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TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Frances N. O'Donnell, Coordinator

SUBJECT: New York State School Meals Initiative Update
By Sandra Sheedy
New York State Education Department
Child Nutrition Program Administration

The New York State Education Department (NYSED), Child Nutrition Program Administration (CNPA) office located in Albany administers the United State Department of Agriculture's (USDA) School Meals Initiative (SMI). The SMI team consists of six staff members who travel Statewide to conduct SMI reviews, which are independent of and in addition to the Coordinated Review Effort (CRE). School Food Authorities (SFAs) are informed at the beginning of the school year that they will receive an SMI review and are invited to attend regional SMI information/preparation meetings (which occurred this year in October, 2004).

The School Meals Initiative is an ongoing effort to bring meals served under USDA's Child Nutrition Programs into compliance with the 1995 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and certain nutrition standards (using the 1995 Recommended Daily Allowances). SFAs participating in the federal Child Nutrition Programs have an SMI review in one recipient agency once every five years. We are currently in year two of the second five year federal cycle.

It is not necessary for the State Agency to return to the recipient agency chosen for review in cycle one in cycle two as it is assumed that all changes made as a result of technical assistance provided in cycle one would have been applied SFA-wide. If you have not done so recently, please refer to your cycle one SMI report to ensure that changes that were agreed upon are occurring. If you need a copy of your cycle one review, please call the Child Nutrition office and one will be sent.

In April of 2004, the SMI team attended national training in Philadelphia, PA to discuss changes/additions to the SMI process. Updated SMI documents were developed based on changes and additions prompted by the first five year USDA SMI cycle. These documents were then revised based on feedback received during the national training and two of the three documents were distributed in final form to State Agencies administering the SMI in September, 2004.

One of the two revised documents, *Nutrient Analysis Protocols*, will be distributed to SFAs upon printing. This manual establishes procedures and protocols to conduct accurate nutrient analyses and was designed for SFAs using Nutrient Standard Menu Planning, SFAs using Food Based Menu

Planning that conduct their own nutrient analyses, and for the State Agency for use in conducting nutrient analyses for SFAs using one of the Food Based Menu Planning options.

The second document is for use by State Agency reviewers and updates the current *Reviewer's Guide to SMI Nutrition Reviews and Technical Assistance*. This manual is for State Agency use only and therefore will not be distributed to SFAs.

The third document, *The Road to SMI Success, A Guide for Foodservice Directors* will be available in final form and ready for distribution to SFAs by February, 2005. This manual is new and was developed to assist foodservice directors, supervisors and managers successfully implement USDA SMI regulations within the scope of daily practice. *The Road to SMI Success* replaces USDA's Healthy School Meals Training and serves as a compliment to USDA's Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals.

The issue of weighted averages versus simple averages when doing Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP) was resolved as a result of Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Programs and allows SFAs using NSMP to continue using simple averages when conducting nutrient analyses through September 30, 2009.

Although Reauthorization allows for schools using NSMP to continue to use simple averages when conducting nutrient analyses, we will not accept nutrient analyses conducted using simple averages for the purposes of the SMI.

If an SFA using NSMP chooses to use simple averages, the nutrient analysis will be considered for the SFAs use only. When the SMI is scheduled, the SFA must provide the State Agency with all of the necessary documents in order for the State Agency to conduct the analysis using weighted averages, including production records, standardized recipes, food labels and product specifications for all items served as part of the reimbursable meal. The NYSED CNPA office strongly recommends SFAs with NSMP conduct nutrient analyses using weighted averages, as this provides the SFA with information that is not only more accurate and meaningful, but meets all of the standards of the SMI in New York State.

One item discussed at the national training included a change to the current SMI review instrument, which now includes additional questions addressing the SFAs efforts in regard to nutrition education and development of policies that promote a healthy school environment. Due to the focus on childhood overweight and obesity, SFAs are asked to describe current activities that promote a healthy school environment, including established policies regarding vending machines, concession stands and school stores. This instrument also asks the SFA to list a la carte offerings and to specify those that are low in fat and high in nutrients. This document will be faxed to SFAs prior to the on-site SMI review so that all staff involved in promoting nutrition education and developing policy will be able to share current activities.

We have set thresholds for sodium, cholesterol and fiber as USDA has not established Recommended Daily Allowances for these nutrients for lunch, but requires their tracking. Beginning in the 2003-04 school year, year one of SMI cycle two, these items were included in the improvement plans and corrective action is required for sodium in excess of 1,500 milligrams,

cholesterol in excess of 150 milligrams, and fiber less than 5 grams per meal, on average. These nutrients were not addressed during the first SMI cycle, but your first cycle SMI nutrient analysis contains this information. You can assess where your menu falls in regard to these nutrients and you can call us for technical assistance prior to your second cycle review.

Please ensure that you are keeping adequate production records that include all items served as part of the reimbursable meal, including condiments; that you have standardized recipes that detail portion size and number of portions for all items that include more than one ingredient; and that you have current nutrient labels for all prepared foods, i.e., chicken nuggets, hamburgers, breads/rolls, etc. Also ensure that if you are conducting nutrient analyses for NSMP that you are entering local products into the database rather than simply choosing a close approximation from the list within the USDA software.

It is strongly recommended that you buy USDA software updates when available to ensure that you are using the most current USDA commodity database. It is also important to note that USDA software vendors are no longer approved if they do not submit commodity updates on a regular basis, and that this software would no longer be considered approved by the State Agency for use under NSMP. In the 2003-04 school year, KTRAK did not submit updates and therefore is no longer an approved USDA software vendor. If you have been using KTRAK to conduct nutrient analyses for NSMP, you must purchase a new software package in order to continue planning menus under NSMP. If you choose not to purchase new software, you must return to food based menu planning, and must ensure that you are serving the required components in the required minimum quantities. If you return to Food Based Menu Planning, you may use the KTRAK software to evaluate menus for informational purposes and SFA-use only.

Any questions regarding the SMI process and review protocols can be referred to Sandra Sheedy and the SMI team. They can be contacted by phone at (518) 473-1525, or by mail at SMI Team, New York State Education Department, Child Nutrition Program Administration, 89 Washington Avenue, Suite 55, Albany, NY 12234.