

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 2023-24 school year:

School Nutrition Program- We offered a lot of changes for this school year. We made more choices available for our high school students. We offered more fresh produce in all grade levels with salad bars available to junior high and high school students. We were honored at an annual Texas Department of Agriculture meeting in May for participation in the Farm Fresh Challenge.

We received a grant from USDA for Local Food for Schools. This grant helps the district purchase more “Texas” products. We have purchased fresh fruits and vegetables as well as olive oil, eggs and honey from Texas Farmers. Our plan for the 24-25 school year is to purchase fresh beef, especially briskets, for our secondary schools.

We started a promotion at Brown and Elementary schools called “Try it Thursday”. This is the day that we introduce Texas produce that students may have never tried before, such as rainbow carrots and watermelon radishes.

We help sponsor the “Eating the Alphabet” at Brown Primary. We taught Elementary students about “Fusion Foods”. We helped Pre-K with many cooking projects during the year.

We introduced the secondary students to different foods from other cultures such as a Mediterranean menu.

Nutrition Education was also one of our goals for this year and we promoted this with many posters as well as fun handouts and cook books to students.

We joined in the ACE Program Trunk or Treat giving away healthy snack cookbooks and healthy snack items. We promoted our Child Nutrition Department in the Smithville Lighted Christmas Parade with milk and cookies for Santa.

I was invited to attend a National No Kid Hungry Summit in Maryland to represent Texas and to be able to speak personally with USDA about the importance of Non Congregate Summer Meals. I was also honored to be asked by USDA to present at the National School Nutrition Conference in Boston. There were only 3 directors asked to present Texas, Louisiana and Kentucky.

The Hungry Tiger Fund was set up 2 years ago 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. I spoke to the Smithville Noon Lions club about our program as well as our HTF. We were very fortunate to go from \$2,727.69 in 22-23 to \$7,743.75 donated from local organizations, A+ Credit Union, Smithville Noon Lions Club, local community members and parents this year. Parents are able to donate through our online meal payment program and this year they donated \$143.75. We are continuing to campaign for this fund in the 24-25 school year.

Summer Nutrition Program- The Child Nutrition Department did continue to serve meals during the summer months with both congregate, non-congregate and hybrid meal service. This summer was a wonderful year for the program. This was due to us being able to go back to serving Non Congregate Meals. It was a lot more work, especially paperwork but it was worth the effort. We served the months of June and July and served 7,639 meals in June and 5,509 meals in July. In previous years we served 25 meals a day in the month of July. We were chosen for a "Ride Along" by No Kid Hungry. We were honored to be accompanied by representatives for No Kid Hungry, Texas Department of Agriculture and 2 media outlets. We were also visited by Representative Stan Gerdes on this day. KXAN and KUT news outlets came and filmed our program. The story made multiple news outlets as well as Yahoo News. We employed 5 adult workers and 7 students. They served in the 100+ degree heat and numerous rain days. We continued to serve the community from the following locations: MLK Park, Bluebonnet Circle, Rec Center, Elementary, Jr High, Rosanky Community Center and Lake Thunderbird Community Center. We served during the months of June and July.

Meals for Parents and Community- We had successful parent participation this year. We had Thanksgiving Dinner for parents and community in November and then Pastries for Parents. These were both offered at Elementary and Brown.

School Gardens- The Child Nutrition 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. Mr. Lowry worked with the Elementary to plant and harvest carrots and other vegetables. He also did garden education and taste testing in Elementary classrooms. We have shared many pictures and videos with other organizations as well as schools that wanted to know more about our program.

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.

Food and paper good prices continue to be a biggest challenge for the department. We are continually working to find the best prices for the items we serve without compromising the quality of food that we proudly serve at Smithville ISD.

USDA 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 meets the USDA requirements while appealing to the student's taste.

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

Submitted September 10, 2024 by Candy Biehle, Child Nutrition Director