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## Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

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Food Service in School Districts

September 23, 2019

Thank you Senator Langerholc, Senator Dinniman, and the rest of the Senate Education Committee for this opportunity to speak to you on the subject of Food Service in School Districts. I know this topic covers many areas, but I am hoping to shed some light onto this important part of a child's learning experience.

My name is Sidney Clark, and I am the Business Manager of the Shanksville-Stonycreek School District. We are the 5<sup>th</sup> smallest school district in student population. As a very small district, I handle and oversee many of the Food Service operations, finances and reporting requirements. I am here today to report on some of our experiences as well as share those from others as well across the commonwealth.

### **HISTORY**

The understanding of the importance of nutrition for school-age children has been around long before any of us ate a school breakfast or lunch. It was realized in the early 1800s that proper nutrition, or the lack of proper nutrition, affected the academic progress of children, especially poor children. Many of the larger cities in the northeast took this responsibility on themselves in the 1900s and began to offer breakfast and lunch in the schools.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt made feeding children on a regular basis a reality with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935. The WPA provided the first federal contributions to aid in feeding children as well as employed individuals to feed them. This may have been the beginning, but additional help and regulations were needed.

In 1946, President Harry Truman signed into law The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act that created three primary goals for school nutrition:

1. Provide a well-nourished nation in time of war.

2. Serve as an agriculture outlet for commodities.
3. Nourish children to improve learning.

It also created standardized procedures for:

- Approving applications for Free and Reduced meals for eligible students
- Developing and serving meals that met current USDA meal pattern regulations
- Ensuring proper meal counting and claiming procedures
- Maintaining records related to meal production

This law also appointed the Department of Agriculture as the managing federal agency, established meal standards, ensured surplus foods were given to schools through donated commodities and ensured continued funding to schools from the federal level.

Changes have been made to this legislation over time. Here are some of the major highlights:

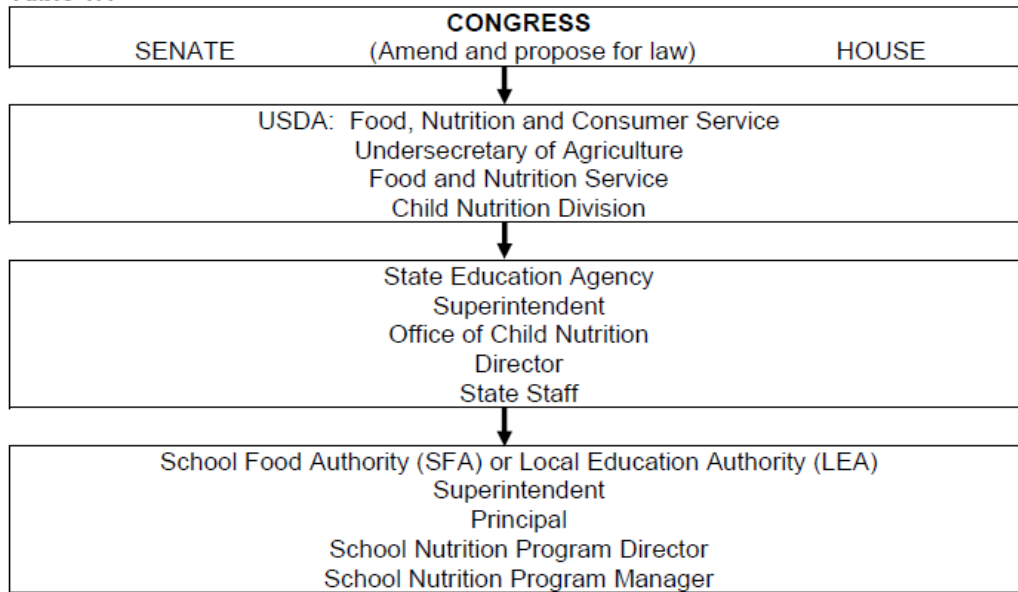
- Breakfast became a meal served in schools in 1975.
- The 1980s brought about reductions in reimbursements and the new concept of Offer versus Serve, which allowed students the option to choose meal components.
- Changes to the meal pattern and nutritional needs for children was made in 1995 based on the principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- 1999 brought about a new program called the Afterschool Snack Program, which allowed schools to provide reimbursable snacks to children in an afterschool educational program.
- 2010 brought about the biggest and most memorable changes that we all can remember. The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA) made major reforms to nutritional standards, meal planning, smart snacks, the Community Eligibility Provision and other new requirements.

My hope today is to inform the Senate Education Committee about a school district's food service program, structure, funding, limitations and restrictions that we deal with on a daily basis. These are in addition to the issues and concerns you as well as we have for our students that extend beyond the school day and in the home.

Let's start with a basic overview of the administrative and organizational breakdown of Child Nutrition Programs. As you can see from the chart below, most of our regulations come from the federal level. The state is in the middle of the hierarchy and implements the federal regulations, and the local school district/school food authority is at the end with the requirement of implementing all of the requirements handed down by the agencies listed above.

## Organization and Administration of Child Nutrition Programs

**Table 1.1**



### OFFER VS. SERVE

The recession in the 1980s brought about a new concept called offer vs. serve. Many over the age of 40 can remember going through the lunch line with slotted lunch trays, getting whatever was on the menu whether wanted or not.

This “serve” method forced each student to take one of every meal component. This method created a vast amount of waste because children would not eat every meal component. Giving every child every meal component kept meal cost at a maximum.



However, the “serve” method was eventually swapped out for the “offer” option. Initiated in middle and high schools, the “offer” option allowed children to choose what meal components they wanted. This curbed meal cost since not all meal components were served with each meal.

This also allowed for a variety of choices. A child could choose a fresh fruit alternative to the fruit cocktail out of a can or even fresh vegetables instead of the mixed vegetables.

**OFFER vs SERVE**  
**The Five Meal Components for School Lunch**

**Choose *at least 3* including:**



- ½ Cup of **Fruits** or **Vegetables**
- **At Least 2 Other Food Groups**

**For best nutrition, *choose all 5***



## MEAL REQUIREMENTS

In 2010, the HRFKA enacted a major change in the definition of what makes a “reimbursable” meal. Reimbursable meaning that the minimum meal requirements are met in order to receive state and federal reimbursement.

Each meal is broken into 5 components:

- Meat or Meat Alternative
- Grains
- Fruit
- Vegetable
- Milk

# MYPLATE GUIDE TO SCHOOL BREAKFAST

*for Families*



## FRUITS

A full cup of fruit is available every day, providing nutrients that are important for kids' health, such as potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin C, and folate (folic acid).

## MILK



Kids and teens need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles.



## VEGETABLES

Every breakfast does not include vegetables, but schools may offer them in place of fruits.



## PROTEIN FOODS

Some breakfast menus may offer items such as eggs, nuts, or meats to pair with whole-grain options.

## GRAINS



Starting every day the whole grains way gives kids and teens B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to feel fuller longer so they stay alert to concentrate at school.



# MYPLATE GUIDE TO SCHOOL LUNCH

*for Families*

## VEGETABLES



A variety of vegetables helps kids get the nutrients and fiber they need for good health.

## MILK



Low-fat (1%) or Fat-free milk. Children and teens need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth and muscles.



## GRAINS

Whole grains give kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them feel fuller longer so they stay alert to concentrate at school.



## PROTEIN FOODS

Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, peas, eggs, nuts, and seeds provide many nutrients including protein and iron. Portion sizes are based upon the nutrition needs of children in various grade groups. School meals also allow cheese, tofu, and yogurt to count as the meat/meat alternate in the school lunch.

## FRUITS



Every school lunch includes fruits as well as vegetables. Only ½ of the fruits offered may be 100% juice, since whole and cut-up fruits have more fiber.



Prior to 2010, a reimbursable meal was defined by someone getting at least three meal components. Up until 2010, it did not matter which three meal components, which means a child could completely avoid fruits and vegetables.

In 2010, HHFKA inserted a new requirement that made either one vegetable or one fruit serving a required component of every meal, along with two other meal components. In an attempt to ensure a more balanced meal, even if only the minimum amount of meal components is chosen, a child is forced to take a meal component that they may never eat, and it could wind up getting thrown away. Many food service directors believe this is the largest source of wasted food in many of their cafeterias.

## **MENU PLANNING**

Over time, menu planning was altered based on changes to the nutritional standards. For example, in the 1980s, the mandatory of serving 1 tablespoon of butter with every lunch was eliminated.

In the mid-1990s, lunches were required to meet new criteria with emphasis on calories, vitamins, minerals, total fat and saturated fat. To assist schools to meet meal pattern changes, commodities changed to include part-skim milk mozzarella, reduced fat cheese, lean ground beef, and more options for frozen fruits and vegetables.

In 2004, recommendations for inclusion of more fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains in meal planning. Many of these recommendations became requirements in 2010 with HHKFA.

The most recent changes were in 2010 when sodium was reduced to levels so low that salt shakers had to be removed from the cafeteria completely. Trans fat was completely eliminated from the cafeteria to help address childhood obesity along with moving to whole grain breads, dough and pasta.

The changes continued with fruits and vegetables being broke out into separate food components. Menu and calorie restrictions went into effect with the USDA implementing new nutritional requirements. Different nutritional requirements were put into effect for children in Grades k-5, Grades 6-8 and Grades 9-12.

Basically, there is a different set of standards for elementary students, than for middle school and high school students. There could be two different standards that need implemented depending on how the grade levels are split up in a district. If grade 6 is in the elementary or grade 5 and/or grade 6 in the middle school, one cafeteria might have to serve different portions depending on the grade level going through the cafeteria line.

Some food service directors contend there should be consideration to two different serving sizes in the elementary levels. Children of the age of 5 and 6 do not eat as much as the 10 and 11 year olds. This is also a major source of food being wasted in the cafeteria. The 5 and 6 year

olds currently get the same amount of food as the older elementary kids and many do not eat all they are given.

The following chart provides a breakdown of the nutrition requirements for each age group:

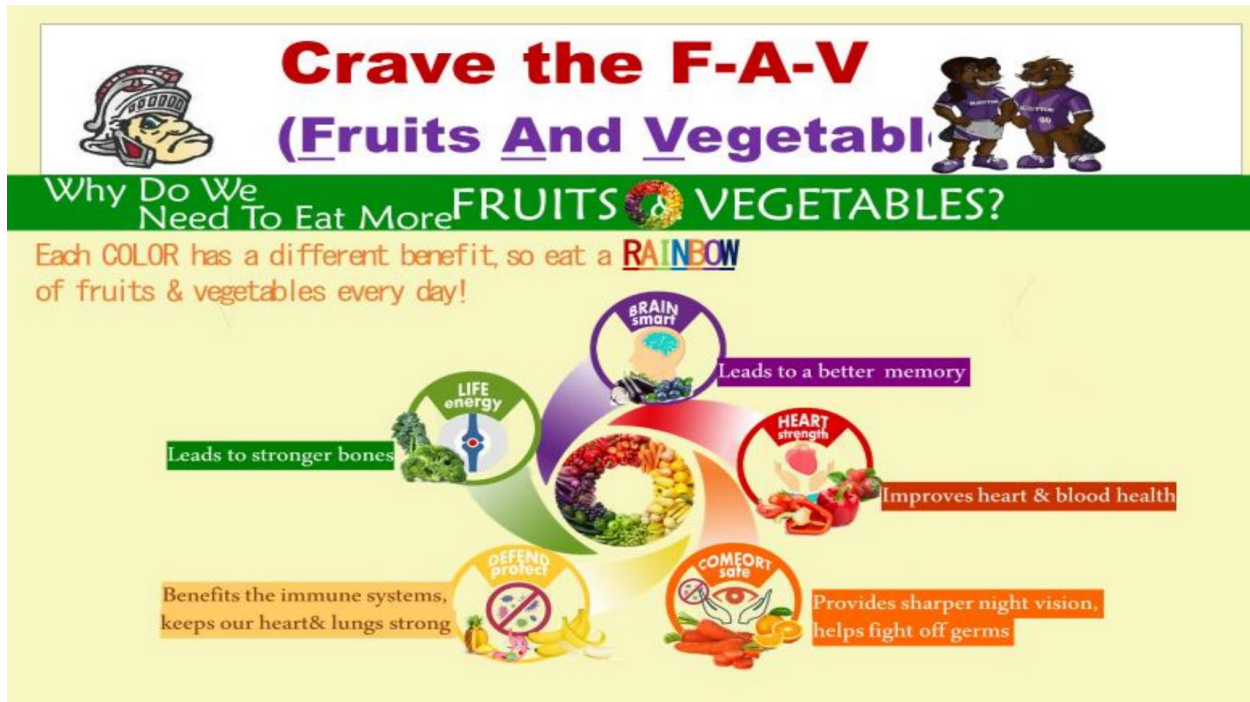
	Lunch Meal Pattern		
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Food Components	Amount of Food <sup>a</sup> per Week		
	(minimum per day)		
Fruits (cups) <sup>b</sup>	2½ (½)	2½ (½)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) <sup>b</sup>	3¾ (¾)	3¾ (¾)	5 (1)
Dark green <sup>c</sup>	½	½	½
Red/Orange <sup>c</sup>	¾	¾	1¼
Beans and peas (legumes) <sup>c</sup>	½	½	½
Starchy <sup>c</sup>	½	½	½
Other <sup>c,d</sup>	½	½	¾
Additional Vegetables to Reach Total <sup>e</sup>	1	1	1½
Grains (oz eq) <sup>f</sup>	8-9 (1)	8-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Fluid milk (cups) <sup>g</sup>	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
<b>Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week</b>			
Min-max calories (kcal) <sup>h</sup>	550-650	600-700	750-850
Saturated fat (% of total calories) <sup>h</sup>	<10	<10	<10
Sodium Target 1 (mg) <sup>h,i</sup>	≤1,230	≤1,360	≤1,420
Trans fat <sup>h,j</sup>	Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of <u>trans</u> fat per serving.		

In addition to making sure a student takes a fruit or vegetable with each meal, schools are also required to ensure the proper rotation of vegetables served by color categories each week. You just cannot serve the favorites all the time (corn, peas, green beans, carrots and others). Below are the vegetable subcategories and examples of each:

- Dark Green- Broccoli, Dark leafy greens (e.g. Romaine, Spinach) 1 cup of leafy greens equals a ½ cup serving.



- Red/Orange- Carrots, Winter squash (e.g. Pumpkin, Hubbard, Acorn, Butternut), Sweet potatoes
- Starchy- Corn, Peas, Lima Beans, White potatoes
- Legumes- Dried Beans and peas
- Other Vegetables- Green beans, zucchini, cauliflower, red beets, jicama, celery, radishes



The forced rotation to use vegetables from each subcategory each week has made cafeterias use many more different types of vegetables than in the past. For younger children who can be very picky eaters, this again leads to waste.

The other challenge for cafeterias is finding multiple ways to serve these vegetables in a way to help children want to eat them. Many of these foods can be refrigerated and/or frozen and used again on the menu. Some of these uses can be in different food dishes the cafeteria makes. A prime example would be using many of these vegetables for different soups.

School cafeteria menus and nutritional breakdowns of each lunch are monitored closely during each monitoring cycle. This also includes the vegetable rotation as well. Most school cafeterias using menu building software to help them monitor calorie and nutritional information with each food component they use in building each day's menu.

HHFKA also brought about nutritional standards for snacks and other "a la carte" foods that cafeterias offer for purchase. Items like chips, cookies, tea and others now have nutritional requirements and some are even limited to certain age groups.



## SHARING TABLES

Recently, school cafeterias can now setup a “sharing” table for children who do not want to eat their unopened prepackaged food, milk or whole fruits. This provides an opportunity to share these foods with other students, however, this doesn’t allow for sharing of open, prepared foods the cafeterias serve. The key to preventing the wasting of uneaten foods in this scenario would be to educate the children to take foods that can go on the sharing table versus the open prepared foods.



Sharing tables creates another area of concern that has to be properly managed. Unopened milks and other items that need to maintain a certain temperature need to be closely monitored. Children would not be allowed to put anything they bring from home on the sharing table either since health concerns come into play.

## LEFTOVERS and WASTED FOOD

Daily leftovers and wasted food are always a concern as are the costs associated with it. The unfortunate part is that we can do very little with the open, prepared food that is already served to the children. However, giving the children the ability to choose what meal components they want as well as different options with fresh vegetable and fruit alternatives

each day allow the students to create a balanced meal that they are more willing to eat in its entirety.

However, there are more options for food that is prepared that day that is not served as long as cooling and reheating requirements are met. One easy option is that foods that can be stored, reheated and served as a la carte items along with the next day's menu. Many foods can be reused in other kitchen recipes like soup and other dishes or even properly stored for use the next time the item appears on the menu. The unfortunate part is that not every food can be saved and reused.

Recently, an Indiana state elementary school made news by giving their food to a nonprofit food rescue group that properly turned the leftovers into frozen meals that were given to underprivileged students to take home on Fridays for meals over the weekend. There are many concerns and food-handling procedures that have would have to be followed in order for a program like this to run successfully. The key point to remember is handling leftovers in schools is not as simple as taking home grandma's cool whip china full of leftovers you take to work the next day for lunch.

In trying to control food waste costs, cafeterias also have proactive options to consider as well. One is menu cycling. Menu cycling is where you take 5 to 6 weeks of menus and reuse them on a reoccurring cycle with minor changes as needed or planned. The menu cycling helps limit the number of food items purchased and stored in limited freezer, fridge and stock room storage.

Another proactive approach is to control how much food is prepared from the beginning. One way to do this is through meal counts. Many elementary schools poll their students in the morning to see which meal choice they will be eating that day. Those counts are then communicated to the cafeteria to help determine how much food is prepared that day.

Many schools have multiple lunch periods like Shanksville-Stonycreek. We prepare an estimated quantity based on the first lunch period and adjust the quantities for the next lunch period based on the leftovers from the first. This method is more labor intensive through the lunch periods, but by breaking up the food preparation, quantities can be more fresh and more accurate in quantity creating less leftovers at the end of the day.

With only one cafeteria, Shanksville-Stonycreek also serves their lunch periods from the youngest children to the oldest. This allows the senior high students the opportunity to consume leftovers for the day through a la carte sales while the food is still fresh from that day.



## AFTERSCHOOL FEEDING

In addition to caring for and feeding the children during the school day, many school districts know that there are many children who do not get an opportunity to eat balanced meals when they are home during the non-school days during the school year as well as the summer. USDA has provided funding for summer feeding programs where children can go to designated schools during the summer for free breakfasts and lunches. Some larger school districts have invested in food trucks for their summer feeding programs where they go into the community

and hand out prepared meals during the summer instead of having the students come to the school.

USDA has also provided funding for nutritional after school snacks that can be served during after school academic programs. Schools are also beginning to provide enhanced supper programs through CACFP (Child, Adult, Care Food Programs). The school district can now feed children all year in communities where poverty and lower income families need the added support.

Many school districts have reached out to their communities for help as well. School districts have partnered with local nonprofits, churches and willing donators to begin Backpack Food Programs. Food sent home in these programs is single-serving and microwavable, if necessary. This ensures that children are able to prepare the meals quickly, safely and independently.

Cafeteria food is not used in these programs, but through the help of grants and donations these programs ensure kids can eat when they are not in school during the weekend. Many school districts use application processes to identify the children who qualify for the program. Unfortunately, not every needy family applies, and these programs succeeding is fully dependent on donations.

In Bedford County, 23% of the children are considered to be food insecure. That means these children do not have enough food at home to be able to eat throughout the weekend. However, school districts like Bedford Area School District and Everett Area School District have programs to help their children. In the 2018-2019 school year, Bedford Area School District provided 140 students approximately 5,000 backpack meals over the course of the school year. Bedford Area School District accomplished by the donations of over 60 community establishments, businesses and faith-based organizations along with donations from community members, parents, students staff members and school officials.

Everett Area School District began their program in 2018-2019 with a small grant and relied on community donations as well.

I believe these types of programs that could flourish in many more districts. Here are some of the districts in the Mid-State PASBO region that responded to our impromptu survey that currently have backpack programs in place:

- Blacklick Valley SD
- Turkeyfoot Valley SD
- Juniata Valley SD
- State College Area SD
- Keystone Central SD
- Moshannon Valley SD
- Tussey Mountain SD
- Bedford Area SD

- Everett Area SD

## **LUNCH SHAMING**

Lunch shaming is a topic that the commonwealth has addressed in establishing laws and revisions to this law. USDA does not permit any identification of children who receive free or reduced meals.

You can remember years ago when colored coded lunch tickets identified whether you got free, reduced or regular priced meals. This type of unique identification has been eliminated with the use of computerized point-of-sale systems using pin numbers, bar codes or even biometric screenings. With prepaid deposits into children's account and not handling receipt of money during the lunch hour, children cannot be identified based on their meal status.

In 2010, USDA made it clear that lunch shaming techniques for negative meal balances are not allowed. We have all heard of the examples that various school districts used throughout the years. Pennsylvania also passed legislation in recent years establishing what school districts can do and cannot do in regards with dealing with collecting negative balances due on cafeteria accounts.

As a result of these changes, negative balances in school district cafeterias have reached an all-time high. This is an expected product of the legislative changes, however, this raises new concerns over the financial stability of the school cafeteria. Many school districts have turned to collection agencies or local magistrates for debt collection purposes on these outstanding balances.

## **FUNDING**

Food Service operates as a separate entity in a school district distinct from the district's general fund that handles educational costs. A large portion of our food service funding comes from the federal government- the same level that the regulations come from as well. This federal funding is completely contingent upon children who qualify for free and reduced meals as well as the federal commodity distribution for the school district.

In 2018-19, Shanksville-Stonycreek's percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced meals was just below 40%. Qualifying for these free and reduced cost meals make it easier for poorer families to afford breakfast and lunch at school. The contingency to receive these price breaks is that they must get a complete meal, a fruit or vegetable with two more meal components.

This qualification process happens every year and is based on family size and annual household income. Qualification for the program can occur anytime during the school year, allowing for seasonal employees or those who may be laid off an opportunity to qualify if their income situation changes. The federal government sets these income guidelines, and the school district processes each submitted application.

There are ways for a family to qualify automatically as well. Pennsylvania's DHS has a system with which each school district can match their students to determine which students automatically qualify for free meals. This process adds efficiency to the meal application process, by eliminating the need for an application to be completed by the family and processed by the school district. Foster and homeless children automatically qualify for free meals.

Federal funding is based on the number of complete meals served. Lunches can be reimbursed up to \$3.43 per meal, while breakfast can be reimbursed up to \$2.20 per meal. The reimbursement amount is dependent upon the child getting a complete meal and their qualification for free, reduced or regular pay meals. This reimbursement is paid monthly based on the number of meals served by the school district.

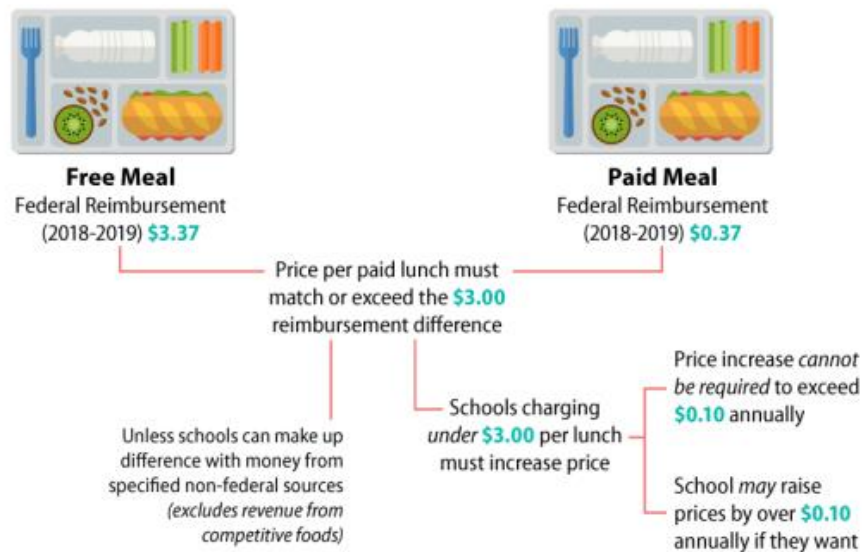
In addition to the meal reimbursement, the federal government also gives food commodities to each school district. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Food Assistance is responsible for the program and working with the local school districts in determining and handling allocations as they become available.

School districts have the choice to have the commodity product shipped directly to the district or to have the raw commodity product diverted to manufacturers of food products for a price reduction on the finished product. For example, we divert our raw flour to our bread company for reduced bread pricing. Another example would be raw chicken, beef or pork that we divert for finished products like chicken nuggets, rib patties or pre-cooked beef crumbles. A sample of the commodities food Shanksville-Stonycreek purchases in the 2018-2019 school year is included with my testimony.

The commonwealth does help with some meal reimbursement, however, it is a very small percentage of the total revenue for Food Service. The commonwealth does reimburse up to 14 cents per lunch and 12 cents per breakfast. The majority of the commonwealth's funding in food service is attributed to the social student and retirement reimbursements.

Local dollars deposited by parents/guardians into children's accounts, along with federal dollars are the majority of the funding puzzle for Food Service. Local meal prices are established by school districts, but they do have to meet federal requirements.





In 2018-2019, federal reimbursement for a child receiving free meals was \$3.37 per lunch. Regular paid students meals were reimbursed at \$0.37 per meal. This means that local school lunch price should be \$3.00 per meal.

The primary focus of a school district participating in the School Nutritional Program is to ensure participation, not generate profit. As a result, many school districts, like Shanksville-Stonycreek, charged less than the expected \$3.00 per lunch in 2018-2019. Since Shanksville-Stonycreek charges less than the \$3.00 per lunch, we had to increase our lunch prices by the minimum of 5 cents per meal. Shanksville-Stonycreek charges \$2.25 for secondary lunches and \$2.20 for elementary lunches in 2019-2020.

With prices lower than federal expectations, school districts end up with a food service program that operates in the negative each year. As a result, general fund dollars are transferred to food service to make up for the lost revenue. Here is a breakdown of 2018-2019 food service revenues for the Mid-State school districts that responded to our impromptu survey:

District	Free & Reduced	Local	State	Federal	General Fund
State College Area SD	16.00%	69.00%	10.00%	21.00%	0.00%
Penns Valley SD	33.61%	56.30%	3.70%	40.00%	0.00%
Shanksville-Stonycreek SD	39.00%	46.00%	9.00%	36.00%	9.00%
Conemaugh Township SD	43.00%	37.00%	10.00%	53.00%	0.00%
Forest Hills SD	44.69%	35.00%	11.00%	54.00%	0.00%
Blacklick Valley SD	46.18%	26.73%	10.23%	58.31%	0.00%
Juniata Valley SD	47.25%	32.95%	3.27%	40.36%	23.42%

<b>District</b>	<b>Free &amp; Reduced</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>General Fund</b>
Southern Huntingdon County SD	47.42%	47.50%	3.30%	49.10%	0.10%
Somerset Area SD	49.00%	37.99%	4.22%	57.79%	0.00%
Keystone Central SD	51.00%	14.00%	3.00%	60.00%	0.00%
North Star SD	52.50%	31.31%	4.05%	57.45%	7.19%
Turkeyfoot Valley SD	56.47%	10.00%	42.00%	75.00%	15.00%
Moshannon Valley SD	56.60%	33.60%	6.00%	60.40%	0.00%
Tussey Mountain SD	61.55%	42.00%	3.00%	55.00%	0.00%

Even though every school district does not show General Fund dollars being used to balance the food service budget, you can see the variances in funding sources. I am almost certain that none of these cafeterias charge \$3.00 per lunch either. This does not include negative balances that the General Fund refunds food service in order to turn over to collections.

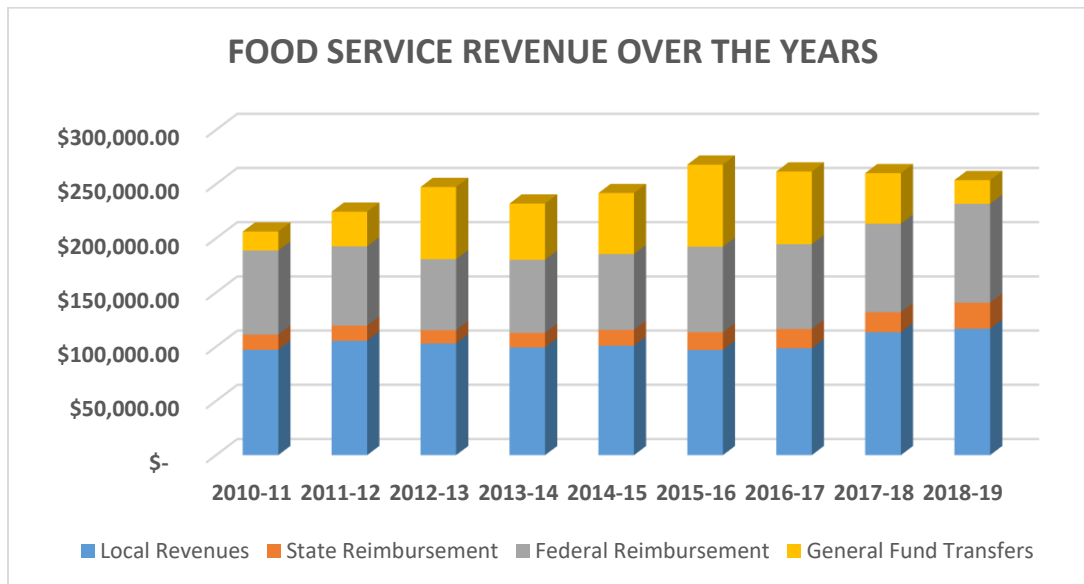
The quick response to funding shortfalls is to raise prices to federal expectations, but as basic economics shows us, as the price of an item increases beyond the customer's expectations, the number of items sold decreases. The key is to increase the price gradually while trying to maintain or increase participation numbers.

The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 had a major impact on funding for food service in various ways. The first impact had to do with the new nutritional requirement changes, which increased food costs. Add in high fuel prices where fuel surcharges began appearing on food service delivery bills, the costs of food continued to rise while school districts were trying to keep meal prices as low as possible to encourage participation.

The second impact was a severe drop in participation due to an initial drop in the quality of the food and the taste of the food. Moving from white bread to whole wheat was a move that most children did not want to take. The same issues arose with pasta. Add in the fact that food service workers took a while to figure out how to refine their preparation methods for these newer foods too, the taste and quality of the finished products suffered greatly reducing participation. In Shanksville-Stonycreek's case, we reached a point where our Kindergarten to Grade 3 lunch group had almost 60% of the children packing their lunch instead of buying a school-provided lunch.

The third impact was the nutritional standards on the smart snacks or a la carte items that school cafeterias sell as extras to help generate revenue for the food service fund. Companies have made adjustments to their products to meet these new standards so that school cafeterias can continue to sell their products. These additional product sales also help improve the local sales figures to help offset reduced numbers in participation.

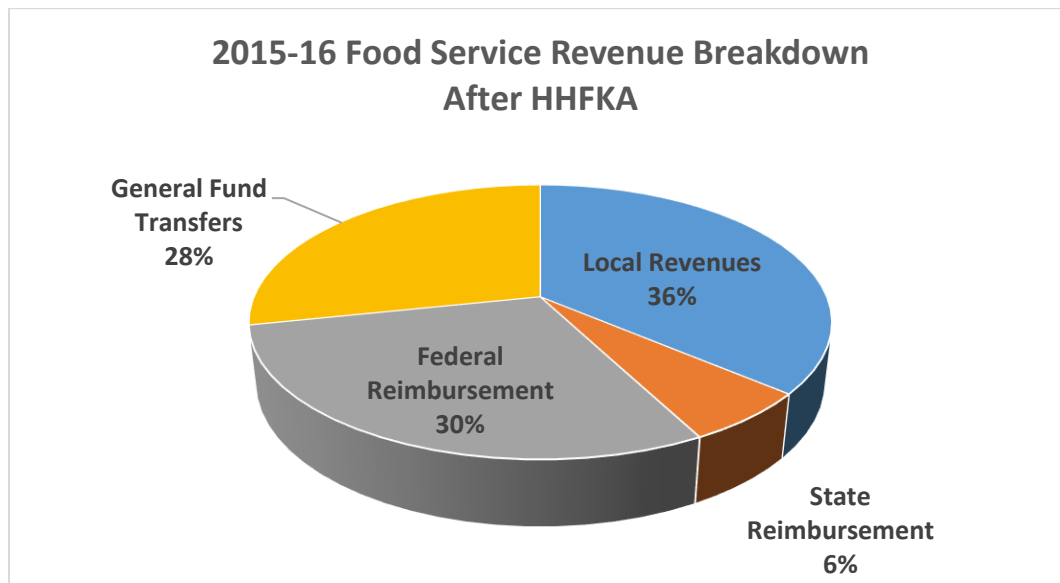
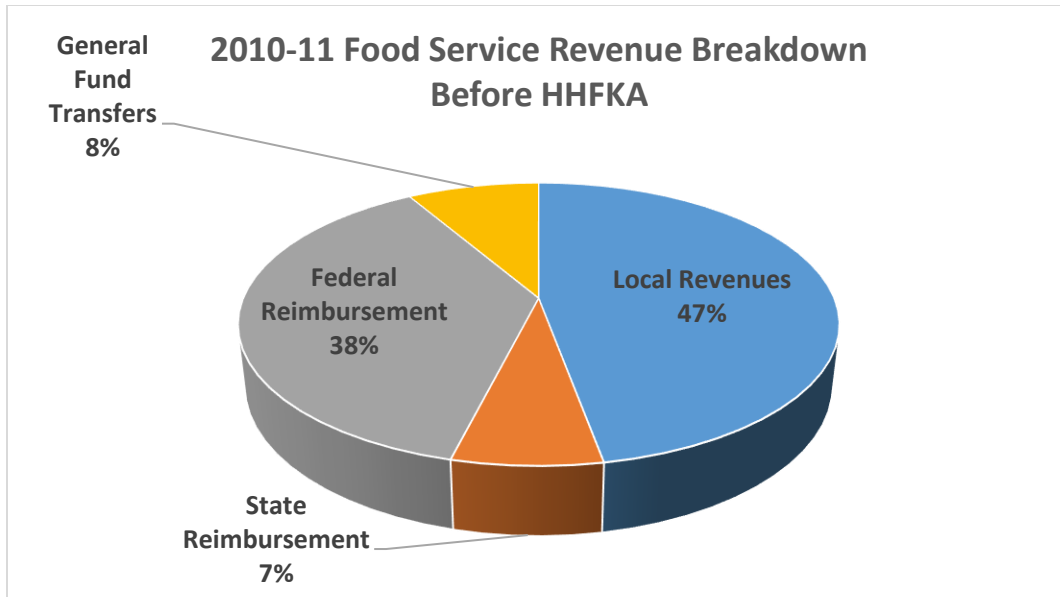
With these severe impacts on our sales figures, Shanksville-Stonycreek had to step back and evaluate their food service department. Below is the revenue breakdown over the past 9 years:



You can see with the implementation of the new nutritional standards as a result of the HHFKA, that our general fund transfers to the food service fund began to increase greatly. Not that Shanksville-Stonycreek did not want to feed our children, rather, we needed to reduce the general fund dollars that were leaving the classroom to supplement the food service fund.

The school board decided it was time to have our self-operated food service program evaluated by an outside entity. We hired a consulting firm to evaluate the program. We also qualified for a PA Project grant that included an evaluation as well.

Both evaluations recognized the difference in revenues before HHKFA and after HHKFA. Sales were down and the General Fund funding had more than tripled in 5 years.



So both evaluations also reviewed expenditures. They both concurred that we were controlling our food expenditures as best we could. Some changes in menu planning could ensure more use of leftovers. So the big item we needed to really consider and evaluate was to increase sales. How do we do that?

Marketing statistics show us people, young or old, are comfortable with what they know. Many children today are not as familiar with the sit-down, home cooked meal as they are with the grab-n-go concept we see in our convenience stores of today.

Shanksville-Stonycreek had driving students travel over 10 miles away from the school each morning to go to the nearest Starbucks for breakfast each school day. So this not only became a food service problem, it was also a student safety problem.

If children are used to the grab-n-go concept they see every day in stores, Shanksville-Stonycreek had to rebrand itself and change the way we did business in the cafeteria. We had to ditch the old school institutionalized look that our cafeteria had.



We could not build a luxurious food court that you see in some school cafeterias today.



Our last and final renovation occurred in 2001. The new cafeteria dining area was also a shared space for our auditorium. As a result, we are very limited in options as to how we can upgrade the look of our cafeteria area.





So, the challenge for Shanksville-Stonycreek became how do we build the environment the children are comfortable with to increase our participation and sales.

From our program evaluations, we knew that breakfast was our biggest area for improvement. Less than 30 children out of 340 ate a reimbursable breakfast meal on any given school day. At this time, we were serving prepared breakfast meals in the cafeteria.



So we began to think outside the box. How can we create a grab-n-go concept like the convenience store. We began to look at the underutilized areas of our building. The concession stand is only used during the evening sporting events. We decided to start with the middle school and high school students who were our lowest participants since the concession stand was located in that part of the complex.





So we started a grab-n-go station where middle school and senior high students could grab their breakfast and go to their first period class to enjoy their meal. We transitioned our breakfast menu to less prepared plate meals to more grab-n-go type products.

Teachers were concerned about messes, and they were proven wrong. The children enjoyed the freedom the new breakfast concept gave them, and since the high school student can purchase coffee as well, we were able to reduce the number of students leaving the district in the morning to get their coffee. Overall, breakfast numbers increased, but we were still below 20% participation during breakfast. More had to be done.

On the lunch side of things, Shanksville-Stonycreek implemented new concepts there as well. People react to bright, vibrant colors in retail environments. People are more willing to buy what they can see. Therefore, we utilized these concepts in the cafeteria as well.

We used the first PA Project grant to upgrade our trays and plates as well as adding some signage.

**BEFORE**



**AFTER**



The impact of just these changes make our children more interested in the cafeteria from the start. We then decided to change our packaging techniques and implement our version of the all too-famous lunchable.

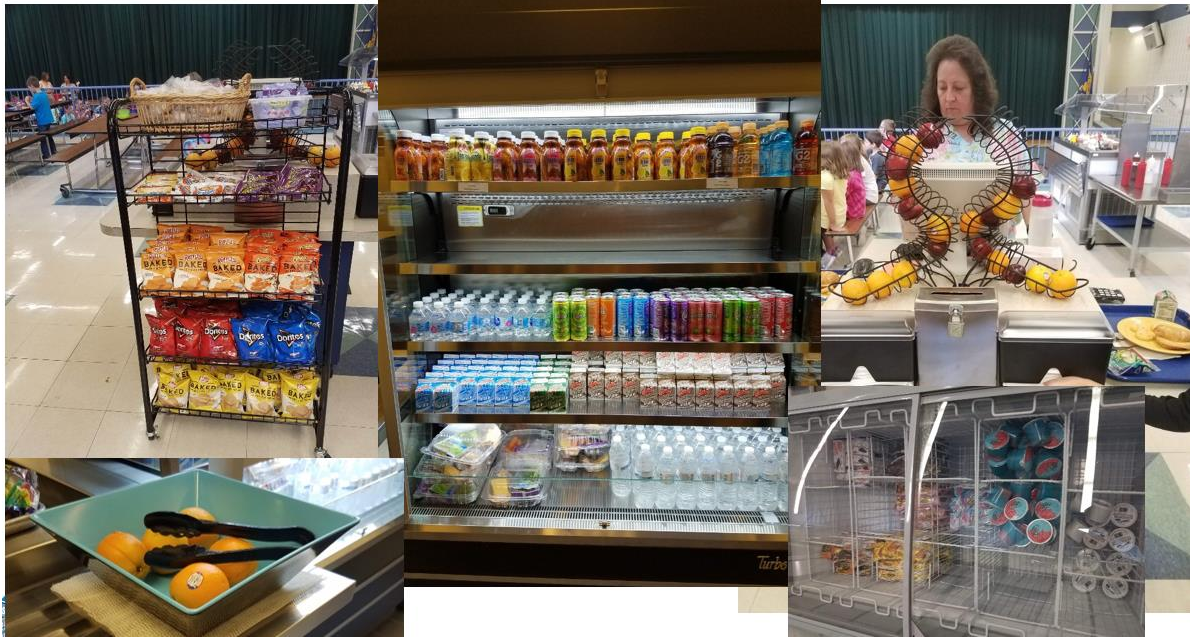


The children now had choices and could see what they were buying. Salad sales soared by taking them out of the dull bowls and putting them in clear plastic containers. We added cold sandwiches as an alternative meal choice that the children could make to order with our fixings bar. Children can also season their food to taste by utilizing the new spice bar too. Garlic, Mrs Dash, Asian seasoning, ranch dressing, hot sauce and others are available for children to fix up their meal just the way they want.



Simple changes to retail display units have made all of our food products visible to the children and have increased our sales greatly.





Progress was being made. We were able to reduce our general fund contribution to food service in 2017-2018, but more improvements were needed to help our cause. In 2018-2019, Shanksville-Stonycreek received a breakfast mini-grant as part of the governor's initiative to increase breakfast participation in the schools.

With the success of the grab-n-go concept in the middle school and senior high part of building, we decided that we need to bring grab-n-go to the elementary as well. Concerns like messes in the classroom brought up again and food trash in the classrooms since elementary students don't always finish their meals.



We took their concerns into consideration and used the grant money to purchase a mobile food cart/serving bar, a new tablet for the point-of-sale system and an additional large trash can. We

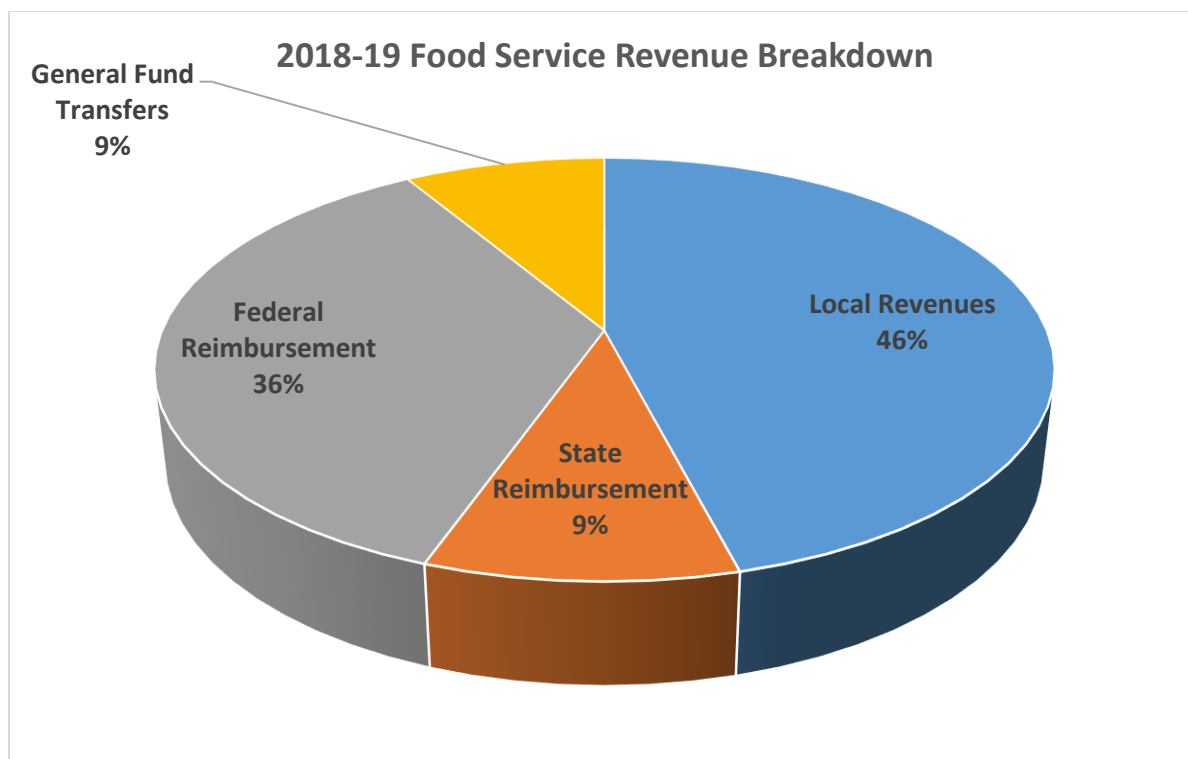
used two new Gatorade coolers the school received for free with our past athletic purchases that were sitting in a closet, and we started the 2018-2019 school year with grab-n-go breakfast in the elementary.

Here, as in the upper grades, the children take their breakfast with them back to their classroom to eat as they prepare to start their day. We tried to emphasize the importance of starting your day with a complete breakfast by using grant dollars to pay for teacher breakfasts as well. Children learn best by observing actions than listening to words. By having the teachers eating breakfast with them in the classroom, it emphasizes the importance of starting your day off the right way.

As you can see from our breakfast numbers over the past three years, the grab-n-go concept works with the children, regardless of age.

	<b>BREAKFAST MEALS REVIEW</b>		
	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>
<b>AUGUST</b>	38.50	33.33	40.50
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	51.48	55.60	68.89
<b>OCTOBER</b>	49.70	61.95	75.00
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	49.76	60.88	68.56
<b>DECEMBER</b>	44.86	60.13	67.00
<b>JANUARY</b>	43.95	60.18	70.24
<b>FEBRUARY</b>	53.88	61.18	60.53
<b>MARCH</b>	58.95	58.61	79.85
<b>APRIL</b>	62.88	66.25	83.45
<b>MAY</b>	65.36	62.27	89.73
<b>JUNE</b>	39.00	19.00	64.00
<b>AVERAGE</b>	50.76	54.49	69.80
<b>MIN</b>	38.50	19.00	40.50
<b>MAX</b>	65.36	66.25	89.73

By May 2019, we had select days where we served over 100 reimbursable breakfast meals in single day. Over 100 compared to less than 30 meals just three years prior. This goes to show that we can rely on the way things have always been. We have to be willing to try new things to invite our children to participate whether it is breakfast, lunch or a new academic program or club.



Overall in 2018-2019, Shanksville-Stonycreek was able to reduce its general fund contribution by two-thirds the amount that the general fund provided in 2015-2016 and put that money into new STEM initiatives.

We know we are not finished and continue to find ways to improve the food service program, menu and participation. Our new cafeteria manager is bringing new additional ideas to the table to help as well.

Did you know Thursday, September 25, is National Pancake Day? Guess what is for lunch that day?

How about September 5<sup>th</sup>? National Cheese Pizza Day. September 10<sup>th</sup>? National Hot Dog Day. September 18<sup>th</sup>? National Cheeseburger Day.

By recognizing these special food days, our children are more willing to eat a meal on those days. Something that seems so silly can make all the difference.

Thank you to each of you for taking time to review this testimony. I hope you find it helpful and useful to help make the changes our children could benefit from in our school's food service programs.

If you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me or the PASBO office. My email address is [sclark@sssd.com](mailto:sclark@sssd.com) and phone is 814-233-3214.