

Food Safety: A Priority for School Nutrition Programs

Aldine ISD Child Nutrition Services implements and follows local, state and federal food safety standards to ensure the safety of students and staff who participate in school meals. In addition, certified trainers along with supervisor staff check schools daily for proper food safety procedures in the areas of receiving, storage, production, holding and meal service. Cafeteria managers and employees are accountable for daily records of temperatures to ensure food safety is a priority.

The following article from the School Nutrition Association describes the strict standards required, track record for schools, training conducted and diligence practiced.



Dani Sheffield

SNA News

USA Today Reports on Ways to Improve School Food Safety

December 30, 2009 – As part of an ongoing series on school meals, *USA Today's* latest story reports on steps the federal government should take to further improve school food safety. [“Schools could learn lessons on food safety”](#) focuses on purchasing and testing standards for USDA's Commodity Programs.

Through strict food safety procedures and employee training, school nutrition programs maintain an excellent food safety record. The School Nutrition Association has called on the federal government to improve its procedures to provide timely and accurate notifications to schools when they identify a food safety threat.

SNA President Dora Rivas, MS, RD, SNS, executive director of Food and Child Nutrition Services for the Dallas Independent School District in Texas, [provided a quote to USA Today saying](#), “Federal officials must do more to notify schools when they

identify food safety hazards. (The USDA and the FDA should) strengthen recall and food safety communications and bring this system into the digital age.”

Below are talking points on this issue and on how school nutrition programs maintain superior food safety records:

The School Nutrition Association and its 55,000 members believe that food safety is paramount. We support strong food safety standards and the effective enforcement of those standards. Our members care for the children they serve, and through strict food safety procedures and staff training, school nutrition professionals maintain a superior safety record while providing nutritious meals to millions of children each day.

- Just like any parent buying food at a grocery store or a restaurant, schools rely on the federal government to inspect and certify the safety of the foods they purchase and to provide timely and accurate notifications when there is a food safety threat.
- The School Nutrition Association has made recommendations to improve communication with states and school nutrition programs, and to enhance recall systems.

o At a March 2008 briefing before the House of Representatives Education and Labor Committee, former SNA President Mary Hill testified on the critical need for updates to USDA’s recall communication system between the Food and Nutrition Service, states and schools that have received potentially tainted products. Hill called for additional training, guidance and funds to assist schools in responding to recalls.
o SNA has made improvements to the recall system a priority issue in discussions with Congress on the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act.

STAFF FOOD SAFETY TRAINING

- Food safety training for school foodservice staff is often required by state, local or school district mandate, and organizations such as School Nutrition Association (SNA) offer food-safety certifications and specialized training.

o SNA alone has certified over 23,500 school nutrition professionals in food safety and sanitation.

- According to the CDC’s 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study, nearly 87% of school foodservice staff received basic food safety training before they were allowed to prepare or serve food, and in over in 82% of schools, a certified food safety manager was present while food was being prepared and served.
- As part of the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization, SNA supports establishing professional standards for those working in school foodservice, including food safety training for all employees.

HACCP PRINCIPLES

- Since the 2004 Child Nutrition Reauthorization, schools have implemented food safety programs based on national HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) principles to identify and eliminate school food safety hazards at every step - from purchasing and receiving, to storing, preparing and holding.

- Just a few of the multitude of HACCP prevention steps are:

- o Taking at least two internal temperatures from each batch of food being cooked*
- o Maintaining records of cooking, cooling, and reheating temperatures in the food preparation process – the basis for periodic reviews of the overall food safety program*
- o Prechilling all salad ingredients to help maintain cold food temperatures*
- o Preheating transfer carts before food is transported*

AN EXCELLENT FOOD SAFETY RECORD

- Even prior to the adoption of strict HACCP principles, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data indicates school nutrition programs across the country maintain exceptional food safety records.

- o In fact, the CDC's most recent Surveillance for Foodborne-Disease Outbreaks showed that only 4 percent of outbreaks were caused by food consumed at school, whereas food prepared at home caused 20 percent of the outbreaks and restaurant fare caused 50 percent of outbreaks*