

# MUSH-ON

June 2023



## A Word from Our State President – Trevor Bridgewater



The Alaska School Nutrition Association has worked hard over the past year. Educating members on updates to USDA regulations, advocating for realistic

changes that benefit students and operations, and engage with our congressional delegation and program operators to develop and promote solutions to elevate school nutrition programs.

As my time as your AKSNA President comes to an end, I can reflect on the experiences over the past year. Collaborating with board members has allowed me to better understand the different challenges we all face. Sharing the success stories from around the state with SNA and our Facebook friends has made me proud to be a part of this group. We have an incredible group of board members and I look forward to what next year brings with incoming President Gavin Northey and President-Elect Tanya Dube as we plan the 56th Annual AKSNA Conference.

I would like to wish you all a safe and enjoyable summer and look forward to connecting again in August.

## AKSNA Executive Board

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## **Following Through**

“Keep your eyes on the stars but remember to keep your feet on the ground.” – Theodore Roosevelt

We all want the best of everything for our programs. It’s just natural.

I’ll be the first to admit it, I sometimes embody Michael Keaton’s character Bill Blazejowski from the 1982 smash comedic hit Night Shift, “See, I’m an idea man, Chuck. I got ideas coming at me all day... I couldn't even fight 'em off if I wanted. Wait a second... hold the phone! Hold the phone! [speaking into tape recorder] Idea to eliminate garbage. Edible paper. You eat it, it's gone! You eat it, it's outta there! No more garbage!” Whether it’s the perfect solution for scratch made, local breakfast and lunch options or getting kids to like legumes, it seems so achievable when you see it on Instagram or Pinterest. Then reality comes crashing down. Planning 7,000 plus meals 5 days a week all school year is enough to make you want to throw in the towel before you even start. It can be an emotional roller coaster to be unrealistic about what can be achieved. Planning, preparation, and patience are some of the pieces to take those “Ah Ha!” moments and turn them into meaningful results for your programs.

Understanding how I operate and my thought process was a step in the right direction in taking my ideas and turning them into actions professionally and personally. A recent article I found from author and speaker Gregg Vanourek, The Trap of Being Unrealistic spoke directly to the process making sure I pause before diving head first into an idea that is half baked. Completing the Traps Test was helpful in knowing the tendencies I have when making decisions. Becoming aware of how you operate will lead to better outcomes.

As you reflect on the past year, the good and the bad days, take the time to really explore those wild ideas you have had to allow yourself that creativity. Then, as your plan for the next year, take the time to give those ideas a solid foundation to be built and grow. Make your ideas your reality.

### **Member Services:**

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AKSNA is pleased to announce the second annual Arctic School Food Service Innovations Competition. The competition recognizes an individual in school food service that has contributed an innovation that has expanded access to school meals, improved the quality or nutritional value of school meals, improved student and community relationships of the school meal program, improved logistical or financial support of school meals, and/or overcome another challenge to making, distributing, and serving school meals.

The winner will be selected by people's choice award at the 56th Annual AKSNA Conference in Anchorage, Alaska, 23 – 25 January 2024.

The winner will receive travel and registration to the **SNA Annual National Conference in Boston, Massachusetts**, 14 – 16 July 2024.

## Nominations

Anyone with direct knowledge of the innovation may nominate an AKSNA member; self-nominations are allowed. The person submitting the nomination need not be an AKSNA member. Examples of qualified nominators include the nominee, the nominee's supervisor, colleague, business manager, teacher, principal, or superintendent.

To nominate an individual, complete the nomination form at <https://aksna.org/arctic-school-food-service-competition/>

Your nomination should include:

- A photo of the nominee
- A photo documenting the innovation and/or result of the innovation, additional photos are encouraged
- A short report detailing the innovation (recommended word length 500-1000 words)  
the report should include an explanation of:
  - What was the innovation?
  - What challenge/improvement was address?
  - What was the nominee's contribution?
  - What date did this start? How long did it take?
  - How the innovation impacted students?
    - If there was a change in participation, please include relevant participation data.
  - What was the impact on the school community?

- Why was the innovation important?

## Guidelines

### Eligibility and Judging

The nominee must be an AKSNA member in good standing at the time of award, 24 January 2024. While attendance at the AKSNA Annual Conference is encouraged, the nominee need not be present to win.

If there are more than three qualified nominees, the AKSNA Board will convene a committee to review the nominations and select the top three choices. The nominees, or the top three selected by the committee, will be presented at the AKSNA Annual Conference where all attendees will select the winner by popular vote.

The nominee with the most votes will be announced at the Award Banquet. If there is a tie, the nominee whose nomination was received first will be awarded.

### Award Details

The winner will attend the 2024 SNA Annual Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, 14 - 16 July 2024.

This includes:

- Conference registration
- Airfare from the winner's home city in Alaska to Boston, Massachusetts (round-trip, economy class)
- Lodging at one of SNA's partner hotels
- A \$300 cash allowance for meals and ground transportation

### Federal Income Tax

The winner will receive an additional cash allowance equal to 28.2% of the total cash value of the prize; the amount is intended, but not guaranteed, to offset the winner's Federal Income Tax liability.

To comply with U.S. Internal Revenue Code, the winner must submit an IRS Form W-9 before any prize may be disbursed; the value of the award will be reported as 2024 income to the Internal Revenue Service via Form 1099-MISC.

## About the Alaska School Nutrition Association

AKSNA is the state affiliate of the School Nutrition Association (SNA), a national, nonprofit professional organization representing more than 46,000 members who provide high-quality, low-cost meals to students across the country. Recognized as the authority on school nutrition, SNA has been advancing the availability, quality and acceptance of school nutrition programs as an integral part of education since 1946.

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## Steam Tables

One big topic that most of us have to deal with is waste from our lunch programs. This is directed at not only the plate waste of uneaten food but the packaging waste also. Anchorage School District is taking a first step to get away from prepackaged meals at all their elementary schools by transitioning over to a more traditional lunch line for the cafeterias.

To make this work, there were more than a few issues that needed to be addressed. These elementary schools were not designed to store cases of food or offer food that was not already in a package. To answer these two issues, a redesign of procedure in their central kitchen happened to allow specific schools to order broken cases. This also required them to ensure proper labeling and food safety was followed for each item.

Finally, a search was made to find a cost-effective way to have food warmers or steam wells available at these sites. The search ended by ordering equipment stands and countertop steam wells. This also moves the served food from a folding table to a stainless-steel roll-away table. The complete set up came in at just over \$1,400 including shipping. Some tests were run to ensure this new set up would work. They were happy to see that after having the table on and holding food temp at 145°F for 6.5 hours, the outer casing never got to a temperature that would harm the students.

This steam table plan will target packaging waste by offering food service onto compostable trays or reusable trays, and this targets plate waste by taking offer-vs-serve to the forefront. Hopefully, this transition can continue and eventually reach most elementary schools.

- Student side



- Kitchen side



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## **National Leadership Conference**

Gavin M. Northey, SNS, President-elect

AKSNA board members Gavin Northey and Tiffany Kurani attended SNA's National Leadership Conference (NLC) in Louisville, Kentucky in April. Additionally, Tiffany participated in the Future Leaders Program (FLP) which is a concurrent track offered for new and upcoming state association leaders. The theme of this year's NLC was "Engage Community," and provided educational and networking opportunities with state leaders from across the country.

Ideas shared at the conference included ways to improve public-facing functions of the association including the conference enhancements, member-engagement and networking, and advocacy as well as ways to improve the governance, Robert's Rules of Order, and financial transparency. While the latter are not necessarily an exciting topic for most members, these topics ensure that your board is able to uphold its fiducial responsibility to you and ensure that AKSNA will today, and in the future, continue to serve you.

Attendees also discuss school nutrition operations. While the conference focuses on leadership within the association, it is always good to find comradery amongst our peers and know that the challenges we experience here in Alaska are not unique, at least not all of them. Across the nation, school nutrition professionals are working to find solutions to staffing shortages, financial deficits, and meeting demand in the face of changing nutrition standards.

NLC equips your AKSNA board members to better support the state association and its membership. A frequent topic in sessions and among attendees included opportunities to connect with members and improve member services, improving state conferences and award banquets, offering training and networking opportunities beyond state conferences, and attracting and engaging new members.

Creating great services for our members and supporting school nutrition programs across our great state is a priority for the AKSNA board. If you are interested in serving, whether you are available for just an hour or two a month or more, we would love to help you start your leadership journey with AKSNA. Volunteering for AKSNA has many benefits; for me personally, I have gained many professional and personal relationships, gained valuable professional experience, and am part of something far greater than myself. If you would like to volunteer, please feel free to email me, [gavin.northey@aksna.org](mailto:gavin.northey@aksna.org).

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## State Agency Update

Gavin M. Northey, MBA, SNS, Alaska Child Nutrition Programs Manager

There are many new faces at Alaska Child Nutrition Programs. Since December, Samantha Simien, School Meal Program Coordinator; Chris Mariano, Summer Food Service Program Coordinator; Waverli Stowe, Farm to School and Health and Wellness Grant Coordinator; and I have joined the State Agency, representing a 40% turnover inside of six months. We joined an incredible team that has years of experience supporting child nutrition programs in the Last Frontier. While the faces have changed, our commitment to serving and supporting child nutrition sponsors in Alaska endures.

Summer food service has commenced in many Alaskan communities. The passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (a.k.a. the Omnibus) brought some significant changes to summer feeding including permanent non-congregate food service in the SFSP in rural areas. The Secretary of Agriculture must issue Interim rules by December of this year; in the meantime, Alaska has taken a cautious approach to implement it this year. Our intent is to uphold program integrity while enabling the widest possible access and service to Alaska's children. If our implementation is too rigid, it will be easier to relax procedures and requirements rather than be forced to escalate those that are found too lax.

In other summer news, Meals to You, an alternative to traditional summer meal programs that provides meals by mail to children in rural areas of the US, served over 1,300 families from five districts in 2022. These districts likely could not have operated a traditional summer meal program due to migratory population, lack of staffing, or prohibitive cost. We are pleased to see that 13 districts are offering this program in 2023; unfortunately, we have been notified that this will be the final year for Meals to You and we do not believe there is an alternative program for 2024 that is substantially similar that fills the gaps that Meals to You will leave, we are continuing to monitor this and will keep interested districts informed of any updates.

If summer isn't sufficiently occupying your time, planning the 2023-2024 school year is also underway. If you have not already done so, please plan to attend the School Meals Training, 25 – 27 July in Anchorage. The training covers important content for new and returning child nutrition professionals and we have focused the training on topics that we know to be relevant through conversations, observations, and administrative review findings. If you did not receive a link to register, email [Samantha.Simien@alaska.gov](mailto:Samantha.Simien@alaska.gov) and [Debbie.Soto@alaska.gov](mailto:Debbie.Soto@alaska.gov).

In the meantime, have a safe and happy summer!