



## AN AFTERSCHOOL MEALS CASE STUDY

# ENDING THE SECRECY AROUND AFTERSCHOOL MEALS

When Jenny Arredondo became the Senior Executive Director of Child Nutrition Services for San Antonio ISD (TX) in 2016, the afterschool meals program was its “best kept secret,” as Arredondo described it. It was geared toward more formal afterschool programs, and they had to know to ask for it. Arredondo saw the level of need in the district – about 45,000 of the 50,000 students across roughly 90 schools are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches – so she set about ending the secrecy around afterschool meals.



Her initiative to feed more hungry students in the district garnered some concerns, though. During a meeting with a group of liaisons to afterschool programs, her proposal to expand afterschool meals was met with questions around safety and supervision. She recognized the validity of their concerns, so she shifted her focus building buy-in for a broader afterschool meals program among administrators.

This was not a one-time attempt. Arredondo wrote several memos, attended multiple meetings with administrators, and visited schools herself. Through this work, district leaders came to support the afterschool meals program, and they also gained a better understanding of all of the afterschool activities offered across schools.

Arredondo also continued educating other afterschool stakeholders, like coaches and band leaders, to make sure that everyone was aware of the availability of meals. Dispelling the myth that afterschool meals are only for tutoring programs proved to be an ongoing task.

Fortunately, based on these efforts, the school nutrition staff was able to work with each school to determine how



to best serve meals after school. In some schools, students go to the cafeteria right after the bell, eat, and then head to their activities. In other schools, the afterschool programs have moved into the cafeteria.

However, Arredondo knew that this promotion alone would not be enough to reach all of the students who needed an afterschool meal. She also felt a responsibility to meet the need rather than hope another organization would fill it. She knew that parents would not allow their children to walk to other meal sites due to safety concerns.

With teachers already staying for tutoring and other activities open to all students after school, the enrichment requirement was not a concern. Arredondo just needed an

**“When you’re passionate about what you do, and ending hunger is your mission, it’s just what you do. If you have hungry kids, and you have the resources, how can you not put them together?”**

- Jenny Arredondo, Senior Executive Director of Child Nutrition Services, San Antonio ISD

efficient way to reach all of those students. She heard about schools in North Carolina using the Supper in the Classroom service model for afterschool meals, and she thought it was worth trying. Many schools had already successfully implemented Breakfast in the Classroom, so Supper in the Classroom seemed doable.

She strategically contacted principals at elementary schools with a very high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. During a lunchtime meeting, she presented several options for reaching more of their students and also solicited their ideas for new solutions. Arredondo was pleasantly surprised: the principals supported the Supper in the Classroom model.

Several schools were interested, but Arredondo decided to start with one elementary school in January 2018 so that she and her team could focus on making it successful. She chose a school with adequate storage space for all of the extra food, making that one less challenge to overcome at the beginning. There was still plenty to navigate between finding staff to stay and prepare meals for six hundred students, working out the logistics of meal preparation, packaging, and delivery to classrooms, and training teachers to serve meals and maintain records. Since the meal components are different than they are for breakfast, teachers had to be taught the differences on what makes a reimbursable meal, plus teachers had to learn the rules for share tables and what children are allowed to take home.

In the end, though, **the principal reported that Supper in the Classroom was an all-around success.** Teachers found that end-of-the-day classroom management was easier, parents were less likely to pull their children out of school early, and students were asking about supper when they came through the lunch line. Arredondo ran the numbers and verified that the supper reimbursements covered the costs of the additional staff time and food.

With one win under their belt, Arredondo and her staff moved on to another school. They still went one school at a time since the logistics and other needs were slightly different from school to school. For example, some schools needed to increase their delivery frequency to twice per week to make up for the lack of storage space. Other schools needed additional equipment because the delivery system that worked best for Supper in the Classroom was different than it was for Breakfast in the Classroom. All of the schools testing this model prepared the meals on site, but the staffing plan varied depending on the number of meals served. Some schools added hours for part-time employees, some gave enough extra hours to push a few staff into over-time, and some brought on new staff or got help from staff at other schools. Arredondo was upfront about the challenges and need for customization, asking

principals to give her team two weeks to test and refine the model before deciding whether or not it was working.

By the end of the 2017-2018 school year, five schools were using the Supper in the Classroom model. An additional school was having all teachers bring their students to the cafeteria at the end of the day to go through the serving line and then return to their rooms to eat. The latter option made it feasible to serve around the same number of students even when they could not find enough staff to deliver meals to every classroom.



When the 2018-2019 school year began, all six schools resumed having students eat their afterschool meal in their classrooms. Expanding this model slowed due to needed system changes, like transitioning from paper rosters and meal counts to an electronic system as well as working with district administrators on the school bell schedule.

Looking district-wide, after Arredondo's first year in her position when she mainly focused on raising awareness, the number of afterschool suppers served rose by about four percent. After her second year, which included the Supper in the Classroom roll-out, the number of suppers served across the district increased by another 52 percent. Compared to 2015-2016, the year before Arredondo started, the district served more than 435,000 additional suppers in 2017-2018 with just eleven more sites for a total of 84 sites. Even with the slowed expansion of Supper in the Classroom in 2018-2019, the number of suppers served across the district rose another 26 percent.

Some schools have discontinued Supper in the Classroom in 2019-2020 due to bell time adjustments, but four have continued. More importantly, Arredondo and her staff have built key relationships and proven their ability to meet the needs of each school and its students, no matter the model. And most important of all, supper is no longer a secret in San Antonio schools, so more students than ever have the chance to end their day with the nutrition they need to learn and grow.

*To learn more about the Afterschool Meals Program, visit [bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/afterschool-meals](https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/afterschool-meals).*