

Illini Central School Board Update

October '25

Jennifer Harrison, Director of Food Services

1.) The School Breakfast Expansion grant - SY25/26 I was awarded for the district funds used to replace a double door reach-in cooler that suffered compressor issues that could not be repaired. Installation was completed in September. The total cost was \$6875 covered 100% by grant funds.

Last year, SY24/25, I was awarded for the district an amount of \$10,000 to purchase a new convection oven for the kitchen.

2.) Meal Participation - Meal participation numbers from August and September show nonstop increases year over year!

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Breakfast	3869	5195	5923	6345
Lunch	11959	13354	13811	14648

3.) Food costs continue to rise and remain at the forefront. Factors I use to help control these costs are:

- Accurate ordering - Knowing the usage and keeping production history records helps in knowing how much is needed and reduces the size of the inventory on hand.
- USDA commodities - We use commodities as much as possible by planning menus around anticipated shipments. This helps with reducing bottom line food expenditures.
- Cost Research - By comparing prices on items between our two suppliers Kohl Wholesale and Sysco, I am able to get the best cost. Because produce and meat prices fluctuate weekly, this often results in substantial savings so it is important to take the time to research the savings.
- Preparing the right amounts of food - We use production history records to help determine how much food to prepare avoiding overproduction and waste.
- Inventory control and organization - Knowing where items are works best when implementing the first in/first out method. Food logs track quantities of items to prevent over ordering and better control food costs
- Offer versus Serve - Is the meal method used in our district. This allows the students to create a reimbursable meal that contains the required items yet forgo additional items they do not want or will not eat. A reimbursable meal contains at least 3 food components with one being a fruit or vegetable.
- Portion control - We follow state guidelines when serving meal components. Over serving results in unnecessary food waste and higher food costs.

Ways the cafeteria is maintaining fiscal responsibility:

- Offering a variety of a la carte items. To the HS/MS the smart snack chips variety are a favorite. Homemade items such as apple nachos, parfait assortments, yogurt fruit cups, veggie/ fruit trays, salads, and wraps sell out daily. Also, hot a la carte items such as super slice pizza, popcorn chicken, and Bosco breadsticks have been a huge hit. For the GS we have Frozen Friday offering ice cream to 3rd through 5th grade every Friday.

- Maximizing on seasonal trends and holidays. For example adding fall flavors to items such as pumpkin spice muffins, pumpkin bars, cinnamon apples/ applesauce, We make a la carte items festive by adding holiday sprinkles and colored sugars to the rice krispies, sugar cookies, and cakes.
- Introducing new menu items. Keeps the menu fresh and exciting. This can increase participation which leads to higher claim reimbursements.
- Encouraging complete meals that are free under CEP rather than buying just the main entree. Guide students on how to choose food options to make a reimbursable meal so it can be claimed.
- Planning menus that are not only nutritious but also appealing to the eye. I try to incorporate a variety of fruits and vegetables that bring color to the plate. If the food looks good and smells good then that's half the battle to getting students to eat well.

4.) LFS Funds - Local Foods for Schools funds. This program will continue until January 2026. I requested an additional \$3,000 for our schools. For a total of \$6,500.00 to be used towards the purchase of unprocessed or minimally processed foods that are locally grown and are from local producers for the distribution to schools. The USDA's Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS) are funds available to all schools that opt-in and also operate under the NSLP and SBP.

- **Program Goal:** To increase purchases from local producers, small businesses, and socially disadvantaged farmers/ producers in order to build a more resilient local food chain by expanding and strengthening local and regional markets.
- **District Benefit:** This program provides to us \$6,500.00 towards the purchase of unprocessed or minimally processed foods that are locally grown and are from local producers for the distribution to schools. Our district has utilized these funds by receiving chicken and pork from 4 Lees Farms located in Virginia, Illinois.

5.) Food Establishment Inspection - Our inspection on August 27, 2025 showed a 100% compliance with positive comments noted by the inspector. A copy of the latest detailed inspection is posted by the kitchen entrance.

6.) Lanter Distributing rebate checks- We can expect a rebate check from Lanter in the amount of \$3710.08 for reimbursement of district paid delivery fees for government commodities for the 24/25 school year.

7.) National School Lunch Week is Oct. 14-17. During this week we serve up some of the students' favorites! Ex. Asian Chicken, Corn Dog , French Fries, Roasted Chicken Legs, Chicken & Noodles, Fiestada Pizza