloring, as well as how creating a vision board can be an effective approach to setting goals and intentions for the new year or any time. Look for these online extras in January and February.

You'll find these at www.schoolnutrition.org/bonuswebcontent/#articles



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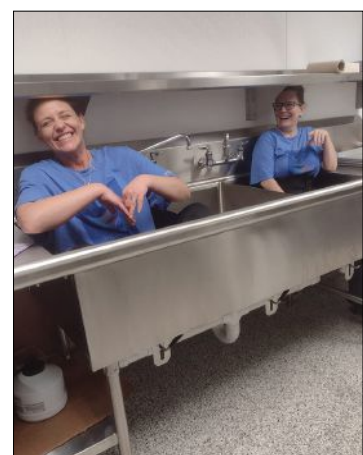
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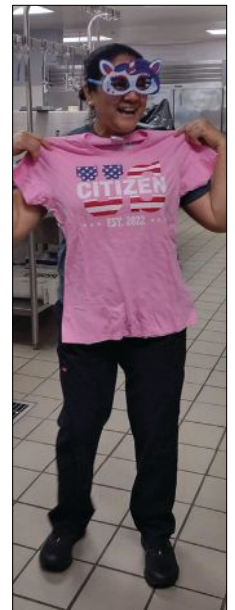
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Things We Love

2022 YEARBOOK

Time flies when you're having fun, and in spite of ongoing supply, labor and inflation challenges, America's school nutrition professionals *a/ways* found the fun last year! Here's a quick look at just some of SN's favorite memories, from January to December, featuring exuberant cafeteria teams, special guests, delicious food, creative décor, sassy looks and adorable kids. We can't wait to see what you'll do in 2023!





THE THRILL OF THE GRILL

The best **sandwiches** lean on the craveable magic of warm, toasty, melty goodness.

BY PATRICAL L. FITZGERALD

I was a very cautious (i.e., picky) eater as a child, and on the infrequent occasions my family ate out, my parents would have to pick a restaurant that served one particular menu item for their highly particular child: a grilled cheese sandwich. Grilled cheese remains a favorite—although I’ve come a long way from being satisfied by the pairing of mild American cheese on buttered white bread grilled in the frying pan.

Huevos Rancheros Quesadilla

26.25 oz. vegetarian refried beans, low-sodium*

15.5 oz. eggs, liquid, whole, frozen

34 whole-grain tortillas, 8-in.

1/2 gal. boiling water

2 1/8 cups diced tomatoes, canned, no salt added

1/2 cup + 1 Tbsp. green chilies

1 Tbsp. garlic powder

1 lb. + 1.125 oz. mozzarella cheese, shredded*

2 1/8 cups salsa, low-sodium

1 Thaw eggs in refrigerator one to two days before preparation. Place tortillas in the warmer for about 45 minutes.

2 Pour the boiling water into a 4-in.-deep half-steamtable pan. Quickly pour beans, tomatoes, green chilies and garlic powder into the water. Stir ingredients together and cover. Allow beans to sit for 25 minutes in the warmer at 135°F or higher.

3 Whisk the eggs, then add to a steamtable pan sprayed with a pan release.



Place in steamer for 10 to 12 minutes until eggs have firmed up. Use a spatula to stir halfway through cooking.

4 Preheat oven to 350°F. Lay tortillas out flat on the work surface. On one half of the tortilla, spread 3/8 cup (3-oz. ladle) of the bean mixture evenly. Top with 1/2-oz. scrambled egg and 1/2-oz. cheese. Fold the other half of the tortilla to cover. Place on a lined sheet pan. Lightly spray the quesadillas with a pan release and

Serves 34

Per Serving 274 cal., 13 g pro., 8 g fat, 5 g sat. fat, 38 g carb., 8 g fiber, 434 mg sod., 2 g sugars

Meal Pattern 2 oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 1.5 oz.-eq. grains, 1/8 cup vegetables (red/orange)

bake for 7 to 8 minutes or until the tortilla is lightly toasted.

5 Cut each quesadilla into three triangles. Serve with 1 Tbsp. salsa.

***Notes:** Basic American Foods' Santiago® Smart Servings™ Vegetarian Refried Beans-Low Sodium can be used in this recipe. Part-skim mozzarella is used in the nutrient analysis.

Recipe and Photo: Basic American Foods, www.baffoodservice.com

Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Rebecca J. Polson, CC, SNS, Instagram: @ChefRebeccaK12

My current craving is for the Caprese Melt on the menu of a tiny, seasonal, all-grilled-cheese concept in downtown Bar Harbor, Maine. It packs freshly sliced tomatoes, thick-cut mozzarella, cheddar and a layer of basil pesto between two slices of grilled sourdough, and then is finished with a drizzle of balsamic glaze. While this is a once-a-year vacation treat (I've tried to recreate it myself and it's just not the same), my love for a wide array of grilled sandwich alternatives keeps the cravings (somewhat) at bay year 'round.

At its most fundamental, there's something irresistible about the pairing of warm, grilled bread and ooey, gooey melty cheese. According to market research firm Datassential, 80% of American consumers say they love or like grilled cheese sandwiches, ranking them as the country's second-favorite sandwich (behind chicken) and earning a spot in the top 100 favorite foods overall. Go beyond those core elements and consider the spectrum of other ingredients that bring different flavors and textures to the format, and you have a

menu category that offers lots of potential for menu innovation in school meal programs.

Let's break down the fundamentals required for building a memorable, craveable grilled sandwich—bread, cheese and fillings—and consider the options for each. But first, there are a few school nutrition-specific asterisks to acknowledge.

Bona fide grilled sandwiches are difficult to pull off in the volume and speed necessary for most school kitchens. Equipment like a flat-top, grate grill or panini press are less common tools in the K-12 segment. Plus, some of the most flavorful combinations may send your nutrition counts off the chart. These may be pragmatic realities for many school nutrition operations, but certainly not all. Or you may find your goal is *not* to replicate exactly the grilled sandwich experience found in restaurants—or seen on TikTok—but to serve up something that aspires to be close.

Most of the recipes featured in these pages call for a combi or conventional oven to prepare their “grilled” sandwiches.

Pear and Turkey Panini



Serves 24

Per Serving 482 cal., 22 g pro., 24 g fat, 5.4 g sat. fat, 47 g carb., 6 g fiber, 910 mg sod., 13 g sugar

Meal Pattern 2-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2-oz.-eq. whole grains, 1/4 cup fruit

48 slices whole grain-rich sandwich bread

1 1/2 cup honey mustard, prepared

2 lb., 4 oz. turkey, deli-style

#10 can sliced pears, extra-light syrup, drained

9 oz. arugula or spinach

1 lb., 8 oz. mozzarella cheese, shredded*

1 1/2 cups mayonnaise

1 Preheat the oven to 375°F.

2 Spray 2 full-size sheet pans with a butter-flavored pan release. Lay 12 slices of bread on each prepared pan.

3 Spread 1 Tbsp. of honey mustard on each slice of bread. Assemble each sandwich with 1 1/2 ozs. sliced deli turkey, 4 pear slices, 1/4 cup arugula or spinach and 1 oz. mozzarella cheese (portion the cheese with a 2-oz. spoodle).

4 Spread the remaining bread slices with 1 Tbsp. mayonnaise each, place bread slices (mayonnaise-side-down) on top of the sandwiches.

5 Spray tops of sandwiches with a butter-flavored pan release.

4 Place one to two sheet pans on top of the sandwiches to weigh them down and facilitate browning, and place in the preheated 375°F oven.

5 Bake for 8-10 minutes or until bread is toasted and cheese is melted. **CCP:** Heat to 135°F.

6 Transfer sandwiches to 2-in.-deep full-size steamtable pans for service. Shingle in pan for best appearance. **CCP:** Hold and serve at 135°F or higher.

***Notes:** Pacific Northwest Canned Pears can be used in this recipe. If substituting with part-skim mozzarella, conduct a new nutritional analysis.

Recipe, Photo and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Pacific Northwest Canned Pears, www.eatcannedpears.com

Many inventive school chefs have discovered workarounds, such as placing weighted sheet pans on top of a tray of sandwiches to mimic the effect of a panini press. And while a double-cheese, triple-tortilla, crunchwrap-style handheld may be too costly (in calories, as well as dollars) to be a regular item on your cycle menu, a thoughtfully developed, school-appropriate recipe should more than satisfy your customers. Let the tips in this article serve as inspirational fuel for your grilled sandwich aspirations.

BREAD

The best breads for grilled sandwiches are those that are strong enough to handle plenty of ingredients (standing up to wet components without getting soggy), plus take the heat of the grill and, in many combos, the weight of a panini-type press. Crusty, tangy **sourdough** more than holds its own in cooking, and it won't fall apart when filled with

rich, melty cheese, multiple fillings and wet sauces. The crusty exterior and airy interior of **ciabatta** is another sturdy carrier of flavorful ingredients. **Baguettes** also work for panini-style handhelds.

Consider if you want the bread to be somewhat neutral and let the fillings to the "talking," or if you want the bread itself to add interesting flavor to the grilled sandwich. For example, toasted **brioche** delivers delicious buttery notes. Herby Italian **focaccia** has the heft suitable for panini sandwiches with moisture-rich ingredients. Turn to **rye**, with its fragrant caraway seeds, if you're building a grilled version of a classic Reuben. **Pumpernickel** offers sweetness, which is unsurprising since it's made with molasses and brown sugar. Hearty **multi-grain** bread lends a nutty flavor, while boosting fiber.

Flatbread can go either way. Unseasoned, it's considered a great panini bread because it stands up to the weight of

the press. Or look at flatbread spiked with various herbs. Of course, arguably the flattest of flatbreads is the **tortilla**, which is the carrier of choice for Mexican-inspired grilled creations. Corn is more “authentic” and tends to have good thickness for carrying multiple fillings, but milder flour tortillas tend to have greater acceptance.

CHEESE

The key here is to use cheeses that melt well, becoming velvety smooth and creamy when heated and delivering the all-important “cheese pull” when the sandwich is cut in half. Nothing melts better than **American**, although purists struggle with putting this one-note processed staple in the same category as “real” cheese.

For many, the mouthfeel of melted cheese is all they need, which is why mild mozzarella and Swiss are good choices. For a bit more bite, without sacrificing melting properties, look to **sharp cheddar** and **provolone** to deliver flavor as well as the ooey, gooey melting qualities you expect in a grilled sandwich. But if you're looking for cheese that will really amp up the flavor of your sandwich without the

aid of other ingredients, consider **fontina**, **gouda** (“younger” melts better than aged) **gruyere** and **pepper jack**.

FILLINGS

You certainly can't go wrong when you pair your proteins with fresh, in-season **produce!** Also give due consideration to including **textures** that will contrast with creamy cheese and soft, well-cooked meats. For example, iceberg lettuce, apple slices and pickles (although not necessarily all in the same sandwich) offer a nice crunch with each bite. Or your aim might be something different to say, to deliver the umami-forward **savory** quality that can be found in mushrooms or to dial up the **heat** with different peppers.

Condiments are an easy way to lift the flavor of grilled sandwiches. Go beyond the most common and seek out spicy mustards and ketchups or herbed mayos (which is essentially what an aioli is, by the way). Savory-sweet condiments like onion-bacon jam or a tomato-basil spread—plus sweet-heat combos, like a peach or mango salsa—are great sources of interesting flavors that contrast well with various breads and cheeses.

Buffalo Ranch Pretzel Turkey Melt



Serves 100

Per Serving 362 cal., 30 g pro., 8 g fat, 3.1 g sat. fat, 46 g carb., 4 g fiber, 916 mg sod., 6 g sugars

Meal Pattern 2 1/2-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2 1/2 oz. whole grains, 1/2 cup vegetables (other)

21 lb. turkey breast, sliced
11 lb., 6 oz. coleslaw mix, shredded
3 1/8 cups ranch salad dressing, reduced-fat
1 cup Buffalo hot sauce
100 whole-grain pretzel buns, 2 7/10 oz.
3 lb., 2 oz. American cheese blend, skim

1 Preheat oven to 350°F.

2 In a large bowl or 6-in. full-sized steamtable pan, toss the coleslaw, ranch dressing and Buffalo sauce. Cover and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

3 Prepare sheet pans with parchment paper and lightly spray with a pan release. Place the bottom of each bun on the sheet pan, with the cut side up.

Top each with six slices of turkey and one slice of cheese. Place the top of each bun on separate sheet pans with the cut side up.

4 Place the bottoms and tops in the oven. Cook the tops for 5 to 7 minutes or until lightly toasted, then remove them from the oven. Cook the bottoms for 15 minutes or until the turkey reaches 165°F and the cheese is melted.

5 Remove the pans from the oven and top the cheese with 1/2 cup of the coleslaw mixture. Place the tops on the sandwich and serve. **CCP:** Heat the poultry to 165°F or higher for 15 seconds.

***Notes:** Butterball Foodservice's K-12 All Natural Sliced Turkey Breast CN can be used in this recipe.

Recipe, Photo and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Butterball Foodservice, www.butterballfoodservice.com

Pizza Grilled Cheese

Serves 68

Per Serving 412 cal.,
21 g pro., 23 g fat,
9 g sat. fat, 31 g carb.,
4 g fiber, 812 mg sod.,
4 g sugars

Meal Pattern 2-oz.-eq.
meat/meat alternate,
2-oz.-eq. whole grains



68 oz. mozzarella cheese, part-skim, shredded*

106 oz. white cheese sauce*

52 oz. turkey pepperoni, chopped

2 tsp. Italian seasoning

1/2 tsp. garlic powder

136 slices whole-grain bread

2 3/4 cups vegetable oil

1 Combine the mozzarella cheese, cheese sauce, turkey pepperoni, Italian seasoning and garlic powder in a large bowl or mixer. Mix until just combined. Hold cold until ready to assemble sandwiches.

2 To build sandwiches, brush one side of each slice bread with oil to lightly coat.

3 Place 68 slices, oil side down, onto full-size sheet pans.

4 Portion one #12 scoop of the cheese mixture onto the bottom slice of bread. Top with a second slice of bread, oil side up.

5 Set combi oven to 375°F and 100% steam. Bake sandwiches uncovered for

10 minutes or until the bread is toasted and cheese is melted.

6 Hold warm at 135°F or higher until service. Wrap in deli foil for grab 'n' go.

***Notes:** Land O'Lakes Foodservice's Shredded Mozzarella Cheese and Ultimate Creamy White™ Cheese Sauce can be used in this recipe.

Recipe, Photo and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Land O'Lakes Foodservice, www.landolakesfoodservice.com



Servings 100

Per Serving 270 cal., 5 g pro., 3 g fat,
0.3 g sat. fat, 37 g carb., 4 g fiber,
866 mg sod., 14 g sugars

Meal Pattern 2-oz.-eq. meat/meat
2-oz.-eq. whole grains

Hot Cranberry Panini

200 slices sandwich bread, whole-wheat

#10 can cranberry sauce, canned

18 lbs., 2 oz. turkey breast, sliced*

1 On lined sheet trays, lay out two slices of bread for the top and bottom of each sandwich.

2 Portion a #40 scoop (1 Tbsp. + 2 tsps.) of cranberry sauce for each sandwich and spread on both halves of the bread.

3 Slice the turkey into 1 oz. slices and place three on the bottom slice of bread. Top with second slice of bread.

4 Grill in a panini machine for 1 to 1 1/2 minutes until hot and brown. Without a panini press, place 2 sheet pans on top of the sandwiches to weigh them down and facilitate browning. Place in a preheated 375°F oven. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes or until the bread is toasted.

5 Serve immediately or hold at 140°F until service.

***Notes:** Jennie-O Foodservice's VIP Roasted Turkey Breast, Slice-N-Tact, can be used in this recipe.

Recipe, Photo and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Jennie-O Foodservice, www.jennieofoodservice.com

Nacho Burger

30 beef burgers, grilled, frozen, 2 oz. each
15 oz. salsa*
15 oz. cheddar cheese sauce
30 hamburger buns, whole-grain, sliced
1 1/2 cups black beans, drained, rinsed
1 1/2 cups corn, drained, rinsed
1 1/2 cups tomatoes, diced
1 1/2 cups bell peppers, diced
1 1/2 cups onions, diced
3/4 cup lime juice
2 Tbsp. Tajin seasoning
1 7/8 cups or 2.8 oz tortilla chip strips



Serves 30

Per Serving 334 cal.,
22 g pro., 12 g fat,
4 g sat. fat, 36 g carb.,
6 g fiber, 709 mg sod.,
4 g sugars

Meal Pattern 2.25 oz.-
eq. meat/meat alter-
nate, 2 oz.-eq. grains,
1/4 cup vegetables
(1/8 cup red/orange,
1/8 cup additional)

1 In a mixing bowl, combine the black beans, corn, tomatoes, peppers, onions, lime juice and Tajin seasoning. Hold under refrigeration until ready to serve.

2 Heat oven to 350°F and cook beef burgers for 8-9 minutes or until an internal temperature of 165°F. Hold in warmer at 135°F or higher until ready to build burgers.

3 In a saucepan, combine the cheddar cheese sauce and salsa. Keep warm until ready to serve.

4 To build the burgers: Open the sliced buns and lay one burger patty on the bottom bun. Top with 1 oz. cheesy salsa, a #16 scoop of black bean and corn salsa and 1 Tbsp. or 0.1-oz. tortilla chip strips. Replace the top bun and serve.

***Notes:** Red Gold® Nutritionally Enhanced Salsa can be used in this recipe.

Recipe and Photo: Red Gold, www.redgoldfoodservice.com

Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: Rebecca J. Polson, CC, SNS, Instagram: @ChefRebeccaK12

THE EXTRAS

Consider pairing your grilled sandwich with a delicious dip. Variations of **birria**, a classic slow-cooked meat stew from Mexico, were trending on social media not long ago. The key component to adapt is a thick, red, beefy sauce for dipping a taco, quesadilla or burrito. Other dip options to consider include **tomato soup** (the traditional accompaniment for grilled cheese), **marinara sauce** (perfect grilled chicken sandwiches or a pizza-inspired handheld) and the good-with-everything **ranch dressing**.

Finally, if possible, find a way to deliver all-important **grill marks**, even if you don't have access to a grated grill. The visual cue provided by the dark stripes on the bread will put your nose and taste buds on happy alert, of course, but

grill marks also convey the smoky char associated with the best grilled sandwiches (and meats, veggies, produce, etc.) Turn to the internet for tips and tricks on creating these without the classic equipment.

If you read this article soon after it arrives in your mail during January's winter chill, don't be surprised if you suddenly find yourself craving a classic grilled cheese with creamy tomato soup. That's to be expected. But when time allows, hit the grocery store and prep for different bread, cheese and filling combinations that you can enjoy all year long—and adjust, as appropriate, for your school meals program. **SN**

Recipes published in *School Nutrition* have not been tested by the magazine or SNA in a school foodservice setting, except for certain "Kitchen Wisdom" selections, which are evaluated by a volunteer pool of operators. When available, nutrient analyses are provided by the recipe source. The specific brands used may make a difference in nutritional breakdown and meal pattern crediting. Required ingredients, preparation steps and nutrient content make some recipes more appropriate for catering applications or adult meals. Readers are encouraged to test recipes and calculate their own nutrition analyses, meal patterns and HACCP steps.



By Patricia L. Fitzgerald

Don't Go Green—With Envy

» Take steps to address workplace jealousy before it destroys your team.



Ruby is, hands-down, the most popular “lunch lady” with the teens at Washington High School. It seems they’re always lining up at her station, whether she’s serving or cashiering. She knows everyone by name and has a different greeting ritual for each individual kid, maybe a high five, a booty-shaking two-step or a unique call/response exchange. Every year, she’s showcased in the school’s yearbook, often as favorite “teacher.” She gets regular callouts from the student government. The pep squad performs a special cheer whenever she’s spotted in the stands at games. Once, the Homecoming King invited her to be his date at the big dance—and she went!

Ruby has certainly earned her favored status. She goes the extra mile to be sure kids have the best possible cafeteria experience that she personally can provide. She’s a great model of best-in-class customer service.

But Ruby doesn’t enjoy this same popularity among some of her coworkers. Even her manager can be surprisingly cold toward her. She tries to be her same cheerful self around them when meal service is done for the day, but they don’t make it easy. Ruby is a victim of a particularly insidious and destructive workplace monster: jealousy.

Petty Grievances You don’t have to be a mind-reader to guess why Ruby’s coworkers resent her. She’s getting a lot of positive attention and feedback in an environment where school nutrition professionals are often overlooked and disrespected. But let’s employ a little imaginary telepathy to get deeper into the details of their envy.

Emily, another server/cashier: “Of course, she’s popular. She never calls anyone out for their bad behavior, when they’re goofing around and holding up the line, begging for extra potatoes they know I can’t give them, being sarcastic and snarky. They’re *not* all angels, and if their parents are falling down on the job, someone needs to step in, so they turn into respectful adults.”

Blake, who runs the custom deli sandwich station: “I’m not surprised she’s in the yearbook again. I mean, they’re never going to pick the lunch ‘dude,’ right? Plus, I don’t have time to get all buddy-buddy with these kids. Gotta stay focused to keep pumping out these custom orders and make sure they’re right. And they *are* right—every time. Not one complaint, but do I get a gold star from these kids? Of course not. Whatever.”

Lily, who works in the kitchen: “Ruby, Ruby, Ruby. I’m so sick of hearing about how great she is. Even my own nephew Jordan brags about her from time to time. But does he ever say, ‘Hey, Aunt Lil, did you make those awesome teriyaki bowls they served today?’ Of course not. It would be



nice if anyone bothered to let these kids know who actually cooks the meals they love so much.”

Brianna, a server/cashier floater: “I just don’t get it. *I’m* really friendly with these kids. *I* know their names. *I* ask about how things are going at home, in class, with band practice or the field hockey tournament. I get the importance of customer service, and I know the kids like me just fine. Just not as much as her.”

Prisha, the site manager: “Sometimes I wish I had 10 Rubys. Her customer service is off the charts, and when she gets that extra recognition from students, it really elevates our entire team at school and throughout the community. But I know it causes jealousy among some of the others. I have to be really careful not to compliment her too much, or the team might implode.

Jealousy Rears Its Ugly Head

Workplace jealousy can occur when one or more employees feel anxious, insecure and resentful about the talents and achievements of a colleague. It can cause friction, erode morale and lead to a poisonous, unproductive environment. Both those who feel envious and the individual who is the target of their jealousy are affected. It’s one of the most significant lose-lose scenarios that can occur in a work environment.

Do you suspect that someone is jealous of you? Or are you aware of your own feelings of envy for someone else on the team? Although envy is a complex emotion that you can’t turn on and off like a light switch, both of you can, and *should*, take some assertive steps to address the situation. It starts with being aware of your feelings—and being committed to gaining control over them, rather than letting them control you.

Why Am I Jealous and What Can I Do About It?

Most of us know that jealousy is a destructive emotion, so we might be hesitant to admit we’re feeling envious in the first place. Acknowledging our jealousy makes us feel small and petty. “*Why can’t I stop being so self-centered and just be happy for that person’s good fortune?*” Although it might take several years of counseling to get at the complex answers to that question, it is

important to shake off denial and admit that you *are* bothered by another’s achievements.

Confronting the reality of your envy might be enough to strip it of its power, because you really don’t want to be *that* person. It also gives you an opportunity for a little self-reflection about the circumstances of this particular envy and determine if there’s some way you can take back control over your feelings about the situation.

Let’s consider another imaginary scenario. Caterina and Kim both started working in the cafeteria at the same time. Both are good at their jobs, ethical, respected and well-liked by their coworkers. When an opportunity arises to fill a number of manager vacancies across the district, Caterina gets a promotion but Kim does not. In fact, Caterina has been assigned to Kim’s cafeteria and will now be her supervisor!

Kim is, indeed, green with envy. She cycles through some predictable emotions like rage (“It’s not fair”) and suspicion about the merits of the achievement (“She only got the promotion because she’s Latina/younger/prettier/better at sucking up”). Her congratulations to Caterina are half-hearted, and she finds herself consumed by venting her frustrations to any allies she can find.

Hopefully, Kim will soon decide (on her own or with the gentle nudge of one of her friends) to take more productive steps to deal with her disappointment. She could go to the person charged with deciding the promotions and ask for advice about areas where she needs to improve in order to be considered for the next opportunity. Or Kim might invest time in some honest self-assessment and realize that she can

be a bit introverted on occasions where she should speak up and show off her expertise, creative ideas and passion for making this a career and not just a job. Or maybe just the opposite. Kim might come to the conclusion that she was always a little ambivalent about the manager’s role, but because Caterina was applying, she thought it was the expected thing to do.

No matter the specific outcome,





because Kim acknowledged her jealousy and decided to look into it, she’s defanged the green-eyed monster. Instead of focusing on her resentment of something out of her control (Caterina’s success), Kim can concentrate on steps she *can* control to pursue her own goals.

There are some cases of envy that can’t be resolved by reframing the situation and changing your tactics. Take the example we started with at the beginning of this article. Short of some kind of sabotage (*not* a recommended approach!), Ruby’s coworkers can’t compete with her popularity among students—they can’t “make” the kids like them as much as or more than Ruby. So, how can they loosen the hold jealousy has on their emotions? A counselor might suggest digging into why those colleagues feel it’s so important to be well-liked. We’ll leave such psychological forays to the professionals! Instead, return to the notion that owning up to feeling jealous, and realizing this is not how you want to spend your hours in relation to others, can be a helpful step in letting it go and moving on.

It’s No Fun Being the Source of Envy

At some level, we *do* like knowing we’re envied by others. It’s affirming in a backhanded kind of way that addresses our insecurities, sense of pride or competitive spirit. But such an interpretation tends to be more in theory than practice, because when real people in your life are envious of you, they’re not particularly nice.

As the target of another person’s jealousy, you might feel ostracized. You might sense that their

support is insincere or half-hearted. To pump themselves up, they might try to take you down with cutting remarks and excluding behavior that leaves you isolated and alone. It can take a real toll on your happiness and your confidence.

You didn’t ask for this reaction to your achievements, and you certainly can’t control how another person feels. So, what *can* you do to avoid being the subject of envy while still letting your light shine? Here are some suggestions:

Be humble. There is room between being deservedly proud and pleased with your achievements and bragging about them. Be mindful if your success came at a cost to someone else. Was there just one winner among many contenders for the recipe competition or the door decorating contest? You can let loose with an unrestrained celebration when you are off the clock and with friends and family.

But avoid false modesty. When others congratulate you, don’t respond with “I don’t deserve it” or “I can’t imagine how I got so lucky” or “It should have been you/someone else.” Disingenuous remarks like these only serve to feed envy, as others will further resent your insincerity.

Share credit. If others contributed to your success in large or small ways, be sure you acknowledge their role and express your gratitude.

Pay it forward. Make a regular effort to encourage and praise others. Helping others to feel good about their own accomplishments and talents can make them less prone to the insecurities and neediness that prompt a jealous reaction.

Jealousy is a natural human emotion, and we all experience it from time to time. But we can remain mindful of its destructive power, resolving not to let the monster rampage unchecked at work, at home or in any of our relationships. **SN**

Patricia Fitzgerald is editor of School Nutrition.



BONUS WEB CONTENT

Don’t Go Green—With Envy

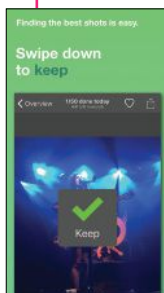
Supervisors have a role in reducing the risk for envious reactions in the workplace. The online extras for this issue will include a look at a few tactics and strategies.

You’ll find these at www.schoolnutrition.org/bonuswebcontent/#articles

This & That

▶ DOWNLOAD THIS

Photo Library App | GETSORTED |



Ever feel as if your photo library on your iPhone is getting out of control? We get it! You need to take a lot of pics, whether it's of the delectable food you're serving on any given day (hello, social media promo!) or the

fun-filled events you hold in your cafeteria on special occasions. The **GetSorted app** makes it easier than ever to unclutter your photo library by giving you the option to sort through all your pics and swipe up to keep them or swipe down to remove them. Download and breeze through your photos today. *Available for iOS devices from Apple's App Store.*

▶ CHECK THAT OUT

Yakisoba Noodles | INTERNATIONAL FOOD

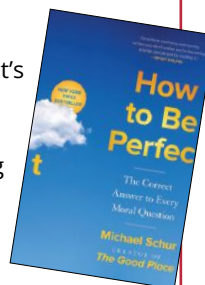
SOLUTIONS | Just when you think pasta couldn't become easier or more versatile, consider **Yakisoba Noodles**, from the Asian Food Solutions line of International Food Solutions. They lend themselves to all kinds of cold and hot recipes, whether that's soup, stir-fries or salads. Made with whole-grain wheat, these noodles meet 1 grain equivalent for each 2.06-oz. serving and contain no trans fat or MSG. www.internationalfoodsolutions.com/products/asian-food-solutions



▶ READ THIS

How to Be Perfect |

MICHAEL SCHUR | Let's just get the obvious out of the way—nobody is ever going to be perfect. And that's part of the humor of Michael Schur's provocative tongue-in-cheek book **How to Be Perfect: The Correct Answer to Every Moral Question**. Beneath the surface of its lighthearted philosophical musings, the book *does* touch on some important points about how to conduct ourselves in an ethical way while navigating a complicated world. *Find it at most major retailers.*



▶ CHECK THAT OUT

Eco Packaging | **BOXED WATER** |

Offering an alternative to the not-so-eco-friendly plastic used for most bottled water products, **Boxed Water** delivers the same to-go convenience in a paper-based, 92% renewable carton. Different package sizes are available, as are a range of flavored waters, including blackberry, grapefruit and lemon. Although water is not a reimbursable meal component, this product is a great a la carte option that will encourage students to stay hydrated at mealtimes and all day long. www.boxedwaterisbetter.com



▶ CHECK THAT OUT

Farm-to-School Stickers | USDA |

Help students embrace farm-to-school activities with colorful, fun **stickers** from USDA. With fun phrases like "Loco for Local!" and "I Dig Local Foods," these stickers promote awareness of local foods and strengthen the relationships between agriculture and your school community. Each roll has 200 stickers, and schools participating in the federal child nutrition programs are eligible to order up to three rolls. www.tinyurl.com/F2SSstickers-SNmag



▶ CLICK THIS

Cafeteria Classroom | **PLANTCARTON LIFE** | Spark creativity, as well as environmental sustainability, by encouraging students to repurpose milk and juice cartons into all kinds of practical and decorative projects. Then, show off their ingenuity by submitting photos of the results! The **Give Cartons Another Life** program from PlantCarton Life includes tips for collecting cartons, instructions for select creations (such as a race car, bird house and pencil holder), nature activities and examples of innovative DIY projects submitted by students. www.plantcartonlife.com/repurposing-cartons



This & That

▶ CHECK THAT OUT

Cafeteria Signage | AMTAB |

You want your cafeterias to be welcoming zones, ones that are boldly attractive and emanate school pride. AmTab has you covered with its flexible options for **décor, graphics and signage** developed to transform your cafeteria into a high-impact dining environment—and ultimately spur more student participation in your meal program. www.amtab.com



▶ CHECK THAT OUT



Cereal Bars | GENERAL MILLS

FOODSERVICE | Combine the good nutrition of breakfast cereal with the convenience of an individually wrapped, eat-with-your-hands snack in these new, larger size, 2.5-oz. **cereal bars** from General Mills Foodservice. Each bar provides 2-oz. equivalent grains and features no high fructose corn syrup. They're available in three favorite flavors: Cinnamon Toast Crunch, Lucky Charms and Peach Cheerios. www.generalmillscf.com/products/business/K-12

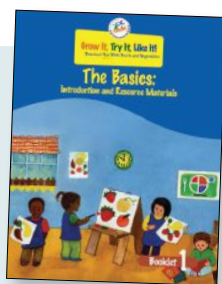
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Reading App | **POCKET** | Does this sound familiar? You're scrolling through your phone and see an article that looks intriguing. You don't have the time or attention to read right at the moment—and then you forget all about it. That's why there's **Pocket**. With this app, you can save all those articles to reference later—even the recipes you want to try out in your cafeteria or the latest innovations happening in school nutrition! www.getpocket.com/en/

▶ CLICK THIS

Nutrition Education | **USDA** | It's time to stop presuming that young kids are predisposed to dislike fruits and vegetables. It's more likely that they are wary of trying something new. The online garden-themed nutrition education program for Pre-K children, **Grow It, Try It, Like It: Preschool Fun with Fruits and Vegetables** from USDA's Team Nutrition, guides you through numerous activities to inspire more adventurous eating. The downloadable 90-page toolkit features lesson plans, coloring pages, activity suggestions, book recommendations and much more. www.tinyurl.com/NutEdToolkit-SNmag



▶ CHECK THAT OUT

Personal Pizzas | SMART

MOUTH FOODS | What kid doesn't love pizza? And when they can get restaurant-quality personal pizzas with their favorite toppings, you can count on increasing participation in your program. **Smart Mouth Foods** provides school cafeterias with everything needed—including a state-of-the-art pizza oven and staff training—to start serving up pie after pie. www.smartmouthfoods.com



SN AD LIST

Barfresh Food Group, 7
Bridgford Foods, 15
Conagra Foodservice, 5
General Mills Convenience & Foodservice, 1
Horizon Software International, 3
J.T.M. Food Group, C4
McKee Foods/Fieldstone Bakery, 28
ProView Foods, by Tasty Brands, 21
Red Gold, C2
Schwan's Food Service, C3
SFSPac Food Safety & Sanitation System, 33
Simplot Food Group, 9
SNA-NSBW 2023, 41
Tasty Brands, 20

▶ CHECK THAT OUT

Paw Patrol Snacks | **CRUNCH PAK** | Snacktime is *paw-some* when kids can enjoy a variety of healthy nibbles and munchies individually portioned in **Paw Patrol-themed packaging**. Developed for the retail segment by Crunch Pak®, these prepackaged snacks are available in three different Lunch Bites combinations and three different Blendz brand drinkable pouch purées. Connection to the popular canine characters make these worth considering as a la carte options for child care and Head Start snack programs. www.crunchpak.com/products/kids-snacking/paw-patrol



Last Word



» meet *Mercedes Rutherford*

FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR » PULASKI COUNTY (KY.) SCHOOLS

Q How long have you been an SNA member, and what was your favorite national conference destination?

A I have been a member of SNA—both national and state—for 20 years. I've attended 10 Annual National Conferences, and my favorite was in San Antonio, Texas, because of its rich, cultural history.

Q What motivated you to choose this profession?

A I started as a substitute cook and fell in love with the job. Being in school nutrition gives me an opportunity to create a positive impact in my community. I took every opportunity and promotion that was offered to me and the rest is history. My favorite area of responsibility is training my staff on how they can provide our students with the best possible lunchroom experience. I love kids and love to feed them. It makes me so happy when I see them enjoy the breakfasts and lunches that we serve them!

Q What is one thing that you can't live without right now?

A My Brooks running shoes—everywhere I go, they always go with me! In fact, if marathon walking was turned into an Olympic sport, I'd earn a medal!

Q What's your favorite way to spend a day off?

A I'd spend much of it with my family—we all have crazy schedules and rarely get to spend time all together. A perfect start would be to have three meals together, cooking, laughing and

trying new foods. Then we might do some kind of activity, such as building furniture or working in the garden—my personal happy place.

Q Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your 18-year-old self?

A Take your time. All good things are worth waiting for. And the best advice I've ever been given is not to sweat the things I cannot control.

Q What was your best vacation, and what's still on the bucket list?

A My favorite vacation was a family trip to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. It was our first family trip that wasn't school- or work-related. We chose Pigeon Forge because it was close, which meant more time to explore the town and restaurants and not be in a vehicle for hours. The trip was filled with forever memories. One bucket-list destination for me is Jerusalem, because of its amazing history.

Q Name three foods you could happily subsist on if marooned on a desert island with a lifetime supply.

A Rice, coconut and watermelon. These foods remind me of my Filipino heritage. We use rice in every meal and add coconut to make a richer and more flavorful dish. And what's better than an in-season sweet watermelon on a hot summer day?

Q What is the strangest food you've ever tried?

A Once when I was in the Philippines, I tried deep-fried bugs. I won't ever eat them again!

Q If a genie granted you three wishes, what would they be?

A First, I want to age gracefully. Second, I'd ask to stay healthy. My third wish would be to end world hunger.



Promo Planner



Celebration Opportunities for School Cafeterias

February 2023

- » American Heart Month
- » Black History Month
- » National Cherry Month
- » Random Acts of Kindness Week (Feb. 14-20)
- » Super Bowl LVII (Feb. 12)
- » National Pancake Day (Feb. 21)

March 2023

- » National Noodle Month
- » National Nutrition Month
- » Women's History Month
- » National School Breakfast Week (Mar. 6-10)
- » **National Spinach Day (Mar. 26)**
- » National Crayon Day (Mar. 31)

April 2023

- » National Grilled Cheese Month
- » National Volunteer Month
- » National Wildlife Week (Apr. 4-8)
- » International Carrot Day (Apr. 4)
- » National Banana Day (Apr. 19)

GET READY: MARCH 26 IS *National Spinach Day!*

Chicken Spinach Alfredo Bake

- 2 lb., 4 oz. chicken, diced, cooked
- 12 oz. spinach, chopped, frozen, thawed
- 1 qt. + 1 cup Alfredo sauce, prepared
- 1 qt. + 1 cup water
- 12 oz. cottage cheese, low-fat
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- 1 lb., 8 oz. rotini, whole-grain, dry
- 12 oz. mozzarella cheese, shredded, low-fat
- 2 tsp. dried parsley

Serves 24 (2/3 cup portions)

Per Serving 278 cal., 25 g pro., 10 g fat, 4.6 g sat. fat, 24 g carb., 3 g fiber, 400 mg sod., 1 g sugars

Meal Pattern 2-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 1-oz.-eq. whole grains

- 1 Spray a 2-in.-deep full-size steamtable pan with pan-release spray.
- 2 In a large mixing bowl, combine the Alfredo sauce and water. Add the diced chicken, thawed spinach, cottage cheese,



garlic powder and black pepper. Stir to combine.

- 3 Add the uncooked rotini pasta to the mixture and stir to combine. Pour the mixture into the prepared pan and top with 12 oz. shredded mozzarella cheese.

- 4 Cover the pan with aluminum foil and bake at 350°F for 50 to 60 minutes.

- 5 Just before serving, sprinkle the dried parsley over the top of the pan.

Recipe, Photo and Nutritional and Meal Pattern Analyses: North Carolina K-12 Culinary Institute, www.tinyurl.com/NCRecipes-SNmag

For more holidays and promo ideas, SNA members can visit www.schoolnutrition.org/promocalendar



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