

Interview Guide: Food Service Directors
Assessment of Healthy School Meals for All in Arizona
Conducted by ASU Food Policy and Environment Research Group, College of Health Solutions
Arizona State University

Technical notes:

Give note-taker co-host ability

The note taker should turn on the transcript function in zoom and is responsible for starting recording AFTER consent.

Interview notes:

Interviewee:

Interviewee District/school:

Interviewer:

Note taker:

Date:

Hi, my **name** is **XXX** and I'm from **XXXX**. **Thank you** for agreeing to participate in this interview today. Before we get started, we will share the study consent with you and give you a chance to review it, ask any questions and sign it.

[Provide link via zoom chat or via email if on zoom phone]

Consent link:

[If written consent is received, start recording interview.]

We are conducting a research project to assess perceptions of serving Universal Free Meals for All in Arizona. During this interview, we will ask you to think about your experiences serving Universal Free School Meals for All during the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2021-2022 school year. We know that the past couple of years have been extremely challenging for school food service operations due to the pandemic, and we'd like to hear about your experiences. Then we will ask similar questions but considering what operations *might* look like if Arizona were to start serving Healthy School Meals for All in future school years.

Questions:

Let's get started with the interview. For this first set of questions, we'll focus on the 2021-2022 school year and how you think serving free school meals to all students has impacted your operations.

- 1) Thinking about your school food service operations during the 2021-2022 school year. [**Domain: current operations**]
 - a) How did you serve lunch (for example, traditional lunch lines or pre-packaged option)?

- b) Where did students typically eat lunch (such as in the cafeteria, gyms, outdoors or in classrooms)?
- 2) Can you tell me about the challenges or difficulties you faced serving free school meals for all students in the 2021-2022 school year? Consider challenges such as staffing issues, facility capacity, food sourcing etc. **[Domain: current challenges]**.

Probe for the following if they were not already mentioned:

- Labor capacity (like staffing issues)
- Facility capacity, including kitchen equipment, storage and cold storage
- Food sourcing or supply chain issues, including vendors/local foods/farm-to-school, as well as paper goods, utensils, etc.
- Meal quality and menu variety
- Food waste
- Were there other challenges serving school meals this year that I didn't mention?

- a) Which of these has been the biggest challenge?

Now let's talk about factors that helped your food service program to be successful in the 2021-2022 school year.

- 3) Can you talk about anything that your district/school has done that has made serving free school meals for all students more successful? **[Domain: current facilitators]**
- a) Were there schools within your district for which feeding students was easier? ([If Yes] What's different about those schools?) **[Domain: different implementation]**
 - b) Were there schools within your district that experienced more challenges with feeding students? ([If Yes] What's different about those schools?) **[Domain: different implementation]**
 - c) What methods did your food service division or district come up with to address these challenges that could also be used for meal service if universal free meals were to continue?
 - d) Are there methods that you've heard of other school districts using that can be used for meal service if universal free meals were to continue?

We realize that recent school years have included many disruptions and challenges for school meal programs. We want to be sure we understand how this is affecting people's experiences with school meals. First, I'll ask about parents, then students.

- 4) What did you hear most from **parents** about school meals in the 2021-2022 school year?

- a. How did you get this feedback from parents (e.g., emails, surveys, calls, etc)?
- 5) Continuing to think about the 2021-2022 school year, what did you hear most from **students** about school meals? [**Domain: student/parent perspectives**]
- 6) What do you think are the most important factors that drive students to participate in school meals in your district?

Probe: If the response is that meals are free, probe if they think participation is due to actual cost or to reduced stigma [or if there is something else about free meals that impacted participation]).

- a) Are there differences for breakfast and lunch?
- 7) What do you think are the main reasons students **do not** participate in school meals?
 - a) Are there differences for breakfast and lunch?
 - b) Are there differences in the reasons students don't participate among different student populations within your district?

- 8) School food operations need support from various stakeholders. How supportive are school administrators and teachers in your district?

- a) How do they see school meal programs benefiting students?

Probe for details, including academic and behavioral benefits

- 9) Do you have a sense of what stakeholders think about continuing to serve meals to all students at no cost?

Specifically ask about:

- a) Principal and administrators
- b) Teachers
- c) Your foodservice staff

Probe: Are there differences by grade level, i.e., elementary vs. middle vs. high school

- 10) I also want to talk a little bit about universal free meals for all authorized via the USDA waivers. Can you tell me how your meal program finances have been

impacted this year while you are providing free school meals for all students with the USDA waivers in place?

- a. How do you expect your school meal program finances to be impacted in the NEXT school year when the USDA waivers are no longer in place? **[Domain: financial impact]**

Now let's talk about your thoughts about offering healthy school meals for all in Arizona in future school years.

- 11) If the state of Arizona were to implement Healthy School Meals for All, do you think you would be able to provide the kinds and quality of meals that you would like to all students? **[Domain: meal quality]**
 - a. [If yes] What will allow you to do that?
 - b. [If no] Why not?
 - a. **Probe:** What are the potential challenges that you would be concerned about for your service program if Healthy School Meals for All were in place? How do you think you would address those issues?

- 12) If the state of Arizona were to implement Healthy School Meals for All, does your SFA have the capacity to serve two full meals (breakfast and lunch) to all interested students?

Probe about storage, staff, service space, kitchen equipment, meal service logistics such as time to eat, anything else that limits the ability to achieve full participation

- a) [If no] What would it take?

- 13) If Arizona were to offer Healthy School Meals for All, what do you think is needed to make free school meals for all students as successful as possible for your schools?

- a) What resources and information do you think would be most helpful for your district/school to support a successful program? **[Domain: future needs]**

- b) What are your overall concerns about providing free school meals to all students?

- 14) Is there anything else you would like to discuss? I want to give you a chance to share any comments or ask any questions you might have.

15) Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your ideas. My final question is about potential methods of collecting future data from stakeholders in your district. We hope to send a very quick survey out to other stakeholders (including parents, teachers, administrators, and food service staff) to gather basic opinions about Healthy School Meals for All.

- a) In your district, what is the best way to reach these stakeholders? **Probe for specifics:** is there a certain person, department, email address, etc that we should reach out to? To your knowledge, do these methods have a cost?

Wrap up:

That was the last question I have for our interview today.

Again, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your ideas.

This interview guide was adapted from:

Cohen, J.F., Polacsek, M., Hecht, C.E., Hecht, K., Read, M., Olarte, D.A., Patel, A.I., Schwartz, M.B., Turner, L., Zuercher, M. and Gosliner, W., 2022. Implementation of Universal School Meals during COVID-19 and beyond: Challenges and Benefits for School Meals Programs in Maine. *Nutrients*, 14(19), p.4031.

Zuercher, M.D., Cohen, J.F., Hecht, C.E., Hecht, K., Ritchie, L.D. and Gosliner, W., 2022. Providing school meals to all students free of charge during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: Challenges and benefits reported by school foodservice professionals in California. *Nutrients*, 14(18), p.3855.

The original survey can be accessed at:

<https://www.childnourishlab.org/healthy-school-meals-for-all>