SCHOOL NUTRITION INCENTIVE PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Revised August 2008

1. **What exactly is the School Nutrition Incentive Program?**

For schools that agree to implement the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools (revised July 2008)*, the Governor's investment will provide higher reimbursement rates for every breakfast and lunch served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

The PDE nutrition standards can be accessed at the following link: www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition. Click on the School Nutrition Incentive section and look for the nutrition standards document. The nutrition standards are also on PEARS Forms Download, School Nutrition Incentive Section.

2. **What additional reimbursements can schools expect to earn if they adopt and implement, at a minimum, the *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools*, and how do these reimbursement rates compare with the current state reimbursement rates?**

Please refer to the table below.

State Reimbursement Rates When *Not* Implementing the School Nutrition Incentive Program	**State Reimbursement Rates When Implementing the School Nutrition Incentive Program**
Breakfasts Served 10 cents	**Breakfasts Served 11 cents**
Lunches Served 10 cents **(School does not participate in the School Breakfast Program)**	**Lunches Served 11 cents** **(School does not participate in the School Breakfast Program)**
Lunches Served 12 cents **(School serves breakfast to less than 20% of enrolled students)**	**Lunches Served 14 cents** **(School serves breakfast to less than 20% of enrolled students)**
Lunches Served 14 cents **(School serves breakfast to 20% or more of enrolled students)**	**Lunches Served 17 cents** **(School serves breakfast to 20% or more of enrolled students)**

3. **What does my school district or non-public school have to do to qualify for the extra reimbursement from the School Nutrition Incentive Program?**

The PDE nutrition standards must be implemented prior to receiving the supplemental state reimbursement.

4. **How will I report to the PDE that a school is implementing or not implementing the *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools*?**

First, a Local Wellness Policy Amendment form must be submitted to the PDE. (Go to www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition and click on the School Nutrition Incentive Section to get the Wellness Policy Amendment Form.)

Second, update your National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Sponsor Application and Site Information in CN PEARS, concerning commitments to implement (or not implement) the *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools*.

Third, certify on your monthly Claims for Reimbursement that you are implementing, at a minimum, the revised *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools* if you are claiming higher state reimbursement rates.

5. **Are we required to implement the *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools* as written, or are we permitted to "tweak" them?**

In order to receive the increased state meal reimbursements, your school board, administrators and Wellness Policy Committee must commit to implementing, at a minimum, the *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools*. You are permitted to "tweak" the guidelines as long as the outcome is that the nutrition standards will be ***more*** stringent than what is currently allowable under the state's *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools*.

6. **The revised *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools* provide criteria for various areas where food may be available in the school. We don't have any a la carte or vending machine foods available to students during the school day, so do we qualify for the supplemental reimbursement?**

Yes, schools that don't offer foods in the areas that we have specified in the nutrition standards are actually exceeding PDE's *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools* in those specific areas (i.e., vending machine snacks and a la carte food snacks).

7. **Is the NSLP sponsor required to implement the PDE's *Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools* in all school buildings, within the LEA, to earn the additional state meal reimbursements through the School Nutrition Incentive Program, or can the sponsor earn the additional reimbursements on a school-by-school basis?**

NSLP sponsors earn the additional meal reimbursements on a school-by-school basis. For example, if the NSLP sponsor chooses to implement the PDE's Nutrition Standards in elementary and middle schools, but not the high school, the NSLP sponsor can claim additional meal reimbursements, through the School Nutrition Incentive Program, for the elementary and middle schools on CN PEARS.

8. **Will it cost more to implement these nutrition standards? Will students purchase less food?**

The PDE continues to document revenue improvements among schools that are taking steps to promote healthier nutrition habits among their students. Examples include:

- In Mechanicsburg Middle School, Karin Marlin, Food Service Director, decreased the number of beverage offerings and switched from milk cartons to 8 ounce plastic bottles. As a result, students are choosing more milk. There was a 10% increase in milk purchases from November 2005 to November 2006 and a 2% increase in reimbursable meal participation for the first four months of the 2006-07 school year. Students like the design and "cool" look of the milk bottles. Karin's advice is that food service directors should not be intimidated by the higher cost of plastic milk bottles. She states, "Students will purchase more milk and your reimbursable meals will increase."

Evidence from across the country shows that selling healthier food can actually increase revenue. A study in California found that:

- "Total revenue increased at the majority of schools because increases in meal revenues more than compensated for any losses in competitive food and beverage sales." In fact, 65% of the schools studied increased their combined meal and competitive food sales by more than 5%.

- "When students buy more meals and fewer snack foods, food service revenues increase."

- "It appears that the implementation of nutrition standards for competitive foods and beverages benefited school food service departments financially because, although the students purchased less competitive foods and beverages, they purchased more meals instead. This trend likely benefited students by decreasing their consumption of snack foods and sweetened beverages in favor of more balanced meals."

The following links provide examples of schools reporting positive nutrition and revenue outcomes after modifying competitive foods available to students:

http://nutrition.psu.edu/projectpa/CCNPLR/pdfs/NJ_Hap_Schools.pdf

http://nutrition.psu.edu/projectpa/CCNPLR/pdfs/SuccessfulChanges.pdf

9. **If we decide not to implement the nutrition standards, but we change our minds, and begin to implement the standards in January, will we be able to receive the increased meal reimbursement rates from the time we implement the standards?**

Yes. You may submit the Local Wellness Policy Amendment Form any time during the school year. You will not be eligible for the supplemental state reimbursement until the Division of Food and Nutrition receives this form and you have revised your CN PEARS Sponsor Application and Site Information.

If we receive this form by the 14th of the month, you will be able to receive the supplemental reimbursement for the entire month. If we receive the form on the 15th of the month or after, you will be eligible for the reimbursement for the following month.

10. **Why is the Commonwealth offering an incentive for sponsors of the National School Lunch Program to implement the PDE's nutrition standards when the federal government does not require sponsors to regulate the sale of competitive foods?**

Federal law requires schools to adopt and implement nutritional standards for competitive foods as part of the local level wellness policy. This is a federal mandate and not optional.

The School Nutrition Incentive Program is a *state* initiative designed to help public and non-public sponsors of the National School Lunch Program implement standards that will benefit students. Schools get extra reimbursement through the School Nutrition Incentive when they implement the PDE Nutrition Standards.

Participation in the state School Nutrition Incentive Program is voluntary. Sponsors of the National School Lunch Program in Pennsylvania are required to implement PDE's Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools only if they wish to earn additional state meal reimbursements through the School Nutrition Incentive Program. The decision to implement or not implement PDE's Nutrition Standards remains at the local level.

11. **How will the PDE monitor our compliance with the Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools?**

Compliance will be measured as part of the existing Coordinated Review Effort- School Meal Initiative (CRE-SMI) process conducted by PDE, Division of Food and Nutrition staff.

12. **I see there is an optional "Best Practice" included in the revised nutrition standards. Will we be required to implement those standards to receive the supplemental state reimbursement in School Year 2009-10?**

No, sponsors are not required to implement the "Best Practice" or optional standards. They are provided as recommendations for schools interested in continuing to improve the nutrition environment once they have implemented the revised nutrition standards.

13. **My school district is unclear about the connection between the federal mandate to develop and implement local level wellness policies and the School Nutrition Incentive Program that would provide additional state reimbursements to schools implementing the PDE's Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools. Can you please explain?**

Yes. A timeline and historical context follows:

- The federal Child Nutrition and WIC Authorization Act of 2004 requires all sponsors of the National School Lunch Program to develop and implement wellness policies by School Year 2006-07. According to federal law, sponsors are required to include and implement nutritional standards that address all food available to students throughout the school day in their wellness policies. The objective is to involve sponsors of the

National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs in addressing the childhood overweight and obesity epidemic.

- In response to requests from sponsors of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in Pennsylvania, the PDE developed our "original" *Guidelines for Nutritional Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools*. These voluntary standards for competitive foods were shared with all NSLP sponsors in School Year 2004-05.

- In early 2007, Governor Rendell proposed the School Nutrition Incentive Program that provides additional state meal reimbursements to schools implementing PDE's competitive food standards in their local level wellness policies.

- In July of 2007, Governor Rendell signed HB 842 that includes the School Nutrition Incentive Program. The language in HB 842 is now included in the Pennsylvania School Code.

14. **Who can we contact in the PDE, Division of Food and Nutrition, with additional questions?**

The following individual can be contacted with questions about the **School Nutrition Incentive Program**:

Evelyn Arnold
earnold@state.pa.us
1-800-331-0129, Ext. 2766533

The following individuals can be contacted with questions about the **content** of **PDE's Nutrition Standards**:

Evelyn Arnold
earnold@state.pa.us
1-800-331-0129, Ext. 2766533

Diane Kraft (Wednesday through Friday)
dkraft@state.pa.us
1-800-331-0129, Ext. 572383