



FALL INTO FRESH
IDEAS FOR YOUR
CLASSROOM &
MORE!

The Link

YOUR QUARTERLY CONNECTION TO CACFP SUCCESS



IN THIS EDITION...

3

Sample Menus

6

Food Storage Safety

7

Meal Pattern Tips

8

Building Friendships

11

Family Engagement

12

Fall Crafts

13

Joining the CACFP



CARDINAL CORNER

PAGE
9

FEATURED EDUCATORS

PAGES
14 & 15



PLANT-BASED FIBER

PAGES
16 & 17



PAGE 5

KENYA REEVES

The Link Magazine
Editor-in-Chief



EDUCATOR PORTAL

PAGE 18

HELLO FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Since 1995, Our Daily Bread CACFP has remained dedicated to promoting the nutritional well-being of children and adults. What began as a simple mission to serve healthy meals has evolved into a deeper commitment: ensuring every child has the nourishment they need to grow, learn, and thrive. Over the years, we've become more than a Child Adult Care Food Program—we are a trusted partner in building healthier futures for families and communities.

Our impact is only possible because of the strong relationships we share with educators, providers and industry partners across Tennessee and Kentucky. Your commitment to creating safe, nurturing, and educational spaces lays the foundation for everything we do. We are honored to support your work through training, resources, and consistent, high-quality nutrition services that help children reach their full potential.

As we look to the future, Our Daily Bread CACFP remains focused on expanding our reach and advancing our commitment to quality in child and adult nutrition. Our vision is clear: to be a driving force in providing access to healthy, affordable meals for all. We are actively exploring new opportunities to innovate, educate, and empower the educators and communities we serve.

Our approach continues to be holistic, addressing not only the nutritional needs of children, but also those of adults. Through nutrition education, community involvement, and sustained support, we strive to inspire lifelong habits that promote better health for everyone. Investing in wellness today means stronger, healthier communities tomorrow.

Together, we are building a future where every child and adult has access to the nutrition they deserve. We deeply appreciate your continued partnership and dedication. We thank you for your continued partnership, and we look forward to working hand in hand as we grow our reach and impact.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Warm regards,
Phillip Hester



KNOXVILLE

2240 Sutherland Ave. Suite 107
Knoxville, TN 37919
Local | 865-938-6328
Fax | 865-938-6335

CLARKSVILLE

298 Clear Sky Ct. Suite E
Clarksville, TN 37043
Local | 865-238-6328
Fax | 931-920-3902

SAMPLE FALL MENU

6-11 MONTHS

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Breakfast
IFIF or BM

 Infant Oatmeal
Applesauce

IFIF or BM

 IF Infant Cereal
Strawberries

IFIF or BM

 Infant Rice –
Cereal
Avocado

IFIF or BM

 IF Infant Cereal
Strawberries

IFIF or BM

 Infant Oatmeal
Peaches

Lunch
IFIF or BM

 Pinto Beans
Apples

IFIF or BM

 Tuna
Banana

IFIF or BM

 Infant Chicken
Broccoli

IFIF or BM

 Infant Beef
Squash

IFIF or BM

 Cheese
Pears

Snack
IFIF or BM

 Animal –
Crackers
Sliced Grapes

IFIF or BM

 Graham –
Crackers
Oranges

IFIF or BM

 IF Infant Cereal
Peaches

IFIF or BM

 Crackers
Tomatoes

IFIF or BM

 Goldfish
Applesauce

Infants have different hunger and fullness cues. Following these cues helps ensure babies are fed when they're hungry and stop when they're full.



DID YOU KNOW...

REMEMBER...

Breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula is the main source of nutrition for infants during the first year.



SAMPLE FALL MENU

1-12 YEARS/ADULTS
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Breakfast
Oatmeal

 (WG) Oatmeal
Blueberries
Fluid Milk

Quiche Quest

 Quiche or Egg -
Bites
Grapes
Fluid Milk

Pancake Tacos

 (WG) Pancakes
Pears
Fluid Milk

Turkey Hash

 Turkey Ground
Potatoes
Fluid Milk

Waffles

 (WG) Waffles
Bananas
Fluid Milk

Lunch
Cheesy Pizza

 Mozzarella Cheese
Pizza Crust
Garden Salad
Grapefruit
Fluid Milk

Stroganoff

 Beef Ground
(WG) Noodles
Carrots
Apples
Fluid Milk

Veggie Plates

 Cheddar Cheese
Cornbread
Red Kidney Beans
Pineapple
Fluid Milk

Chicken Penne

 Chicken Breast
(WG) Noodles
Broccoli
Grapes
Fluid Milk

Salisbury Steak

 Salisbury Steak
(WG) Rolls
Asparagus
Pineapple
Fluid Milk

Snack
Animal Parade

 Water
Animal Crackers
100% Grape Juice

Graham Crackers

 Water
Graham Crackers
Sliced Oranges

Fresh Fruit Cup

 Water
(WG) Wheat Crackers
Cantaloupe

Greek Dip

 Water
Hummus
Carrots

Berry Bears

 Water
Teddy Grahams
Blueberries

Use Mealtimes as Social Learning Opportunities

Family-style meals, when appropriate, provide a wonderful setting for children to practice conversation, manners, and cooperation. Encourage children to talk about their favorite foods, weekend activities, or something that made them smile. These relaxed conversations help children become comfortable interacting with their peers.



FRESH CARROT SALAD

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup raisins
- 2 cups carrots, peeled and coarsely grated
- 1 ½ cup green apple, peeled, cored, and coarsely grated
- ½ lemon juice
- 1 tbsp olive or canola oil

SERVING & CREDITING

One Serving (1 cup) Provides:

½ cup fruit

½ cup vegetable

Serving Sizes

1–2 yrs. = ½ cup

3–5 yrs. = ½ cup

6–12 yrs. = ¾ cup

Adults = 1 cup

Yield: 4 Servings
Meal Type: Snack

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Soak raisins in warm water for 15 minutes, then drain.
2. Combine all ingredients into a medium bowl, mixing together well until all vegetable and fruit pieces are evenly distributed.



CHEESY RANCH CORN

INGREDIENTS

- 3 (15 oz) canned corn kernels
- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tbsp ranch seasoning
- 1 lime, juiced
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 cup shredded cheese

SERVING & CREDITING

One Serving (⅔ cup) Provides:

¾ oz meat/meat alternate

½ cup vegetable

Serving Sizes

1–2 yrs. = ½ cup

3–5 yrs. = ⅔ cup

6–12 yrs. = 1 cup

Adults = 1 ⅓ cup

Yield: 8 Servings
Meal Type: Snack

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine the corn and butter in a medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave for 4 minutes, or until the butter is melted and the corn is hot. Stir to coat the corn evenly.
2. Stir in the yogurt, ranch seasoning, lime juice, and cheese until well combined.
3. Serve ⅔ cup in a bowl or cup. Enjoy as is, or pair with vegetables or whole grain-rich crackers.



SAFE FOOD STORAGE & PRACTICES FOR CACFP

Why Food Storage Matters

- Prevent harmful bacteria from growing
- Preserve nutrients and food quality
- Reduce food waste
- Save money by extending the life of ingredients
- Keep meals safe for the children you serve

Even foods that look and smell perfectly fine can become unsafe if they're stored improperly.

Reduce Waste the Safe Way

One of the easiest ways to reduce food waste is by freezing foods before they spoil.

Consider freezing:

- Extra berries before they become overripe
- Chopped peppers and onions for future recipes
- Homemade soups in meal-sized portions
- Leftover pasta sauce
- Homemade muffins for quick breakfasts or snacks

Planning ahead helps save both time and money while keeping meals nutritious.

Homemade Pickles and Fermented Foods

•Homemade refrigerator pickles can be a delicious way to enjoy fresh vegetables, but they should remain refrigerated and should not be preserved for shelf storage.

•Similarly, fermented foods served in reimbursable CACFP meals should come from a commercial source.

Safe Thawing Practices

Frozen foods should be thawed only by approved methods:

- In the refrigerator
- Under cold running potable water
- In the microwave if cooking immediately afterward
- As part of the cooking process

Foods should never be thawed on the countertop, where bacteria can multiply rapidly.

Fresh Produce: Plenty of Safe Options

- Fresh
- Refrigerated
- Frozen
- Cooked and then frozen for future meals
- Frozen fruits and vegetables credit exactly the same as fresh produce under CACFP as long as no non-creditable ingredients have been added.
- One important exception is milk, which should not be frozen!



Temperature Control

- Keep potentially hazardous foods refrigerated at 41°F or below until they are prepared.
- Maintain frozen foods at 0°F or below to preserve quality and safety.

Prevent Cross-Contamination

- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with potable (safe drinking) water before preparing them.
- Use clean, sanitized utensils and food-contact surfaces.
- Minimize bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods.



COMMON MEAL PATTERN MISTAKES

Meal pattern mistakes happen.

Let's talk about some of the most common errors and how to avoid these errors in your program!



Cereals and Yogurt

Currently, there are many different types of cereals on the market. Under the CACFP, cereals must meet the added sugar requirements. All breakfast cereals served in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce. Kidkare lists most cereals by their brand name such as Cheerios, Honey Bunches of Oats or Kix. Brand named cereals are not required and store brands can be purchased. Marking a Cheerios look-a-like in Kidkare is not possible so instead you can just click Cheerios. Though it is listed, this does not mean it is creditable. Each cereal must be checked to ensure it is creditable. Once you have found a store brand that meets the limits, you can usually continue serving it (Brands change their ingredients. It is always helpful to check those often.)

The same applies to yogurts. All yogurt served in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce). Just like cereals, store brand yogurts can be served as part of a meal or snack, but the added sugar limit must be checked to ensure creditability. Items such as yogurt containing candy or extra fruit are mostly too high in sugar to be served.

The Educator portal has cereal and yogurt calculators to ensure credibility. The Educator Portal can be accessed on any smartphone, tablet or computer.



**Scan the QR code
to register for
the portal today!**

Serving sizes

Another common mistake is not meeting the required serving sizes. Most commonly this error occurs with milk and grains. For all components, the required serving size must be met on the first serving. In many toddler classrooms for example, Educator will serve less than the required total to help limit spills (mainly with milk). A best practice is to use a measuring cup to ensure the sizes are met. Not only does this ensure the children/adults are being served their full amount, but it also stops milk shortages/ non-reimbursable meals in the future.

Grain Ounce Equivalence is another area where meeting the serving sizes can sometimes be an issue. Knowing how much grain to serve at a meal or snack is very important. The Educator Portal also has a tool for this! Please keep in mind, the meal pattern shows the minimum serving sizes. Educators are welcome to serve more than what is listed on the meal chart. However, the minimum serving must be met to ensure a creditable meal or snack.

Recipes/ Child Nutrition Labels

To serve any combination foods under the CACFP, a recipe or child nutrition (CN) label must be on file. Educators must show these documents to ensure that each child/adult is receiving the correct portion/serving size. **Our Educator Portal also makes this much easier by providing both recipes and CN labels for commonly prepared items.**

For homemade items, a recipe is required. An example of a homemade combination item would be spaghetti, soup, meatloaf or even sandwiches. These items contain one or more components.

It is the Educator's responsibility to show how much is included in the meal/snack prepared.

Processed combination foods such as chicken nuggets, fish sticks, corn dogs and pizza require a child nutrition label or product formulation statement. These labels/ statements show how much of each component is in the item and how it can be credited toward the meal pattern. Many times one combination food can be credited as multiple components. Pizza, for example, can sometimes provide grain, meat/meat alternate and vegetable components. Your Field Representative can assist in ensuring your label is accurate. Child nutrition labels/ product formulation statements expire after 5 years.



KELLY CHILDERS
Field Representative

HELPING CHILDREN BUILD FRIENDSHIPS

Friendships are an important part of early childhood. Positive relationships with peers help children develop communication skills, confidence, empathy, and a sense of belonging. As educators, we have many opportunities each day to create environments where friendships can grow.

Create Opportunities to Connect

Plan activities that encourage children to work and play together. Building with blocks, creating art projects, gardening, dramatic play, and simple cooking activities all provide opportunities for children to cooperate, share ideas, and solve problems as a team.

Teach Friendship Skills

Young children are still learning how to make and keep friends. Model and practice skills such as:

- Greeting others by name.
- Taking turns and sharing materials.
- Using kind words.
- Listening when others are speaking.
- Inviting someone to join in play.
- Solving conflicts calmly and respectfully.

Role-playing these situations during circle time can help children feel more confident using these skills during play.

Foster Inclusive Play

Encourage children to include everyone. Pair children with different classmates during activities and celebrate each child's unique strengths and interests. When children learn that everyone has something valuable to contribute, they build stronger and more inclusive friendships.

Use Mealtimes as Social Learning Opportunities

Family-style meals, when appropriate, provide a wonderful setting for children to practice conversation, manners, and cooperation. Encourage children to talk about their favorite foods, weekend activities, or something that made them smile. These relaxed conversations help children become comfortable interacting with their peers.

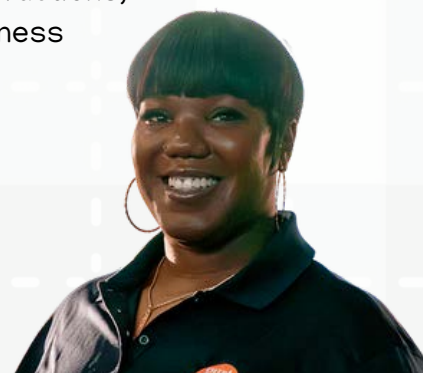
Recognize Acts of Kindness

Notice and celebrate positive social behaviors. A simple comment such as, "I noticed you invited Maya to play," or "Thank you for helping your friend clean up," reinforces caring behaviors and encourages children to continue building positive relationships.

Partner with Families

Share simple ideas families can use at home, such as arranging playdates, reading books about friendship, and talking about kindness and empathy. Consistent support between home and the child care setting helps children develop lasting social skills.

Helping children build relationships is an investment in their emotional well-being and lifelong success. By creating welcoming environments, modeling positive interactions, and encouraging kindness every day, educators can help every child experience the joy of belonging and friendship.



TAKESHA MIDDLETON
TN Centers Program Manager

CARDINAL CORNER

U OF EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH CENTER

What's New?

Lots of news lately to keep up with in our Early Childhood world- let's unpack it

Here at the University of Louisville Early Childhood Research Center we are officially beginning our 2026-27 High School Cardinal CDA course in eight new Kentucky counties!

This will be our second year using the course. And, good news, five more counties have joined us! Very exciting to have the High School Cardinal CDA adding more and more young people to our work.

We also now partner with the Apprenticeship program in the Governor's Office of Early Childhood! This means students are even better prepared to provide caring education to our youngest community members.

The CDA E-portfolio is up and running and they are making improvements to it all the time to make it even better. And remember, everything on the CDA page that is offered has a Spanish version. The CDA Council announced that they will be creating a Youth Development Associate to offer those in school age care and education a credential! Very exciting. We were able to give input on our thoughts on what has been developed so far and it looks amazing!

What's on your minds?

Here's a fantastic question from our very own Ashley Little, I hear this one all the time from parents, so be sure you share with them also.

What are some practical ways educators can encourage children to try new or less familiar healthy foods without creating pressure or power struggles at mealtime?

As promised in the last issue, Family Backpacks as a way to introduce new foods! So, are you already familiar with the "Family Backpack" experience? If not, here's how it works:



Family Style Meal and the Family of the Week Backpack experience!

Foster cross-cultural learning and deeper relationships in an ongoing way, ask family members to complete an "all about my family" activity that you package in a backpack called the "Family of the Week" backpack. A THEMED family of the week backpack once you have had families send in everything about themselves could be a recipe and ingredients for a simple dish that could be prepared at school. If the family can come in and help, all the better. And remember the guidelines for "trying foods" from our last issue. In some cultures it can be offensive to refuse a prepared dish. Be sure to inform families ahead of time your policy on "trying foods" and any allergy concerns you must be aware of in the classroom.

Some TIPS for Family of the Week - Share your favorite family dish- backpack! NOTE: In my family culture this very well could be PASTA! 😊 So remember, keep it simple.

CARDINAL CORNER

U OF EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH CENTER



- Allow families to present the items in their mother tongue if necessary and prepare to assist with translation services in your community.
- If children are unhoused or in foster care, help them share what they can from their living situation and family. Work with them to make sure the child can participate.
- Ask families to include items that are important to them in the backpack and to unpack it in class as they share information about each item and answer children's questions. If family members are not able to join in person, don't worry.
- They can join virtually using video conferencing (like Zoom) or share a recorded video of themselves unpacking the backpack and explaining the items they pull out.
- If families are unable to participate directly, the child can share the backpack while showing pictures of their family. Suggest that families include items that represent their culture, a favorite family memory, and a family interest or hobby. Use the information and experiences shared to connect with the broader curriculum so that families' funds of knowledge are integrated into learning in meaningful and sustained ways.

Cardinal Corner Spotlight!



One of the brightest stars in our country in the area of Families and Belonging is called **PlayLab Foundation**. Founded by **Kisa Marx** whose child caring and education space is a model for respecting the daily lives of young children, I chose her for this issue because in all her work (you can google her and find her easily!) she speaks for every family, guardian and trusted adult in children's lives and their value. And that's what including the Family Backpack Meal of the Week from each family culture– whether it's mac and cheese or falafel or peanut stew– hopes to do also. **PlayLab Foundation**

Delights and Suprises!



My delight and surprise this issue is from my own grandson– now a baker in his own right who was gifted a lesson in how to make pasta from scratch! A teacher I have worked with in professional development over ten years –

surprised me by telling me she has been a skilled chef, having studied in Italy where she grew up! WHAT!? I immediately engaged her in coming over and TEACHING this to a child.

I am so grateful to Our Daily Bread for providing this space for us! Their work is so important and nurturing for each other, our children, and their families. I am honored to be here with you. I look forward to hearing from you!



MORE THAN AN EVENT: BUILDING FAMILY CONNECTION THROUGH FALL ENGAGEMENT

As the school year settles into a routine, fall presents child care programs with one of the best opportunities to strengthen family relationships while showcasing everything that makes their program unique. Cooler weather, seasonal traditions, and a renewed sense of community create the perfect setting for meaningful engagement. Best of all, creating memorable experiences doesn't require a large budget, just intentional planning and a welcoming environment.

Connection Comes First

Family engagement is about more than attendance at an event. It's about helping families feel like valued partners in their child's education. Whether it's a fall festival, family game night, pumpkin decorating, or an outdoor story walk, these moments create opportunities for parents, caregivers, teachers, and children to build relationships outside of the daily drop-off routine.

When families feel connected, communication improves, trust grows, and children benefit from stronger partnerships between home and the classroom.

Every Event Is a Marketing Opportunity

One of the most overlooked benefits of family engagement is the positive impact it has on your program's visibility. The excitement created by a successful event naturally extends beyond your current families.

Invite families on your waitlist, community partners, or prospective families who have toured your program. With permission, capture candid photos of families interacting, children exploring activities, and teachers engaging with parents. These authentic moments tell the story of your program far better than any advertisement ever could.

People don't simply enroll in a child care program, they choose a community where they feel welcomed, supported, and connected.

Simple Ideas That Make a Big Impact

Meaningful engagement doesn't have to be elaborate. Sometimes the simplest ideas become the most memorable.

Consider adding a few seasonal favorites to your fall calendar:

- Pumpkin decorating
- Family picnic or food truck night
- Outdoor story walk
- Parent's Night Out
- Trunk-or-Treat
- Community service or donation drive

Choose activities that encourage families to participate together rather than simply observe. The goal is to create shared experiences that leave everyone feeling connected.

Building Community That Lasts

The success of a family event isn't measured by attendance alone. It's measured by the conversations that continue afterward, the new relationships that form, and the confidence families feel when they walk through your doors.

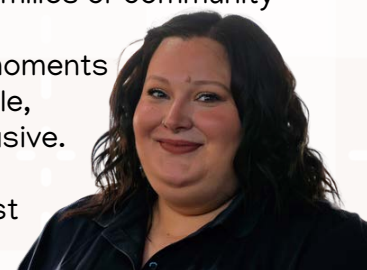
This fall, don't focus on creating the biggest festival or the most elaborate decorations. Focus on creating meaningful opportunities for connection. When families feel welcomed, appreciated, and included, they become your greatest ambassadors—sharing their positive experiences with friends, neighbors, and future families.

Strong family engagement doesn't happen in a single evening. It grows through intentional moments, genuine relationships, and a commitment to making every family feel like they belong.

Fall Engagement Checklist

Create opportunities for families to participate together.

- Invite prospective families or community partners.
- Capture authentic moments
- Keep activities simple, welcoming, and inclusive.
- Focus on building relationships, not just hosting an event



ASHLEY LITTLE
Training Coordinator

LEAF IT TO CREATIVITY!

Craft time is about more than creating something cute to take home. It's an opportunity to build language, practice problem-solving, strengthen fine motor skills, and encourage creativity. Try these fun fall themed crafts out with your kiddos!

Leaf Critters

Bring a little bit of the outdoors inside by turning colorful fall leaves into adorable woodland animals!

Supplies

- Assorted fall leaves
- Construction paper or cardstock
- Glue
- Googly eyes (optional)
- Markers or crayons

Directions

1. Take the children on a nature walk to collect a variety of leaves.
2. Allow the leaves to dry if they are damp.
3. Invite children to arrange their leaves into different animals such as owls, foxes, hedgehogs, lions, or birds.
4. Glue the leaves onto construction paper and add eyes, ears, legs, or other details using markers or craft supplies.
5. Display the finished critters around the classroom to create a festive fall gallery!



Apple Threading

This simple lacing activity is a fun way to celebrate apple season while strengthening the small muscles children use for writing.

Supplies

- Red construction paper, cardstock, or paper plates
- Hole punch
- Green construction paper
- Brown construction paper
- Yarn or shoelaces (tape the ends to make threading easier)
- Child-safe scissors

Directions

1. Cut apple shapes from red paper or plate.
2. Add a green leaf and brown stem to each apple.
3. Punch holes around the edge of the apple, leaving about an inch between each hole.
4. Demonstrate how to weave the yarn through each hole.
5. Encourage children to lace around the apple, practicing over-and-under movements until they reach the end.



KAYCEE FOX
Case Manager

WHY JOIN THE CACFP?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federally funded program sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides financial reimbursements to certified/licensed daycare centers or homes and registered/alternate-approved (Non-license) daycare home providers, for serving nutritious meals and snacks to children in their care.



Receive reimbursement for meals and snacks.

- Financial support for a portion of food costs.
- Afford more nutritious foods for those in your care.
- Make child care more affordable for the families you serve.



Provide healthy and affordable meals & snacks

- Access to meals and snacks that meet the USDA guidelines.
- Reduce hunger and increase food security.
- Promote lifelong healthy eating habits.



Access to training and resources.

- Receive professional training and technical assistance on how to be successful.
- Learn valuable nutrition education.
- Network with other CACFP educators local and nationwide.



Make your child care stand out.

- Save parents time and money from having to prepare meals and snacks.
- Improve the overall quality of your program.
- Promote that meals are served based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Interested in joining the CACFP? Find a sponsor today!

FIND A CACFP SPONSOR



LOOKING FOR QUICK TIPS, FRESH IDEAS, AND REAL TALK ABOUT MANAGING EARLY EDUCATION? TUNE IN TO OUR **EARLY EDUCATOR PODCAST**, WHERE WE COVER EVERYTHING FROM GROWING YOUR BUSINESS TO OVERCOMING OBSTACLES.

WHETHER YOU'RE ON YOUR LUNCH BREAK OR COMMUTING, IT'S THE PERFECT WAY TO STAY INSPIRED AND CONNECTED!

KENTUCKY EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

EDUCATOR: MS. JOHNNIE'S ACADEMY

Caring, Learning, & Growing Together

For more than 30 years, caring for children has been Ms. Johnnie's life's mission. At Ms. Johnnie's Academy, every child is treated like family and given the love, encouragement, and support they need to learn and grow.

The Academy makes learning fun through hands-on experiences like the **"Big Word of the Week,"** where children learn new vocabulary, practice pronunciation, and build confidence using new words. They also enjoy **"Around the World,"** where they explore states and capitals through puzzles and activities that encourage teamwork and problem-solving.



Before breakfast, everyone gathers to share their experiences and sing the Good Morning Song, making sure each child, teacher, and Director Dr. Ezell Banks feels included and welcomed.

With a focus on learning, laughter, creativity, encouragement, and love, Ms. Johnnie's Academy strives to help every child discover their abilities and develop confidence. For Ms. Johnnie and her team, each day is another opportunity to make a meaningful difference in a child's life.



Learning doesn't stop at the classroom door. Children take part in scavenger hunts that strengthen observation, memory, communication, and attention to detail. Even the morning routine creates opportunities for connection.



REBECCA RIFE
Field Representative

TENNESSEE EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

EDUCATOR: LAURIE CHOQUETTE

Growing Through Play and Nature

After years of working in child care centers, Ms. Laurie Choquette opened her first home-based child care program in Massachusetts in 2000. In 2021, she and her daughter moved to Tennessee, where they opened their play-based family group home in 2023. Their commitment to providing a nurturing, engaging, and high-quality learning environment has even earned them a nomination for **Best Childcare in McNary County**.

A big part of their program happens outdoors. Their play yard gives children opportunities to explore through water play, dirt digging, art, music, and other hands-on activities. These experiences allow children to build important skills while developing a connection with nature.



One of their favorite traditions is their annual garden. Children help plant, water, weed, and harvest the garden, giving them a sense of responsibility and pride while teaching them where their food comes from.

This year, they were honored to receive the “Taking Root Grant” from Our Daily Bread CACFP, which helped them expand their garden with new grow bags. The additional space has created even more opportunities for children to explore, discover, and develop a lifelong appreciation for nature and gardening.



Today, Ms. Laurie remains dedicated to helping children grow through play-based learning, meaningful relationships, hands-on experiences, and the development of lifelong skills. She strives to provide these opportunities within a safe and supportive environment.



SHEENA WILSON
Case Manager

PLANT-POWERED FOR HEALTHY STARTS NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2026

Brought to you by [Balanced.org](https://www.balanced.org)



WHY THIS NEWSLETTER?

We know you work hard to keep children nourished and thriving. Whether you're a home-based provider or a center director, you're navigating meal pattern requirements, limited prep time, diverse family backgrounds, and some very picky eaters. That's why we created this newsletter specifically for you. At Balanced, we're here to support you with practical tools, creditable recipe ideas, menu planning tips, family engagement strategies, and program-specific guidance that make it easier to expand the plant-powered, fiber-rich options on your menus. This is our way of sharing quick updates, resources, and inspiration to help you serve and promote plant-powered meals with confidence.

CHECK OUT OUR CACFP RESOURCES

Follow the link to access:

- **CACFP Essentials Guide**
- **3 CACFP Resource Guides**
- **Goal-Setting & Planning Workbook**
- **Taste-Testing Toolkit**

These resources provide everything you need to get started implementing plant-forward menu changes in your CACFP program.



ACCESS YOUR COPIES



PLANT-POWERED RECIPE OF THE MONTH: CHICKPEA SALAD SANDWICH

This simple, scratch recipe from the National CACFP Association comes together quickly with only eight ingredients. **Taste-test it with your participants at snack time to build familiarity** before you serve it for lunch.

GET THE FULL RECIPE HERE

TASTE-TESTING TIPS & TRICKS

Young children may need to encounter a new food 8–10 times before accepting it, so don't give up after the first rejection! A few tips to for effective taste-testing:

- **Keep it low-stakes.** Tiny portions, no pressure to finish or even like it.
- **Let kids be the judges.** Simple smiley-face rating cards or thumbs up/thumbs down sticker charts make tasting feel like a game.
- **Pair new with familiar.** A new veggie alongside a food they already love reduces resistance.
- **Talk it up.** Where does this food come from? What color is it? What does it smell like?

The more playful the experience, the more likely kids are to come back curious.



VENDOR SPOTLIGHT: BANZA CHICKPEA PASTA

Add a boost of fiber and protein to your pasta dishes. Legume-based pastas are having a moment and it's no wonder why. With **20g of protein and 13g of fiber per serving**, Banza's chickpea pasta is a nutrition no-brainer! From penne and rotini to pinwheels and shells, there's a shape for every sauce and style.

READY TO BRING MORE PLANT-POWERED MEALS TO YOUR CACFP MENUS?

Balanced has got you covered! The Institutional Support team at Balanced wants to support you in creating realistic, manageable change by providing: menu analysis and design support, vendor samples, marketing materials, training, and nutrition education resources. Plus, we'll help you build buy-in with your team and community - all at no cost to you. Reach out today to get started!



Michelle Saletan
Institutional Support Manager, Balanced
MichelleS@Balanced.org



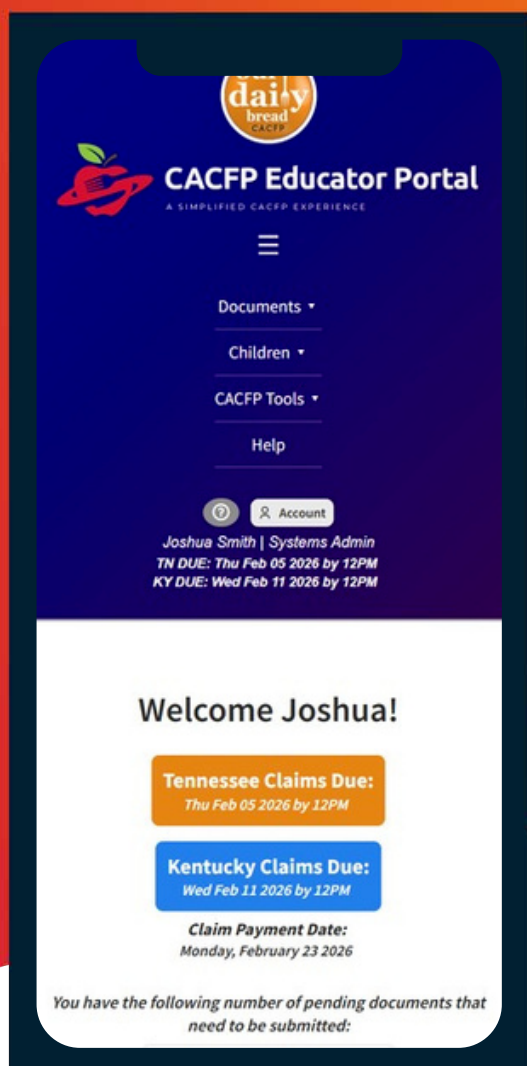
LITTLE LOAVES WITH OUR DAILY BREAD MINI TRAININGS WITH A MIGHTY IMPACT

CHECK OUT OUR NON-CREDITED WEBINARS FOR EXTRA TIPS AND TRICKS!



- Mastering Milk in the CACFP
- USDA Added Sugars Ruling
- Tennessee CACFP Enrollment Forms
- Kentucky CACFP Enrollment Forms
- Infant Addendum Training





THE CACFP EDUCATOR PORTAL IS IN YOUR HANDS!

Complete CACFP tasks, upload documents, and access resources in one place—so you can focus on children, not forms.



COMPLETE E-FORMS

Submit CACFP forms online without printing or scanning.



CACFP RESOURCES

Find crediting tools, CN labels, CACFP recipes, and guidance all in one place.



ONLINE ENROLLMENT

Request Enrollment + IncomeEligibility eForms from parents and manage your KidKare children—online.
(Pilot Phase, must request access)

JOIN TODAY!

CHILDENROLLMENT eFORMS PILOT

Manage your KidKare children and request Enrollment + Income Eligibility eForms from parents—online.



**JOIN
PILOT**



CACFP Educator Portal
A SIMPLIFIED CACFP EXPERIENCE

portalsupport@odbcacfp.org • portal.odbcacfp.org

USDA POLICY UPDATE



Final Ruling: Expanding Milk Options

USDA has expanded fluid milk options in CACFP. On June 8, 2026, the new rule allows whole and 2% milk to be served to children ages 2 and older, while maintaining existing requirements for 1-year-olds. Learn more about what this means for your program.

https://www.cacfp.org/2026/05/08/final-rule-expanding-fluid-milk-options-in-cnps/?mc_cid=0608c9fb66&mc_eid=659482eb54

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-050826>

The Link

In accordance with federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the state or local agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY). Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, [AD-3027](#), found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

The completed form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

Email: program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

FALL 2026



odbcacfp.org
contact@odbcacfp.org | Issue # 66