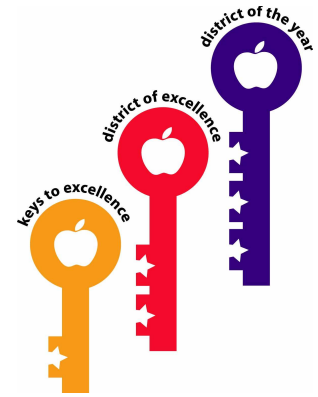


Talking Points for Stakeholders

Keys to Excellence



To successfully complete *Keys to Excellence* and implement change in your district, the school district and community must support the *Keys* assessment and evaluation process both before and after you undertake the assessment. Use these talking point to help discuss *Keys to Excellence* with four main stakeholders: your staff, school administrators, parents and teachers. General talking points and background information are also included.

Background

- The School Nutrition Association (SNA) released the *Keys to Excellence* in 1995.
- In 2002, the School Nutrition Foundation (SNF), formerly the Child Nutrition Foundation, led the revision of the *Keys*. The Foundation recruit school nutrition experts to overhaul the *Keys*. Both content and delivery were improved. In July 2003, SNA and SNF launched the new online *Keys to Excellence* program, featuring the interactive *Keys Express* self-assessment tool, online benchmarking, and interactive resource features. The District of Excellence program was also launched at this time to formally recognize districts meeting the national best practice standards. In July 2003, SNA and SNF launched the new *Keys to Excellence* at SNA’s Annual National Conference.
- In 2007, a group of experts reviewed all *Keys* best practice standards to ensure currency and enhanced the District of Excellence Distinction. The District of the Year Award was also introduced at this time. The 2007 changes to *Keys* were announced in July 2007 at SNA’s Annual National Conference.
- The new *Keys* allows school nutrition program management staff to evaluate the district’s program in four critical areas:
 1. Administration
 2. Communications and Marketing
 3. Nutrition and Nutrition Education
 4. Operations
- The *Keys* encourage “nutrition integrity” throughout the school environment and allow school nutrition programs to be benchmarked against other districts and their own progress over time.
- SNA and SNF are dedicated to providing good nutrition to all children. The *Keys* serve as a basis for SNA and SNF’s professional development activities.
- The *Keys* support marketing efforts to gain community support for the school nutrition program. *Keys* have become an even more powerful tool for public relations in concert with local school wellness policy development and implementation.

General Talking Points

Why are you going to complete the Keys?

- To develop a strategic plan for our program based on national, objective best practice standards and our district's own strengths and weaknesses.
- To earn the recognition our district deserves for excellence in school nutrition. The District of Excellence Distinction in School Nutrition can be a valuable public relations tool at the local and state level and can give your operation and your school district a tremendous boost. Furthermore, the District of the Year Award is a prestigious opportunity to bring positive attention on a national scale to your school district.
- My staff and I respect the organizations and individuals who developed the *Keys* and trust it to be an exceptional self-assessment tool.

What will you do with the results?

With *Keys*, there is so much we can do. The *Keys* will give us new insight to our program's operational strategy and policies and procedures. Depending on our results, we might use *Keys* as a basis to:

- Develop a yearly strategic plan.
- Identify budgetary considerations.
- Encourage a team approach to providing healthy and appetizing meals and nutrition education to children and start a dialogue on our school nutrition program in the healthy school environment.
- Provide objective information to support our local school wellness policy efforts, and to provide ongoing efforts to help us evaluate our progress towards successful implementation of our local school wellness policy.
- Strengthen our commitment to the district's mission and our role as a partner in education
- Update and maintain policies and procedures.
- Improve and maintain nutrition integrity.
- Upon meeting the eligibility criteria, apply for the District of Excellence Distinction in School Nutrition and the District of the Year Award.

How did we do on the Keys?

Once you have completed the *Keys*, be prepared to provide results. There are no talking points for this questions as your response may depend on a number of factors. Just remember that both your strengths and weaknesses can be allies in achieving results. The *Keys* allows you to prepare reports that you can actually print and share with your colleagues and the school community.

Keep in mind that *Keys* is a self-assessment. Honesty is a key component of continuous improvement based on self-assessment programs. Your goal should be to be honest with your responses in order to paint a true picture of your operation and create an effective improvement plan.

Stakeholders

School Nutrition Staff

From the serving line to the program office, your staff's support can determine the success of district-wide initiatives. Your staff may ask: "What are the *Keys*?" or "How are the *Keys* going to help me?" To ensure their support, bring your staff into *Keys* evaluation process before and after you begin to ensure their support. Personalize these points to talk to your staff about the *Keys*:

- Our district values you as members of our team. Without teamwork we cannot be a successful organization or develop relationships with other groups in the school district. We want to let you know that this self-assessment is being done and that we will share the results with you.
- The stronger our program is, the more you will succeed in your job. You will continue to build job-related skills and meaningful relationships with your customers, co-workers, and school staff.
- As district employees you are expected to be part of the school community. The *Keys* will help you be respected as partners in education.
- The *Keys* will help our office establish fair and realistic performance standards and evaluation procedures.
- The *Keys* support wellness activities. Our local school wellness policy is a priority. In addition, as your employer we are concerned with your health and well-being.
- The *Keys* will help us work as a team to identify ways we can ensure an organized and safe workplace.

Management Team

You can build on the points above to talk with your management staff about the *Keys*.

- As management staff you may be asked to complete a portion of the *Keys* or be asked for your input on the evaluation.
- Completing the *Keys* will help you understand your school's program and how you can more efficiently meet the needs of your employees and customers.
- Completing the *Keys* shows our commitment to excellence and solidifies our role as *the* school nutrition experts in our community. Becoming a District of Excellence will only enhance this.
- We will be able to better identify and meet your professional growth needs and help you achieve personal satisfaction in your job.
- I am open to suggestions on how to best tackle this project.

Administrators

This group includes principals, superintendents, and business officials. Their main interest will lie in how the *Keys* help the district stay prepared and avoid difficult issues in the future. Focus on how the *Keys* help you become proactive not reactive to situations.

- The *Keys* provide benchmarking data to measure efficiency and forecast trends.
- The *Keys* require school nutrition programs to use sound financial practices. Programs must be able to account for all gains and losses.
- Food safety and nutrition practices are required to be documented. Accountability for these practices is strengthened.
- To meet *Keys* indicators, hiring practices must be legal and consistent.
- To achieve "Excellence" our program must have quality purchasing standards and procedures in place.

- The data collection performed by the foodservice department benefits the district as a whole, including important funding sources. The *Keys* require districts to use state-of-the-art collection practices that include current technology that interfaces with district specifications.
- Completion of the *Keys* demonstrates our district's commitment to the role of schools in children's health. This is especially critical today with public attention focused on childhood obesity and school-based wellness programs and initiatives.
- Your support of the *Keys* furthers the ability of the program to become an important partner in education and better meet the needs of students and the community.
- Our program's goal to make children fit, healthy, and ready to learn supports the district's mission as a whole.
- There are specific indicators in the *Keys* that relate to the support shown to the program by school administrators and community stakeholders. The *Keys* require us to seek your support and in turn offer our support for district initiatives.
- Our program will complete the *Keys* on a regular basis to track progress toward program goals.
- Becoming a District of Excellence and winning the District of the Year Award would earn respect and recognition for school district as a whole from the education community, the school nutrition community, and the public.

Teachers and Parents

Before preparing materials or presenting to these groups, identify the issues you believe to be of most concern in your district. Nationally, there is strong concern over childhood obesity, wellness, nutrition standards, and academic performance. Perhaps, in your district, parents and teachers are also concerned with the cafeteria environment or financial accountability. Be sure that you speak about the issues affecting your district to show teachers and parents how pertinent the *Keys* are to day-to-day operations.

- The *Keys* contain several indicators that revolve around the student, our customer. Without satisfying our students' desires we will not operate a successful program.
- The *Keys* require our program to balance between meeting students' needs and their desires. We have strict nutritional standards and are dedicated to serving students a variety of appealing and healthy foods to make sure they are fit, healthy, and ready to learn.
- The *Keys* assessment and evaluation allows us to stay on top of our game by benchmarking ourselves against the best districts in the country to see how we excel or how we can improve. There are specific indicators in the *Keys* that relate to the support shown to the program by school administrators and community stakeholders. The *Keys* require us to seek your support and in turn offer support for district initiatives.