

Setting the Stage for Service

A school nutrition program's goal is not only to provide meals but also to provide good customer service in a pleasant environment. Making the dining experience more positive can include anything from running the service line efficiently so students have adequate time to eat, to cooking food on-site to create appealing aromas.

Improving the atmosphere of the dining room can make meal periods more enjoyable for school nutrition staff and customers. Here are some ways to create a more pleasant dining experience:

1. **Maintain a clean and attractive serving line.**

Remember, customers eat with their eyes first – the food must look good.

2. **Be positive and friendly in interactions with customers.**

This includes attitude, expression, tone of voice, and appearance.

3. **Decorate the dining room and serving line according to season.**

Keep in mind the customers' ages and grade levels.

4. **Try to remember customers' names.**

Going the extra mile for customers leads to better perceptions of service.

5. **Respond to the needs, wants, and wishes of customers.**

It is important to help students meet their nutritional goals while also providing foods they like to eat.

Quick Tip: What are some ways to determine and fulfill the needs and wants of customers?

Answers:

- Implement customer service programs for school nutrition employees.
- Form youth advisory councils.
- Conduct student satisfaction surveys or questionnaires.
- Involve students in planning and/or production of meals.
- Listen to and address customer complaints.

Source: National Food Service Management Institute. (2008). *Growing your professional skills: Competencies, knowledge, and skills for successful school nutrition assistants*. University, MS: Author.

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