

# Healthier Meals Administrator Guidance Sheet

## Colorado's Healthier Meals Initiative

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Child and Adult Care Food Program (CDPHE- CACFP) is committed to improving the nutritional quality of meals served to children and adults in participating child care centers, family day care homes, at-risk after-school programs, adult day care centers and shelters. According to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, "Children are a particularly important focus because of the growing body of evidence documenting the vital role that optimal nutrition plays throughout the lifespan."

Currently, far too many children consume diets that are high in calories that lack adequate nutrients and have a decreased opportunity for physical activity (2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans). In 2012, one of four low-income Colorado children ages 2-4 years were overweight or obese. Eating patterns established in early childhood have long-lasting effects. Child care professionals influence children's eating through role modeling, the type of foods provided, structure of the meals, and the social environment in which meals are served. Positive early childhood experiences surrounding food and the social environment are critical for shaping healthy eating behaviors later in life.

The current United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Meal Pattern for CACFP allows for a wide variety of foods designed to meet basic nutrition requirements, Colorado CACFP is moving beyond these requirements with the Colorado Healthier Meals Initiative, a set of menu recommendations aimed at improving the nutritional intake of children supported by the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

Colorado's Healthy Meals Initiative was developed with you in mind. It is meant to support you, the child care professional, in meeting higher nutritional standards and improving the diets and health of the children you serve. Many children rely on CACFP for the majority of their food intake. You play a vital role in ensuring the meals and snacks served are of the highest quality possible. HMI recommendations promote simple and practical menu changes that are considerate to cost, implementation and preparation. Following these recommendations will help reduce sodium, sugar, saturated and trans fat and increase the proportion of whole grains in children's diets. Under the initiative, The CDPHE-CACFP recommends the following menu changes:

1. Limit 100% fruit juice to twice per week\*
2. Limit processed and pre-fried meats to once per week\*
3. Offer at least one whole grain product per day\*\*
4. Serve 1% or fat-free milk to children ages 2 years and older (policy, effective October 2012)

\*best practice would be to not offer at all

\*\*best practice would be to offer whole grains whenever possible

Implementing Colorado's HMI in your center will greatly benefit the health of children in your care. The chart below highlights the impact these simple HMI recommendations can have on the diets of children you care for, as well as the rationale behind this initiative.

## Healthier Meals Initiative Recommendations

## Reasons

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100% fruit juice limited to twice per week\*

- Fruits and vegetables are more nutritious than fruit juice and provide dietary fiber. Fruit Juice which is 100% offers no nutritional advantage over whole fruits.<sup>1</sup>
- Overconsumption of 100% fruit juice can contribute to overweight and obesity.<sup>1</sup>
- Providing fruits and vegetables to children instead of juice, reinforces healthier eating habits as children reach new developmental stages.

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Limit Processed & Pre-Fried Meats to once per week (e.g. commercially prepared frozen breaded meat products like fish sticks, chicken nuggets, chicken patties, etc., hot dogs, bologna, sausages, and canned ravioli. This is not an all-inclusive list [please contact CACFP for further details])\*

- Processed meats are typically high in total and saturated fat and sodium.
- Replacing processed meats with lean meats and/or meat alternates greatly reduces the amount of calories, fat and sodium in children's diets.

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Offer at least one whole grain product per day\*\*

- Moderate evidence shows that intake of whole grain is associated with lower body weight, prevention of cardiovascular disease and reduced incidence of type 2 diabetes.<sup>4</sup>
- Whole grains are an excellent source of nutrients such as iron, magnesium, selenium, B vitamins and dietary fiber. Increase whole-grain intake by replacing refined grains with whole grains whenever possible.

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Serve 1% (low fat) or fat-free milk to children ages 2 years and older

- 1% or fat-free milk has the same nutrients as other milks but with less solid fat and fewer calories.
- Studies show no compromise in growth when switching to lower fat milk.<sup>1</sup>

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### Childcare Center Survey Results

During the summer of 2010, CDPHE-CACFP conducted a survey of all participating centers to gather input regarding nutrition policies and recommendations for improving the nutritional quality of CACFP meals served to children. The survey focused on perceived challenges and barriers to serving healthier meals and proved the number of participating centers meeting or exceeding Colorado HMI

recommendations and policy. CACFP also wanted to learn what child care professionals needed to implement the Healthier Meals Initiative.

Overall, 254 individuals from 240 Colorado centers responded. Respondents expressed a great need for menu planning, manageable food costs menu ideas, and creative ways to promote healthier menus to children and staff. CACFP developed the *Healthier Meals for Healthier Kids* toolkit to meet these needs. We developed this toolkit as a resource to help you meet higher nutritional standards and assist you in modifying your menu to ensure CACFP credit. The toolkit will help you integrate the introduction of healthy foods with center activities that give children and staff the opportunity to increase their nutrition knowledge and skills, and provide them with fun, creative messages to take home to their families.

### Conclusion

The *Healthier Meals for Healthier Kids* toolkit is the first step in our partnership with child care providers who want to improve the meals and snacks they serve children in their care. Together, we can have an incredible impact on the health and well being of children in Colorado now and in the future. We thank you for your time and dedication to the children in your care and look forward to the success you will experience creating a healthful eating environment.

### References:

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 21011. *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards; Guidelines for early care and education programs*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics: Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2010/DietaryGuidelines2010.pdf>. Accessed June, 2013.
3. 2011 Colorado WIC overweight and obesity prevalence.
4. USDA (United States Department of Agriculture). Evidence Based Library. Dietary Behaviors. Food/Diet Patterns, Grains. <http://www.nel.gov/topic.cfm?cat=3304>. Accessed June, 2013

## How to use this toolkit

This *Healthier Meals for Healthier Kids* toolkit is intended to serve as a resource for your center when implementing Colorado's Healthier Meals Initiative (HMI). We think you will find the exciting curriculum a hit with teachers and children alike because of its fun, engaging learning activities. It gives center staff the tools to teach children about the importance of nutrition in ways they will enjoy and want to share with their families.

Your toolkit contains:

### ***Booklet #1 - Healthier Meals Child Care Activity Guide***

This curriculum for centers consists of 10 thematic sections that include: hands-on exploration activities, math and pattern activities, story time activities, songs, and art activities. To best address early childhood learners, the activities are experiential and utilize multiple modalities of learning. Students will make meaning through touch, role playing, art, movement, song, sorting, and stories. Each section includes an original song based on the theme to enhance learning, delight children and promote physical activity. In addition, each section also includes an activity based on a children's book to allow you to extend the theme into story time. The recipes that are included will help your cook link the nutrition lessons to what is being served during meal and snack time. Children can continue the learning at home with reproducible Fresh-Food-Fun Family Letters to engage parents and caregivers.

### **Section 1- Exploring New Foods**

This section is designed to teach children how to experience food in different ways. They will learn about using their five senses to investigate new foods, and play a game to introduce My Plate food groups. Recipes that your cook can prepare to coordinate with this section include the Aspen Power Bars. Families can continue experiencing food at home because the Aspen Power Bar recipe is also featured in the Family Letter.

### **Section 2-Make it, Bake it, Eat it**

Section two features activities to foster excitement about cooking and baking. Children will make their very own chef's hat to wear when they practice following a recipe to make play dough. Your center's cook can bake the blueberry bread and Fiesta Zucchini bread to go along with this unit. The Fiesta Zucchini bread recipe is also featured in the Family Letter and will allow children to showcase their new baking skills at home.

### **Section 3- Plant a Seed of Fruit**

The third section is all about the wonderful world of delicious fruits! Children will learn to recognize a variety of fruits and create their very own class book featuring their favorite fruits. They will gain knowledge in fruit science, and join together as a class to make a fruit salad. Feature the warm apples with cinnamon, and the yogurt parfait on your center's menus during this section. Preparing the easy yogurt parfait recipe in the Family Letter at home will include the whole family in the fun.

### **Section 4- Color Your World with Vegetables**

This section introduces children to the wide variety of vegetables in the world! Children will enjoy working together to identify vegetables by color, shape and size. They will build on their plant science knowledge as they investigate the parts of vegetable plants. You can include sweet potato bakes and roasted cauliflower on your menus when teaching this section. The Family Letter also includes a delicious roasted vegetable recipe that families may discover is their new favorite way to prepare vegetables!

## **Section 5- Mean Bean Machine**

Section five is full of engaging activities to nurture children's interest in beans and legumes. Beans will be featured in a science project to sprout and grow beans, and used in an art project to make maracas. Children will also participate in an activity to discover the amazing number of different shapes, colors and sizes beans come in. Mexican Haystacks and chili are great recipes that your cook can make to extend the learning during this section. An easy dinner recipe for Cha Cha Chili is featured in the Family Letter that parents will love because it is inexpensive and quick to prepare.

## **Section 6-Jazzy, Snazzy Sauces**

What's so snazzy about sauces? Sauces are so easy to make and they are a great way to add flavor, texture, and color to food. Section six will have children making a pretend pizza with sauce, practicing math and pattern recognition as they pretend to be ingredients in a sauce, and creating a pizza collage. You cook will enjoy making the homemade applesauce for this section, as well as a homemade cheese sauce featuring sweet potatoes that is as delicious as it is nutritious. The cheese sauce recipe is also included in the Family Letter. Families can use it on vegetables, or prepare it to use in the macaroni & cheese recipe.

## **Section 7- We Got Grains on our Brains!**

What's so great about whole grains? Children will discover the answer as they talk about the many different sizes, shapes and types of whole grains. A lively charade game and a whole grain necklace activity will extend the learning in an entertaining way. A whole grain rainbow bake and a couscous salad are natural tie-ins for your center cook to prepare for this section. The couscous salad is also featured in the Family Letter, and is a colorful and tasty kid pleasing recipe.

## **Section 8- Making Magical Soups & Dips**

Section eight is all about the magical world of soups and dips. Children will learn about how vegetables can be combined to make a delicious soup. By participating in the creation of a magic soup community mural, children will begin to connect the making of a mural with making a delicious soup. Honey yogurt dip and lentil soup are some of the featured recipes that would be great to serve during this section. The Family Letter includes some great dip ideas and a recipe for green pea soup. This fresh, vibrant soup is super sweet and kids will love its bright green color!

## **Section 9-Celebration Exploration**

Get ready to celebrate! Children will enjoy learning how food can bring people together in celebrations and at meal time. Making invitations for a class celebration will inspire children to be creative and build excitement. Adventurous eating will be explored in greater detail as they chart the new foods they have tried. Spice rubbed boneless chicken is a special recipe that goes with this section. This quick and easy chicken recipe is also found in the Family Letter, and uses a homemade spice rub that kids can help prepare.

## **Section 10-Eating the ABC's**

The final section in this curriculum is all about enjoying eating healthy and delicious foods together. Children will have a chance to reflect on all they have learned in the past nine units about foods that give them energy and help them grow. Making a class book to showcase all of these foods will be a great addition to the class library. Two delicious dips that use fresh, readily available ingredients are highlighted in the Family Letter. Both offer a great opportunity for families to dip a variety of healthy fruits and vegetables!

**Booklet #2- Healthier Meals Food Safety and Preparation Guide:** Includes weekly meal plans to assist Center cooks in incorporating HMI recipes into your Center's menu. A handy shopping list is provided to make planning the menu even easier. Refer to the food safety guide for helpful tips and reminders about providing a safe eating experience for the children in your care.

**Healthy Meals Recipes:** This four-week supply of kid-friendly recipes coordinates with the shopping list in the Healthier Meals Food Safety and Preparation Guide.

**Healthy, Happy Harmonies CD:** Includes all 10 original songs featured in the curriculum.

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