

FoodCorps Montana Guide for Working in School Kitchens

It is important to enter each school kitchen facility with respect, acknowledging it as the professional workspace of the food service staff. The most important aspect of your service is building relationships with the various partners in the schools where you serve. You should consider the strength of your relationship with kitchen staff one of the primary indicators of your success.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

Planning

- As you begin your partnership for the year, discuss the weekly schedule of the kitchen staff. They will likely be able to recommend a day for your visit, which doesn't conflict with other time-consuming tasks such as inventory and receiving. Working around this availability, increases the likelihood that school food service can assist with food prep for your food feature.
- Identify equipment that they are comfortable letting you use when you are cooking with students in class.
- Prior to your visit, communicate the general prep time and equipment needs for your planned recipe. Often oven space can be completely occupied by lunch preparation for the day.

Working in the Kitchen

- Wash your hands immediately after entering the kitchen. It is recommended to wash hands each time you re-enter or change between major tasks.
- School kitchen knives have often undergone a lot of abuse. To make your work easier, bring your own knife (I recommend purchasing a plastic sheath for less than \$10 for transporting it to school and class).
- Clearly communicate with foodservice to establish a food prep space in the kitchen and always be prepared to relocate at any moment. On busy days for kitchen staff it may be easier to do your food preparation on a lunchroom table.
- Ask to use dishwashing equipment. In union contracted schools and privately operated kitchens, it can be against kitchen policy for you to use the kitchen equipment when staff aren't present. This doesn't end up being a hard and fast boundary; you will just need to discuss how best to handle cleanup, especially for late-afternoon classes.

Engaging Food Service Staff

A few suggestions for engaging staff in a positive way include:

- Treat the kitchen with utmost respect as a professional workspace. Ask first and never assume permission to use equipment. Clean up meticulously.
- Invite food service to talk with students about their class food activities and new food experiences.

- Communicate voting results, fun kid quotes, and reactions, especially when school food staff helps to prepare items.
- Share local food recipes and samples of taste test foods prepared by you or students. Food connects people!
- Talk about your life and ask about theirs. 80% of your relationship will be built on talking about things not related to food at all (though they often lead back to food in a positive way).

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