

OPERATOR SPOTLIGHT

Working at the Heart of Your Menu™
School



Someone you should know: Karen Crawford, Nutrition Education Coordinator, Gwinnett County, Georgia.

Tyson Foodservice: Karen, how large is your district and what is your breakfast program like today?

Karen Crawford: We serve about 55,000 breakfasts every day in 126 schools around our district. We serve 126,000 lunches, so our breakfast percentage is a little above the national average. Our current breakfast ADP is 34%, but with our new district wide menu program, we hope to improve that even more.

TFS: How long have you had a breakfast program in Gwinnett County?

KC: We've had a breakfast program of some kind for well over 15 years here. It's always been an integral part of our program. Currently we have 52% of our students qualifying for free and reduced price meals, so our meal programs have really become an integral part of the community we serve with families counting on our program for their children.

TFS: Have there been any major changes in your program recently?

KC: Oh yes, this is our first year with a district-wide menu for all our meals. In the past every school worked out its own menu. Of course they all met nutrition standards, but it made planning and acquisition a nightmare trying to match suppliers with so many different menus. Now we have a single menu for all 126 schools and procurement has become far more efficient.

TFS: What were some of the major challenges you faced in moving to a single district menu?

KC: Our district has a real variety of venues for breakfast. Some are more traditional like the cafeteria, but we have a growing number that offer Grab 'N Go and breakfast in the classroom. Any district-wide menu has to take that variety into account. That's why we focus on a lot of handheld breakfast items and IW (Individually Wrapped) breakfast sandwich options as well as cereal pouches and bars. Of course we have a good selection of seasonal fruit at every school as well.

TFS: How has Tyson been able to help you with your breakfast program?

KC: As I mentioned, handheld breakfast sandwiches are very popular with our students as well as our staff, since they are easy to prepare with the tight prep time we have for breakfast. We use Tyson whole muscle chicken filets and several of their chicken patties for different breakfast sandwiches. Combined with our own freshly made "proof and bake" biscuits, they are a student favorite.

TFS: Have you run any special breakfast promotions?

KC: We always put together a big promotion for National School Breakfast Week, March 7 through 11, 2011. It's a great opportunity to showcase new items and try different things with our students. It's a lot of fun for all of our schools with new promotion materials both in the cafeterias and on the serving lines and kiosks. It's been very successful at helping build our ADP.

TFS: Any suggestions for other districts putting together a promotion?

KC: Absolutely! Start organizing at least two months ahead. It takes time to put together a good promotion and coordinate things. With that lead-time you can bring your best suppliers into the program with you and it gets better and better.

Also, make sure you cover things like pre-event signage for the halls, in the cafeteria and the serving lines. Write some fun announcement scripts for the intercom in the morning for the week leading up to the event, focusing on the special breakfast items that will be offered.

TFS: Do you do anything special promotionally for the different grade levels?

KC: Oh yes. For our younger students the focus is always on nutrition education so we use age-appropriate posters and offer premiums that are safe for younger students. For our middle and high schools we have had laptop computers raffled off where any student buying a lunch or breakfast can enter for the drawing. We have also done some premiums for the middle and high schools where the school name or mascot was on a pen, pencil or stress ball. The students love premiums and so do we, as long as they are safe and aren't promoting a specific brand name. It's all about reminding them about the school feeding program and the quality of the nutrition and knowing that some of that education is going to reach their home and the community in general.

Past operator interviews:

• Jim Hemmen, CNS Supervisor, Roosevelt School District, Phoenix, AZ (PDF)

• Adriane Robles, Director of Nutrition Services, City Unified School District, San Bernadino, CA (Video)

