

The **Smithville ISD Child Nutrition Department (CND)** strives to provide healthy meals to the children of Smithville ISD by incorporating nutritional foods and nutrition education.

The following are the highlights of the 2022-23 school year:

**School Nutrition Program**- It was so good to be back to normal meal service for our students after the pandemic. The department came back with lots of new meal options as well as new recipes. The students continue to eat school meals and our numbers were back to pre-COVID days. The only downfall was the fact that meals were no longer free to all students. Going back to paid meals did cause a lot of stress on our families and department with lunch charges and debt. We realized that many parents of students 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and below have never paid for school meals, so it has been a big adjustment to their household budgets. We continue with the process of not refusing a meal to a student.

**The Hungry Tiger Fund** was set up this year to help offset the meal debts and give some relief to families struggling to pay for school meals if they did not qualify for the Free Meals. We were very fortunate to have \$2,727.69 donated from local organizations, A+ Credit Union and local community members. We are continuing to campaign for this fund in the 23-24 school year.

**Summer Nutrition Program**- The Child Nutrition Department did continue to serve meals during the summer months as in previous years. This summer we were required to go back to congregate service. We continued to serve the community from the following locations: MLK Park, Bluebonnet Circle, Rec Center, Elementary, Jr High and High School Cafeterias. We served during the months of June and July.

**Meals for Parents and Community**- We were able to start back a few of our traditions this year. We had Thanksgiving Dinner for parents and community members in November and then Pastries for Parents. These were both offered at Elementary and Brown.

**School Gardens**- This department continued the partnership with the Elementary, Jr. High and High School by paying for a support employee, Mr. Richard Lowry, to facilitate these school gardens. We were excited about the progress at the High School garden this last year as the amount of produce grown for the cafeteria. The vegetables are then served in each of the school cafeterias as part of their daily lunch. The herbs grown are used in the meal preparation. We are especially excited this year about the Grow Towers in Brown, Elementary and Jr. High. The students watch the lettuce and herbs grown and then the students harvest it for their salads. We have seen a tremendous increase in students taking fresh vegetables grown in these gardens. The Elementary Garden and Grow Tower were highlighted in a statewide cohort video meeting. We also welcomed many visitors from different organizations and service centers.

**SHAC-** The department has an active part in SHAC, promoting and educating the community about the updates in the department as well as providing nutritional lunches and nutrition information.

**Grants:** Due to the continual food shortage USDA has offered districts a supply grant. This grant is to be used to purchase domestic minimal processed foods. We are happy to say Smithville has been able to take advantage of this grant and used it to purchase milk and Fresh Produce this school year.

We were also fortunate to receive a grant from the No Kid Hungry Organization. This grant has been essential in paying for us to have cooking class during the summer with a take home cookbook. We were featured in a National Media Bliss with No Kid Hungry when we did a cooking demonstration at one of our after school programs. We continue to use the grant to procure additional fresh product from local farmers and also purchase new equipment to process and preserve this produce. We also purchased signs to help educate the students at Brown and Smithville Elementary School about healthy eating.

Changes continue to come but as a department we are open to these changes and discovering new ways to implement them. Our latest challenge is the reduction of sodium in the menus. We continue to work on offering a tasty and appealing meal that meet the USDA requirements while appealing to the student's taste.

Thank you for your support of the Smithville Child Nutrition Department.

Submitted September 12, 2023 by Candy Biehle, Child Nutrition Director