



# **School Pantry Program Handbook**

**A Program of the Great Falls  
Community Food Bank**

## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

### **What is the School Pantry Program?**

A purpose of the School Pantry Program is to help alleviate child hunger through the provision of food to children and their families at school. School pantries are located on the grounds of the school and intended to provide a more readily accessible source of food assistance to low-income students and their families. Sites are consistently in the same location as the school's campus, have set distribution schedules and offer ongoing food assistance services.

The School Pantry Program objectives are:

- Provide nutritious, healthy food to children at-risk of hunger for preparation and consumption at their place of residence.
- Distribute food discreetly in easily accessible and safe environments.

### **What are the advantages of the School Pantry Program?**

In many communities, the school is the hub of activity and resource center for families. Because of the close relationship between students and faculty, school personnel frequently become aware of challenges within the family while dealing with student issues. A school pantry becomes a safe, supportive way to help students and their families through a crisis, which in turn helps the child become more successful in school.

### **What types of items are available at the school pantry?**

Because the primary focus is to feed the children, most items are shelf stable, nutritious and easy to prepare so that children can take care of themselves when the parents are unable. Many pantries expand this to provide fresh food and more items that can address the needs of the entire family. It is up to the site to determine the needs of their students as well as the resources available.

Some staples that should be available include:

- Peanut butter and jelly
- Crackers
- Canned tuna or chicken
- Cereal
- Shelf stable milk and juice
- Canned soups and pasta meals, individual serving size
- Apple sauce, canned fruit
- Granola bars, fruit bars, etc.
- String cheese

When selecting items to carry in the pantry, consider something from each of the following groups:

- ☞ Fruits and vegetables
- ☞ Dairy
- ☞ Grain
- ☞ Protein

**Where does the food come from?**

The food can be obtained from the Food Bank, the Montana Food Bank Network (contact these agencies for membership information), or through a cooperative agreement with a community pantry. Many grocery retailers are willing to assist with donations or reduced pricing. We encourage school pantries to work closely with a parent or student group to assist with fundraising and food drives to support the school pantry.

**Is there a charge to children and families who receive assistance?**

This program should be provided at no charge to the children participating in the School Pantry Program.

**Is the School Pantry Program a model used in other states?**

The Feeding America network supports members operating more than 450 school pantries nationwide. The program began in 2003 with the San Francisco Food Bank's Healthy Children Pantry Program.

The Great Falls Community Food Bank established its first school pantry in January 2011 and now coordinates with the Great Falls Public Schools to support four school-based pantries, with more being developed.

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## **SITE SELECTION**

Developing and maintain a working relationship with each distribution site is a critical step in operating an efficient and effective program. In general, effective program partnerships begin with a clear understanding of the program objectives and expectations of all parties. It is very important to clearly define the following components:

- The role and responsibilities of the Food Bank and the pantry site
- Program standards and compliance
- Distribution systems and procedures
- Reporting procedures

### **Standards and Guidelines**

A school pantry program must meet the following standards:

1. Approved agency in good standing or program or project of a local, regional or statewide food bank that comply with all applicable Federal and local statutes, ordinances and regulations.
2. At least one individual directly involved with the pantry must receive annual ServSafe Certification training.
3. Healthy, nutritious food must be distributed free of charge at least once per month during the academic year.
4. Food must be distributed for emergency assistance and may not be used for special events, fundraisers or distribution to the general student population.
5. Staff and volunteers with direct repetitive contact with children must pass a national background search.

### **Food Storage**

Each pantry site will need an approved location in the building where food can be safely stored and secured. Key issues to consider:

1. All food must be stored at least six inches off the ground on a pallet, shelf, desk, etc.
2. The storage area should be dry, clean and free of pests.
3. The storage area should be locked when not in use.
4. Inventory should be rotated. Always check the label on the box to make sure you are using the oldest dates first.
5. Perishable foods must be in a refrigerator or freezer. Thermometers should be used and daily reading logs maintained.

## Distribution Method

Sites should develop a plan for how food will be distributed. Key questions to consider:

1. How will food be distributed (pre-packed bags, client choice)?
2. Will you offer reusable grocery bags, boxes, etc. for families to take the food home?
3. Is there adequate space for clients to move through the pantry?
4. Will you require parents to be present with children during distribution?
5. What is the best time to distribute food to children and their families?
6. Have staff members or volunteers that will have direct, repetitive contact with children passed a national background check?

## PLANNING YOUR PROGRAM

The Food 4 Kids School Pantry Program is designed to be a flexible program that is easy for districts and school sites to administer. The Food Bank requires that the site refer children who are at risk of hunger and that they distribute food in a completely confidential manner. As long as these requirements are met, each site has broad discretion when identifying children and distributing food.

1. The school will identify the location where non-perishable food will be stored and/or distributed. *Is it secure from theft? Tampering? Contamination from chemicals, water, etc.? Can food be stored properly – clean, dry, cool, off ground at least 6 inches? Is shelving needed? Cart to move food? Scale?*
2. Devise a plan and schedule for distribution. *Consider requiring students to bring a referral from counseling or administration staff to get food. What days and times is the pantry open? How will you protect the identities from other students?*
3. Develop a plan to notify students and the school community about emergency food assistance now available on campus. *Flyers? Posters? Articles in newsletter? Staff meetings to train on referral and eligibility?*
4. A Site Coordinator is responsible for identifying participants, taking referrals on children from other staff, communicating the program to school personnel, and ensuring the confidential distribution of packs at each site. *Who will serve as Site Coordinator? Where will referral forms and monthly statistics be kept? How will you ensure monthly paperwork is being submitted to the Great Falls Community Food Bank?*
5. Consider enlisting student and parent groups to work on the project. *Organize food drives to refill shelves in pantry. Students can sort and shelve foods, check for expiration dates and ensure food safety.*
6. Assign record keeping to one individual to ensure consistency. *Monthly data is necessary for sustainability. Simple intake form from each student, number of instances of assistance to student, pounds distributed, etc.*