# EvaluationGroup, LLC

**North Country**

**Norman, Mahnomen**

**& Polk Public Health**

**Qualitative Assessment**

**of**

**Dietician Consultation Services**

**Provided to Area Schools**

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**Total amount of funds dedicated per school: $**500

**Counties/school(s) receiving services:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **County** | **School District** |
| 1 | Beltrami | Kelliher |
| 2 | Beltrami | Bemidji |
| 3 | Beltrami | Blackduck |
| 4 | Clearwater | Bagley |
| 5 | Norman | Norman County West |
| 6 | Norman | Ada/Borup |
| 7 | Hubbard | Park Rapids |

A number of other schools (8) were offered the opportunity to work with a dietician but declined.

Polk County provided dietician services at two Farmer’s Markets in the county in lieu of working with schools.

**Services Provided:**

Across the region, most dieticians engaged in the following types of activities:

* Menu planning, analysis and certification
  + Reviewing new regulations for breakfast and lunch program with food service directors while making suggestions and updated menus to meet the new regulations.
  + Some dieticians were initially hired to help in certification, but with SHIP they were able to expand their efforts.
    - “Menu certification and compliance is tied to a financial incentive at 6 cents more per meal. Most schools achieve compliance. If schools are having difficulties, the Department of Education will come out and help you if you are really in a bind so that you can get in compliance and get your extra 6 cents. But there are a lot of schools that could use ongoing help.”
  + Documenting appropriate processes necessary in order to ‘prove’ the menu met criteria.
  + Developing production menu worksheets.
    - Constructing breakfast and lunch menus that contained multiple weeks of meals.
* Communicating suggestions and concerns.
  + Talking through concerns about menu changes with Food Service Directors (FSD’s). Identifying which changes would work the best and tweaking some of the menus to better fit the needs of their food program.
* Working with schools on developing and revising their salad bars/veggie fruit bars.
  + More selections, greater offerings to a wider range of students.
* Determining appropriate serving sizes.
* Identifying areas of need.
* Identifying vendors.
* Implementing salad bar changes to offer a greater offering to a wider range of students.
* Assisting food service staff in having a better outlook on their own wellness in order that they might be better able to spread healthy attitudes/behaviors and "sell" wellness to the children they are serving.

***Selected unique site-specific activities***

* At Norman County West, plans were in place to teach in all 7-12 FACS classes about nutrition but those plans changed course midway through planning as the cooks needed more help from the allotted time with new menu guidelines.
  + Ultimately the class at NCW consisted of the dietician visiting with high school seniors on weight management strategies once they graduate. The dietician gave them some ideas for shopping and cooking for themselves, used Ipads in the discussion and looked up nutrient values and calorie contents of different foods. The focus was on eating healthy and being healthy.
* Polk County provided a dietician presence at the Crookston and Mentor Farmer’s Markets. The dietician shared ideas with patrons on ways to incorporate more vegetables into their diet and provided customers with recipes and tips for food preparation, selection and storage. She also distributed colanders and vegetable brushes to aide in food preparation.

**Hours of total work (estimated)**

* On average 15-20 hours per school. (8x15=120; 8x20=160; plus Polk Farmer’s Market hours).
  + On the low end, 10 hours per school, on the high end Kelliher school had over 100 hours of service dedicated (much of it volunteer. Many hours were school supported when the dietician stepped in and managed things for a while because of staff turnover).
* All dieticians interviewed indicated that they could have provided many more hours of assistance to schools given further financial support. They also all indicated that each provided a substantial number of hours above and beyond the amount they were contracted to provide.

**According to the dieticians, what was the most rewarding part their SHIP 2.0 work and why?**

* “Was great watching kids’ faces. They were so happy to have good foods!”
* “Kids’ exposure to new fruits and vegetables. There is always two fresh fruits offerings in our salad bar line and one canned fruit offering. We put in smaller amounts of foods but greater amount of choices. Younger kids hadn’t had an opportunity to have that range of choices. It was fun to see them try new things and see their plates so colorful with fresh fruits and vegetables. The kids were really excited.”
* Helping people prevent chronic diseases.”
  + “In long term care facilities there are plenty of people with diabetes who are amputees. Lots of illnesses are the result of poor diet/lifestyle. To be able to get in on the beginning part of the cycle…it’s really exciting to be able to work with young people at the beginning.”
* How happy the schools were to have someone to help them.
  + “Some FSD’s felt that ‘the state hasn’t given me the best direction’ and so they were delighted that I was there to help.”
* “I don’t think that many of the food service workers have had much food/nutrition education. It was rewarding to be involved because I was able to answer questions, affirm that (in most cases) FSD’s plans/thoughts are right, and bolster confidence that what staff were doing and saying were correct.”
* I think that many school staff felt relieved and encouraged to have contact with a dietician. I gave them resources, ideas, and served as a professional contact.
* Contact with the kids was fun. Kids tell you how it is, like ‘I hate these black beans.’
* “School staff trusted me and viewed me as someone they could come to with questions and talk to. Not just someone who came in and out.”

**Success Story**

When we integrated the veggie bar as part of the food service line it was a huge change. But there was very little resistance by food service staff as all hands were on deck. By the end of the first week, service time was back down to what the staff were used to. Teachers were also a credit by helping prepare kids to appropriately use the fruit and vegetable bar. We had the teachers bring their classes down to the lunchroom so that both the students and teachers could ask questions about the salad bar and its’ appropriate use.

For five and six year old kids, school staff were worried about kids taking too much, or sanitation issues such as dropping something on the floor and putting it back in the bar. However the kids have been good about following directions. Teachers helped enforced the rule that kids eat what they take and we saw incredible drops in food waste. Empowering kids with options has also helped contribute to savings in the food costs and the garbage costs (because the school pays for garbage removal by weight). For example, we used to serve only canned fruits in the food line. For K-3 they just got everything. We would go through 8-10 cans of Mandarin oranges. Now everyone gets to go through the bar, and Mandarin oranges are there but so are other choices, and our usage dropped from 12 cans to 5-6 cans. Granted, there were other options, but less fruit was being thrown away. On occasion, some kids would take what we thought was an excessive portion, but they usually ate it all because they really liked it.

**According to the Dieticians, what was the most challenging part their SHIP 2.0 work and why?**

* Getting in touch with the schools. Some schools took two weeks to get back in contact. “I was wondering if they really wanted to be involved at first. But it could have been partially due to confusion about what services were being offered or just where to start.”
* Sometimes the FSD’s weren’t sure where to start or what to work on. The solution was just to wade through some of the issues like menu changes. It took some working through to get the conversation started. They were not sure if they even needed help at first, but we always found that schools did. I found myself walking into that first conversation and not knowing for sure what they wanted.
  + “I found it helpful in starting the conversation to ask the question, ‘If you hired a dietary professional to come in here and do something, what would you want them to do?’”
* Part of the challenge is the perception of lack of time to do the prep work. Helping food service staff to figure out how to work it in to routines, how important it is for the kids and the need to stay positive.
* “It was important to help food service staff recognize their role in educating the kids. There seems to be a disconnect there at times. Not sure if that happens at a lot of schools. They didn’t see their role as educating kids about nutrition.”
* Cooks now have to prepare meals for three different age groups K-4, 5-8 and 9-12, although most still are cooking for 7-12.
* “The position of food service director/worker has changed so much over the past few years. It’s not just enough to simply be a cook anymore. They really need specialized training. The FSDs and other food service workers are getting some of this through SHIP. The Department of Education has also hosted some useful training events. But there is still plenty of room for confusion and the need for additional support.”
* Menu planning was taking way too much time for the school staff. I helped them create cycle menus. It took more than 15 hours to complete the menu planning. Next year food service staff should not need so much help on this front as they should have all their menus all worked out.

**What work is yet to be done from the Dietician’s? What more would you like to have done?**

* I loved doing nutrition education for food service staff, teachers and the kids.
* Dieticians can bring in the big picture…to remind people it’s about the kids and nutrition.
* Bag lunches that go out, treats, special celebrations…are we making nutrition part of that?
* Education component for food service staff. Bringing in a chef to educate staff.
* Obesity prevention is an ongoing need. Tapping the expertise of a nutritionist or dietician with healthy food selection for schools. Getting into FACS classes.
* Expanding healthy options at concessions...so kids don’t just have to eat a slice of pizza, some popcorn and a PowerAde for supper after practice or before the game.
* Every year or so there are a couple more menu alterations that must occur to meet federal requirements. For example, in approximately 7-10 years there has to be far less sodium. In the next couple years, less fat. Menu change requirements are not going to go away.
* Following up and continuing work. “We dropped in for a certain amount of hours and helped guide food service staff in the right direction, but changes happen. A dietician would be handy to have available to act as an ongoing consultant to ask questions and have access to. Questions about types of foods and acceptability. Having reoccurring check-in’s would be nice. There is enough food service staff turnover to make this a real need.”
* “More than just a few visits between dietician and school food service staff are needed. You can start to create a deeper relationship with their staff and build rapport. For those schools where I have more time it’s a positive experience for me and for them.”

**Suggestions for SHIP 3.0 and Beyond**

* Consider allotting more time and finances for dietician staff to provide support to schools in future efforts. There could be a range of involvement on the continuum from only one/two consultations to basically hiring a dietician on staff. Findings suggest that more than a few visits would be beneficial.
* Use dieticians to reach out to school FACS classes and provide additional teaching/educational support where schools express an interest.
* Provide follow-up support via dieticians for school food service staff who have questions, want to make modifications, etc.
* Focus on assisting schools with implementing concession menu items that are healthy. Don’t focus on taking away unhealthy items. Spend time on identifying healthy additions. Possibly locally grown items.
* Bring professional chef(s) into school settings to provide on-site training to staff one-on-one.
* Don’t assume that because schools seem uninterested at first that it means they do not want or need help. They may be confused about what a nutritionist can offer or bring to their school.
* Consider hiring one dietician responsible for being a county-wide representative that conducts periodic visits, and acts as a person to access to ensure that everything is functioning smoothly. A similar model to WIC. If there are new things coming out then the regional coordinator becomes the expert resource.
* Incorporate expertise, knowledge and experience of dieticians in planning and implementing future food service worker training opportunities.
* At a recent food service worker training, top rated barriers to utilizing more fresh foods in school meals were prep time, cost, cooler space, prep space and getting kids to try new foods.
  + Assist schools in promoting taste test challenges and promoting healthy foods and lifestyle