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Administrative Review Training

10 Common Findings & Best Practices to Avoid Them

At School Management Solutions, we know how much work goes into running a successful school nutrition program, and we're here to make things a little easier. Our goal is to help schools stay organized, keep up with program requirements, and avoid common mistakes so they can feel confident and prepared for their NYSED Administrative Reviews.

Many issues identified during Administrative Reviews involve everyday procedures, incomplete documentation, or differences between written policies and actual practices. Establishing consistent compliance procedures throughout the school year can help schools address these issues before they result in findings.

Here are some key areas to focus on and best practices to help your school stay compliant.



Assuming Similar Products Have the Same Meal Pattern Contribution

What can go wrong: Foods that look alike do not always credit the same way. For example, one brand of pita may provide 2 oz equivalents of grain, while another provides only 1 oz equivalent. Using a different product without checking its contribution can affect whether the school meets daily or weekly meal pattern requirements.

How to avoid it: Check the crediting information for every product used. Keep current CN labels, product formulation statements, or other appropriate documentation on file. When switching brands or changing portions, verify that the menu still meets meal pattern requirements before serving it.



Serving Fruit or Vegetable Portions That Are Too Small

What can go wrong: The amount of fruit or vegetables served may not provide the required creditable quantity. For example, one tangerine may contribute only 3/8 cup of fruit. Similarly, one cup of raw leafy greens generally credits as only 1/2 cup of vegetables.

How to avoid it: Use the USDA Food Buying Guide to check how much each fruit or vegetable credits. Verify serving sizes using the actual food and preparation method, and make sure staff know the correct portions for each grade group and meal service method.



Counting Meals That Don't Qualify for Reimbursement

What can go wrong: A meal may be counted even though the student did not select all the required components. Under Offer Versus Serve (OVS) at lunch, for example, students must select at least three components, including at least ˝ cup of fruit or vegetables. An incomplete meal cannot be claimed for reimbursement.

How to avoid it: Review reimbursable meal requirements with all staff responsible for meal service. Post required meal signage and provide examples of acceptable meal combinations. Make sure staff check meals before recording them as reimbursable.



Using Attendance or Delivery Numbers as Meal Counts

What can go wrong: A school may use classroom attendance, the number of meals delivered, or the number of meals prepared to determine how many meals to claim. However, not every student present necessarily receives a reimbursable meal, and not every delivered meal is served.

How to avoid it: Count meals at the point of service, when students receive a reimbursable meal. Establish a clear procedure for teachers, substitutes, and other staff responsible for counting. Check that daily counts are accurate and properly transferred into the reimbursement claim.

5 Receiving Meals Without Proper Temperature-Controlled Storage

What can go wrong: Meals may be delivered hours before service, but the school may not have appropriate refrigeration, insulated holding equipment, or other approved methods to maintain safe food temperatures. Even properly prepared food can become unsafe if it is not stored correctly after delivery.

How to avoid it: Review delivery schedules and food storage arrangements before meal service begins. Make sure each serving location has the equipment needed to maintain safe temperatures. Follow the school's food safety plan, including required temperature checks, records, and corrective actions.

6 Completing Production Records Without Verifying Actual Quantities

What can go wrong: Production records may list the planned menu and portions without reflecting substitutions, different quantities, or actual leftovers. For example, a school may prepare fewer meals than expected but record the original planned quantity.

How to avoid it: Complete production records using actual information from meal preparation and service. Record the foods and portions served, quantities prepared, substitutions, and leftovers. Review the records daily so errors can be corrected while the information is still available.

7 Missing Civil Rights Notices or Required Procedures

What can go wrong: Schools may overlook civil rights requirements even when they provide meals fairly to all students. Missing "And Justice for All" posters, outdated nondiscrimination statements, or unclear complaint procedures can lead to findings.

How to avoid it: Review civil rights requirements at the beginning of each school year and again before the administrative review. Confirm that required posters and notices are current and properly displayed or distributed. Make sure staff know how to handle a civil rights complaint and where to direct it.

8 Not Following Correct Procurement Procedures

What can go wrong: Schools may routinely purchase food or supplies from familiar vendors without documenting how those vendors were selected. Small recurring purchases may also be treated as separate transactions without considering the school's overall anticipated purchasing needs.

How to avoid it: Review anticipated purchases and determine the appropriate procurement method before selecting vendors. Follow applicable competition requirements and maintain supporting documentation, including quotes, contracts, invoices, and vendor selection records. Check that the Procurement Review Tool agrees with the school's financial records.

9 Completing Staff Training Without Applying What Was Learned

What can go wrong: Staff may complete required online webinars and receive training certificates but continue using outdated or incorrect procedures. For example, a staff member may complete meal counting training but still record classroom attendance instead of actual reimbursable meals.

How to avoid it: Don't stop at training certificates. After staff complete training, review the procedures with them and observe how they carry out their responsibilities. Ask staff to demonstrate tasks such as identifying reimbursable meals, completing meal counts, or checking food temperatures. Provide additional guidance when needed.

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Overlooking Eligibility Determinations and Updates

What can go wrong: Errors can occur when free and reduced-price meal applications are processed incorrectly, eligibility changes are not updated, or information in the meal counting system does not match approved eligibility records. These issues can affect student benefits and reimbursement claims.

How to avoid it: Carefully review eligibility determinations, ensure that required updates are entered promptly, and check that student eligibility records agree with the meal counting system. Keep supporting documentation organized and ensure that staff responsible for eligibility understand the applicable requirements. For CEP schools, follow the appropriate CEP procedures instead of traditional meal application requirements.

A Final Reminder

A successful administrative review starts with everyday practices. Accurate portions, proper meal counts, safe food handling, trained staff, and organized records all help schools demonstrate compliance.

The best preparation is to review procedures throughout the year, address small issues as they arise, and make sure staff understand not only what is required, but how to carry it out.

This guide highlights practical compliance concerns addressed in NYSED Administrative Reviews and the accompanying Admin Review 101 materials. It is intended as a preparation resource, not an exhaustive compliance checklist or a ranking of findings.

One Last Tip: Run Your Own Internal Compliance Review

Before your scheduled Administrative Review, conduct an internal review of meal service operations and supporting documentation.

Observe meal preparation, portioning, meal counting, and food safety procedures. Compare daily practices with written policies, production records, menus, and reimbursement documentation.

Identify any compliance gaps, document corrective actions, and provide additional staff training where necessary. The goal is to make sure that written procedures, supporting records, and actual meal service practices are consistent.

Staying Prepared Starts with Everyday Compliance

Administrative Review preparation shouldn't begin when NYSED schedules a visit. Maintaining accurate documentation, following established procedures, and regularly reviewing program operations can help schools avoid preventable findings and make the review process smoother.

At SMS, we're here to help schools stay on track, strengthen their compliance practices, and feel prepared when review time comes.

This handout is provided by School Management Solutions for informational purposes. It summarizes compliance risk areas and recommended practices based on Administrative Review preparation materials, rather than a verified frequency analysis of NYSED findings. Schools should follow current NYSED and USDA requirements applicable to their programs.

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