

MUSH-ON

Alaska School Nutrition Association

[www.aksna.org](http://www.aksna.org)

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**A Word from Our State President – Sandie Ponte**

**Sandie Ponte, AKSNA President**

Think Spring!! Hopefully it is just around the corner. Its been a long winter.

We held our 54<sup>th</sup> annual AKSNA conference January 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>. It turned out to be a great conference. Hopefully next year we can go back to being in person. We had a good turn out, two great keynote speakers, Jeff Joiner and Alaska Ninja, Nick Hanson.

During the AKSNA Annual Business Meeting, which we had during the conference, we welcomed our new board members. Trevor Bridgewater, NorthStar Borough, will assume the Presidency. Gavin Northey, Anchorage School District is our new President Elect. Rachel Spencer, Yukon Koyukuk, will chair Public Policy and Legislative Committee. Communications and Mush On News Editor is Carlos Perez, Northstar. Elizabeth Seitz from Juneau will chair Standards and Education with committee members David Williams of Matsu and Tiffany Kurani of Anchorage. Members at Large are Susan Pougher and Tracy Hulett. Welcome all new members and thank you to all board members continuing on with us.

We also handed out some well deserved awards. Congratulations to Jennifer Meiwes, Noni Alboni, Amber Colvin, Diane Buchanan and this years Dean Hamburg Award went to Jo Dawson. Thank you all so much.

National School Breakfast week is right around the corner. If your school is doing anything to celebrate, please send us pictures and/or short article on what you did. We would love to spotlight you in our Mush On News.

Have a great March and lets hope it goes out like a lamb.

## State Agency Updates

Springtime in Alaska, you have to love it, even when you are still facing flurries and slush, the promise of warmer weather is on the horizon. As we set our sights on the end of the school year, please keep in mind that in this next month we need districts to transmit data to DEED on enrollment for direct certification matching, this data is pivotal to families to determine eligibility, as well it is vital to districts to qualify (and requalify) for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This next fall schools that have been able to provide meals to all students at no charge will be required to resume pricing programs – the student data that we can match behind the scenes will benefit students, families, and schools. We will be requesting an extension on the CEP deadline, so if possible, complete the SRM in April and again in May or June – CEP is one of the only programs that allows for cumulative eligibility rather than a one-month snapshot.

Another thing to consider as summer approaches is sponsoring the Summer Food Service Program, or promoting programs in your community who provide this service. Please reach out to us if you need additional information. Alaska Child Nutrition Programs is waiting to hear if the Meals To You program will be renewed for this summer; this program has helped to provide meals to children in communities where no summer programs exist. If you are interested in learning more, please feel free to contact me; district responsibility on Meals To You is simply to help sign up families in the spring before school dismisses.

I hope you all have a wonderful spring and that summer is amazing in your part of Alaska.

**Jo Dawson, MS, SNS | Child Nutrition Program Manager**



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## A Word from our Membership Committee

Greetings AK Food Service Professionals –

You have such an important job serving school meals to our nation's children. By belonging to SNA, you are part of something bigger than just your school or district. You are joining the 1000s of committed members from across the country who are feeding the bodies and fueling the minds of future generations. You represent all the hungry children who eat at school and ***your voice matters.***

By being a member of SNA, you get a support network of friends who understand the everyday challenges of the USDA school meal programs and access to resources that help make your job easier. This includes a monthly magazine, professional development opportunities including free webinars and e-newsletters. Your online account provides you with access to your membership and certificate records. You can also download a copy of your membership card and view your current CEUs obtained through SNA.

By recruiting new AKSNA members, you can be recognized as a SNA Star Club member and continue reaching new levels.

AK-SNA would like to say **THANK YOU** to our newest Star Club members – Susan Pougher and Trevor Bridgewater! Also, to Tammi Stroede and Theresa Wilson for moving to a new Star Club level!



**Congratulations** and Welcome to the Star Club!

If you would like more information or have questions about becoming a SNA member, please contact me anytime or visit <https://schoolnutrition.org/membership/> to join/renew your membership.

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AKSNA membership chair  
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### SNA Member Awards

The School Nutrition Association has made some major changes to the SNA Awards Program so all members can be recognized for their hard work to ensure well-nourished students across the country are prepared for success. For qualifications please visit the linked sites listed below.

- [Employee of the Year Award](#)
- [Manager of the Year Award](#)

Nominations for the 2021-22 SNA Members Awards are due online by March 1, 2022. Submit the online application via this link:

- Employee of the Year - [Submit the online nomination online via this link](#)
- Manager of the Year - [Submit the online nomination via this link](#)

### AKSNA Conference 2022 was a HIT!

Thanks to all that attended the Conference and a special thanks to our presenters: Keynote Speaker Jeff Joiner and Alaska's Eskimo Ninja Warrior Nick Hanson.



## The Expo is Virtual, the Information is Real!

**REMINDER:** AKSNA's Virtual Expo is still online and has important information as you make purchasing decisions for the 2022-2023 school year.

View the Expo at [expo.aksna.org](https://expo.aksna.org) and check out all the information that our sponsors have provided, including videos, brochures, product specifications, and contact details. **The Expo will remain open through the end of March.**



## Do you have a graduating high school senior?

The third annual AKSNA High School Graduation Award Program is now open and accepting applications until **1 April 2022.**

If your student will, or has, received their high school diploma or GED during the 2021-2022 school year and will attend an accredited post-secondary institution, then don't delay, apply today!

For full eligibility details and to complete the application, visit the AKSNA web site at <https://www.aksna.org/> and click the High School Graduation Award link on the front page.

# URGENT: Comment on Nutrition Standards for Next School Year!

## **URGENT: Action Needed!**

SNA has submitted [comments](#) in response to USDA's [Child Nutrition Programs: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium](#) for SY 2022-23 and SY 2023-24. We urge all members to [take action](#) **TODAY** to ask USDA to ease rules for schools battling supply chain disruptions.

## BACKGROUND:

In February, USDA issued a [final rule](#), with a request for comments, on transitional nutrition standards. At the time, USDA indicated it would extend meal pattern waivers for schools unable to meet these rules due to supply chain disruptions. However, last week [Congress failed](#) to give USDA authority to extend pandemic child nutrition waivers, and it remains unclear what meal pattern flexibility USDA will be able to offer after June 30.

## TAKE ACTION!

[Submit your comments](#) in response to the transitional rule through [SNA's Action Network!](#) Comments are **due by 11:59 PM on March 24**. Consider using the pre-provided, editable text to share your support for SNA's comments, and add details about the challenges your school meal program or company faces in meeting these standards, as well as concerns about USDA's plan to propose additional long-term nutrition standards this fall.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT!



### Diane Buchanan – AKSNA's 2022 Administrator of the Year!



**Soldotna, February 8, 2022—This statewide recognition highlights Diane Buchanan's commitment and dedication to school nutrition, and feeding thousands of children every single school day in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District.**

For thirty years, Diane Buchanan has worked in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, a diverse district the size of West Virginia, with 42 schools, some only accessible by boat or plane. Starting as a student nutrition cashier in 1992 at Soldotna Junior High, for the past six years, she has served as the Student Nutrition Services Supervisor, where she oversees food nutrition services, school kitchen management, free and reduced lunch applications, and menus among other responsibilities. Fun fact: every day KPBSD Student Nutrition serves a daily average of 1,200 breakfasts and 3,200 lunches!

During the past two years of the pandemic, she and her team stepped up to provide "Get It and Go" lunches when schools were in remote learning, juggled supply chain issues of not receiving food, and kept school meals served every day that school has been open in person. In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, the Governor of Alaska announced the shift of all schools to remote learning after spring break. Immediately, district leadership asked what can we do to provide meals to students, since so many families rely on school meals. The Director of Planning and Operations called Diane, and everyone went to work over the weekend. KPBSD was proud to offer "[Get it and Go Meals](#)" and an online ordering service that began the Tuesday after that 2020 spring break.

Read full Article here: [ONLINE NEWS RELEASE](#)

An avid quilter, she creates beautiful art, she is a beekeeper, goes along with her family on hunts, rides her four-wheeler, enjoys gardening and flowers, is active in her church, and loves time with her grandchildren.

If your district has something exciting to share, please email it to me at [Debbie.soto@alaska.gov](mailto:Debbie.soto@alaska.gov) to be included in the next Mush On!

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## [Juneau School District Celebrates \*School Breakfast Week\*](#)



Students are feeling the weight of the pandemic along with our long Juneau winter and many of us are thinking about sunshine. With those things on our minds, the Juneau School District Food Service staff felt the need to have their own kind of fun for National School Breakfast Week. When researching ideas on the Internet, Catherine Pusich, administrative assistant for the program, came across a piece of clipart which was a smiling sunshine face with sunglasses and an idea was born for one of the days during the breakfast week. During the week of March 7-11, the food service program had a ***Rise and Shine Day*** and every student who got breakfast received a pair of sunglasses to wear. There was also an ***Eat your Spoon Day***. A chocolate edible spoon was served with their yogurt or parfait. Then there was a ***Lucky Number Day*** and one lucky winner

received a water bottle and all students received vinyl stickers. "It is not always easy to find unique and affordable ideas to promote the meal program, but I hope the students appreciated the fun things we planned," said Pusich.

## [Is Your Team TECH-HESITANT?](#)

### **Tips to Building Tech Confidence**

There are many reasons why your team members may demonstrate an insecurity around learning new technology. In "[Is Your Team Tech-Hesitant?](#)" a new [SN Plus](#) article, you'll discover common causes for tech-related stress and best-practice training tips for building confidence. [Learn More](#)

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The SNA's Learning Center - where SNA members can regularly access new learning resources and opportunities to earn CEU's. The Learning Center resources are designed to support you in your school nutrition journey and help you to grow in the field.

### **Upcoming Webinars:**

[The Learning Center \(schoolnutrition.org\)](http://schoolnutrition.org)

## AKSNA Advocates for Reasonable Nutritional Standards

Sandie Ponte, President and Rachel Spencer, Public Policy and Legislation Chair

AKSNA's Public Policy and Legislation Committee recently sent a letter to the USDA regarding Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grain, and Sodium. In this letter, AKSNA joins with SNA in advocating for the tremendous nutritional value that is already present in each of the nearly 73,000 breakfast and lunches served throughout our great state. AKSNA advocated for more reasonable implementation including delayed and voluntary standards that include a cash-based performance incentive in lieu of mandatory standards.

Online: <https://aksna.org/2022/03/23/aksna-advocates-for-reasonable-nutritional-standards/>

See letter on next 2 pages.....



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23 March 2022

Tina Namian, Chief  
School Programs Branch  
Policy and Program Development Division – 4th Floor  
Food and Nutrition Service  
1320 Braddock Place  
Alexandria, VA 22314

RE: Child Nutrition Programs: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium

Dear Ms. Namian:

We write to you on behalf of the Alaska School Nutrition Association (AKSNA), which represents school nutrition professionals across the great state of Alaska. We appreciate that the USDA has recognized the challenges that confront school nutrition professionals each day and urge you to further acknowledge the impact of these challenges by delaying and reconsidering the method in which transitional standards for milk, whole grain, and sodium are implemented in child nutrition programs. We desire to continue operating under current nutritional standards with the option of meeting higher target standards for a cash performance incentive at a time and manner determined by each individual SFA.

Alaska's school nutrition professionals serve 48,000 school lunches and 25,000 school breakfasts per day across 365 million acres in a state where most school districts do not have roads. Like the USDA, our goal is to ensure that our children receive nutritious, enjoyable school meals. Supply chain challenges notwithstanding, we face many hurdles acquiring nutritious foods and ingredients and promoting their consumption. The selection of manufacturers and distributors in Alaska, and in particular, "roadless" areas is limited and increasingly narrow due to supply chain disruptions.

Alaska's SFA serve a small portion of the 30 million school lunches each day, a small portion of a US food market that serves 330 million Americans and a global market of 7.5 billion. Manufacturers have increasingly prioritized larger segments of the market rather than, what is to them, a niche segment of the market. Distributors likewise reduce risk by prioritizing broadline customers and stock more general merchandise that does not meet current, nor transitional, child nutrition standards. Our access to distributors in Alaska is further hampered by the remote nature, both in distance and transportation modes, to most of the state. We are frequently faced with challenges acquiring nutritious foods, supply chain disruptions notwithstanding.

Increasing nutrition standards further challenges participation in child nutrition programs. School meals are often the best source of nutrition for school-age children; discouraging participation discourages nutrition. The passage of the HHFKA saw participation in school nutrition programs dip as students initially rejected and slowly acclimated to the increased nutritional standards. We anticipate that, if we are able to procure



the products and ingredients, that this will happen again at a time when many families in Alaska and across the US struggle with extraordinary consumer price increases.

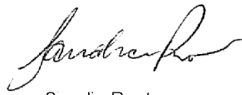
We join with the School Nutrition Association, which represents 58,000 school nutrition professionals throughout the US and its territories, in requesting that these standards remain unchanged. SNA has identified several reasons that the existing standards are beneficial to child nutrition:

- School meal programs already meet significant nutritional standards including sodium reduction, increased fruit and vegetable servings, increased whole grain, and leaner proteins.
- School meals are the healthiest meals most children eat.
- Labor shortages and long-term impacts to the supply chain already impacting 92% of SFAs
- Food manufacturer and distributor efforts to streamline, reducing availability of foods that meet the highly specialized child nutrition standards.
- Only 11% of SFA directors are able to meet the sodium target with 97% expressing concerns of negative impacts on child nutrition programs.
- Three quarters of SFAs face staffing shortages according to the USDA, particularly among cook/prep staff.
- Congressional inaction on child nutrition waivers.

Like the USDA, AKSNA members desire for improvements in child nutrition; we ask that an alternative path forward be created that allows school nutrition professionals the ability to continue to serve nutritious meals while affording the opportunity to meet targeted increases. We request that increased nutritional standards be offered as a voluntary per-meal cash-based performance incentive, which would allow SFAs to incrementally work toward these higher standards at a point when students' tastes and preferences evolve, manufacturers begin to adapt, and the supply chain in the US and our localities improves.

On behalf of our members, we thank you for reviewing and considering our request and appreciate your support as we continue to provide for students' nutritional needs.

Sincerely,



Sandie Ponte  
President



Rachel Spencer  
Public Policy & Legislation Chair