Chapter II: FAQs

This chapter lists out some problems commonly encountered by schools and lunch suppliers regarding lunch supply, as well as the solutions. We hope these FAQs would assist schools in making the best arrangements regarding healthy school lunch provision.

Tendering Process

Question 1.
When choosing a lunch supplier, is it mandatory for the school to set up an MCCA? Who should be appointed as MCCA members?

Answer:
According to the "**Guidelines on Conducting Trading Operations (Appendix 2)**" (at http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/fin-management/notes-sch-fin/ref-trading-operations/Appendix%202%28E%29.pdf) issued by EDB, schools are strongly advised to form Monitoring Committee(s) on Trading Operations (MCTOs) to monitor and steer various types of trading operations. Depending on the needs and circumstances, the schools should appoint MCTOs to monitor and supervise the procedures of selection of lunch suppliers, or they can set up MCCAs to make catering arrangement.

For the composition of MCCAs, school can refer to the recommended composition as in the "Guidelines on Conducting Trading Operations" issued by EDB. As suggested, MCCA can be chaired by a senior member of the teaching staff and contain at least two other members of the staff (to be appointed by the School Head, who acts under the delegated authority of the SMC/IMC) and two representatives from the PTA or one to two parents from the school if no PTA has been set up.

If PTAs or SSBs are appointed by schools to handle the selection of lunch suppliers, all authorisation arrangements should receive prior approval from the SMCs/IMCs and be properly documented. The SMCs/IMCs should ensure that authorised PTAs or SSBs should comply with the principles and guidelines as set out in all EDB circulars about trading operations in schools (especially about tendering/price quotation and how to use the profit or net income as generated from trading operations).

For this purpose, the SMCs/IMCs should obtain related documents from PTAs or SSBs for record. If PTAs or SSBs intend to run trading operations in schools, they should be regarded as bidders as well, and should go through the same procedures of tendering/bidding and selection process just like any other bidder does before they are awarded any tender. In such circumstances, schools should take responsibility to run the tendering process by themselves.

Question 2.
How should schools make use of "Lunch Supplier's Pledge" (Document 1) and "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier" (Document 2)?

Answer:
The purpose of the "Lunch Supplier's Pledge" is to condense the "Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for

Students" (latest version), issued by DH, into two pages in concise language so as to list out clearly the nutritional requirements of the schools on lunch from suppliers, and to have such requirements written into the contracts in such manner that the schools can keep track of the lunch suppliers' services with regard to the clauses in the pledge. The last page of the pledge contains additional options ("Salt Reduction in School Lunch", "Complementary Arrangements for Promotion of Healthy Diet", "Administrative Arrangements", "Green and Waste Reduction Measures" and "Other Service Requirements") for the schools to choose from and incorporate into their pledge document.

As for the formulation of "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier", it has two purposes: first is to provide tenderers with a clear and easy-to-understand list of documents which schools would want them to provide; and secondly to help the schools assess the details provided by the tenderers and record them.

As such, MCCAs have the need to decide what details they want to receive from tenderers before the tendering exercise begins so as to facilitate their tender assessment and other assessments. In the template provided by DH, the first three documents listed are the items which must be submitted while the rest are optional; MCCAs can exercise discretion about which one to be required.

Question 3.
How should schools make use of the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier" (Document 2)? How do they handle tenders with same scoring?

Answer:
When undergoing the assessment process using the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier", the schools can consider the following proposal of assessment:

MCCAs can assess the lunch suppliers' pledges on the nutritional requirements by examining the "meal list for one month's school lunch" which is one of the documents tenderers are required to submit according to the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier". For easy reference, the schools can download the "Classification of Food Items for School Lunch" (latest version) from https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/Lunch_Classification_en.pdf
or refer to the "Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students" (latest version) at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/lunch_guidelines_bi.pdf. As a start, it is suggested that MCCAs should preset a score. In order to show the schools' concern for nutritional value, the preset score for "nutritional value" as regards the one-month meal list should take up 50% or above of the total score of the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier" (Document 2). (e.g. if the total score in an "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier" is set at 120, then the suggested subtotal for "nutritional requirements" should be at least 60.)

If the meal list includes items not meeting the requirements as listed below, the schools can deduct a certain pre-agreed score from the preset score. The more capable are the suppliers to provide healthy lunch, the less deduction will be made. To summarise,

1. All meal choices should not provide dessert.
2. Exclude all "Strongly Discouraged Food Items" from the menus and ensure that all meal choices do not contain "red light" food items.
3. Identify the "Limited Food Items" and make sure such "yellow light" food items are offered no more than two days per week (a school week being four to five school days). If a school week in question consists of less than four school days, the provision of "Limited Food

Items" for that particular week should be cut down pro rata. For example, if a school week consists of two to three school days only, then such items should not be offered on more than one school day; if there is only one school day in a week, then no such items should be offered.

4. Depending on the situation of grains being provided at school lunch, verify the frequency of provision of "Encouraged Food Items" (i.e. "green light" food items):
   - ❖ "Encouraged Food Items" are generally grains, with at least 10% of whole grains or added vegetables;
   - ❖ If more than one type of grains is provided each day, then at least one meal choice should include "Encouraged Food Items" on all school days; or
   - ❖ If only one type of grains is provided each day, then "Encouraged Food Items" should be provided on at least two days in a week.

The above are preliminary procedures for meal list assessment, which are different from the usual practice of school supervision on nutritional value of lunch. In order to ensure fairness of the procedures, DH deems it inappropriate for schools to contact tenderers during the assessment period to enquire about the ingredients of proposed meals or method of cooking.

Since an average meal list for a school will only show the names of the meal items or provide limited information about ingredients, in usual circumstances MCCAs will not be able to grade "portion" or other ingredients of the meals in a meal list. Hence, MCCAs are advised to specify in advance which certain items (e.g. size of portion and ingredients of sauce/gravy) will not taken into consideration before conducting the assessment of meal lists submitted by tenderers. If schools have doubt about the assessment of meal lists, they can contact DH for further assistance.

As for the other documentary proofs stated in the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier", MCCAs can award each satisfactory document a pre-agreed score.

If an MCCA decides to hold a tasting session, the school should invite the three tenderers with the highest scores on the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier". However, if several tenderers attain the same high score, the MCCA will assess and compare the details of the tenderers all over again until three lunch suppliers with the highest scores are picked out for the tasting session.

Question 4.
Why should lunch suppliers tendering for school contracts submit tender documents in triplicate?

Answer:
Submission of tender documents in triplicate is a routine practice in Government procurement. One copy is stored as a closed file (i.e. as a back-up copy), one kept by teachers-in-charge and one for use in assessment and examination.

When submitting the documents, the tendering lunch suppliers shall note that the service information (in triplicate) and the price information (also in triplicate) must be enclosed in two separate sealed envelopes, clearly marked with the words "service information" and "price information". The two envelopes shall then be put in a large envelope for submission. Tenderers should not display or disclose their identity on any of the sealed envelopes; otherwise their tender documents will not be considered.

Question 5.
Is it mandatory for schools to upload the "Invitation for Submission of Tender" document to their websites? Can they just invite a few well-reputed lunch suppliers to bid?

Answer:
Schools used to make newspaper announcements for tender invitation. Nowadays, EDB suggests that schools consider uploading the tender documents and the tendering procedures to the school websites in order to facilitate fair competition between interested bidders and suppliers/contractors on invitation lists.

To ensure the tender invitation reaches to suppliers, schools can consider the possibility of referring to creditable databases of qualified suppliers, and then send them simple letters, say, in the form of faxes, to inform them that the tender documents and tendering procedures have been uploaded to the schools' websites and that suppliers are welcomed to visit the websites and submit tender. This saves time and money.

If schools only intend to invite a few certain suppliers to tender, they can only do so with compelling reasons and have them properly documented to avoid scandal.

Question 6.
When schools need to amend the contents (e.g. closing date of tender) of tender documents after they are issued, how do the schools inform the persons involved?

Answer:
Once the tender documents are approved collectively by MCCAs and the tendering process has begun, the tender documents are not subject to amendment at will unless with compelling reasons and genuine necessity, and with the collective consent of MCCAs. Should there be the need to do so, the invited suppliers must be informed once again by effective means and such arrangements should be properly documented.

Question 7.
Some lunch suppliers queried about the fairness and justice of lunch supplier selection process – they thought that the process put those willing to provide healthy diet in a disadvantaged position. How should one ensure a fair, just and open process of lunch supplier selection?

Answer:
According to the "Guidelines on Conducting Trading Operations (Appendix 2)" (at http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/fin-management/notes-sch-fin/ref-trading-operations/Appendix%202%28E%29.pdf) issued by EDB, schools are strongly advised to form MCTOs to monitor and steer various types of trading operations, including the selection of lunch suppliers. The schools should ensure that MCTOs operate in an open, fair and just manner.

To meet the principles above, the process of selection of lunch suppliers must comply with the requirements as stated in the EDB circulars regarding "Procurement Procedures in Aided Schools" (http://applications.edb.gov.hk/circular/upload/EDBC/EDBC13004E.pdf), i.e. the suppliers are invited to submit quotations or tenders in an appropriate manner; they are subject to an open, fair and competitive selection process. Schools and MCCAs may refer to "Procedures of Selecting School Lunch Suppliers" of this handbook.

After the lunch suppliers have submitted quotation in paper, the schools and MCCAs should keep the information in strict confidence; they should not allow the suppliers to make any amendments thereto after the closing of tender. MCCAs can make use of the "Assessment Checklist of School Lunch Supplier" issued by DH to assess each bidding supplier; and then consider whether tasting session is needed to verify the nutritional value and the taste of the lunch to be supplied. After the schools have finished assessment of the indicators of the above service areas, they can turn to consider the pricing factors, and by then they should be able to pick the best lunch supplier. All assessment record should be kept properly as reference for school personnel and parents to ensure that the lunch supplier selection process is fair, just and open.

Question 8.
Some schools have the policy that they should change their lunch suppliers every year to avoid being suspected of transfer of benefits. Is it the best practice to change to a new lunch supplier every year?

Answer:
According to the "Guidelines on Conducting Trading Operations" (http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/fin-management/notes-sch-fin/ref-trading-operations/Appendix%202%28E%29.pdf) issued by EDB, schools should conduct quotation/tender exercises for the procurement of goods or award of service contracts. The contract period should preferably not exceed three years.

It is not the best practice to change to a new lunch supplier on annual basis. Nevertheless, the most important thing is to have a fair, just and open selection process. As such, DH and EDB recommend schools to adopt the "Procedures of Selecting School Lunch Suppliers" formulated by DH. The schools and MCCAs will choose the suitable lunch suppliers in an objective manner on one hand, while long-term performance of the selected lunch suppliers will be assessed by a lunch monitoring mechanism on the other hand.

If the schools worry that they would pick a lunch supplier unsuitable for them despite a lengthy process of selection, the schools may incorporate warnings, termination and breach-of-contract clauses in the contracts to be signed by the lunch suppliers. The schools can then issue an oral or even a more severe written warning if the suppliers performed sub-optimally. Upon receipt of a written warning, if the suppliers do not implement improvement in a thorough way to meet the requirements as stated in the terms of the contract within a specified reasonable timeframe, the schools can terminate the contracts with the suppliers in accordance with the termination clauses in the contracts signed between the schools and the suppliers. The combination of selecting school lunch suppliers with the correct procedures, a contract term of two to three years together with the use of appropriate clauses can minimise the administrative duties of the schools in relation to the selection of lunch suppliers.

Arrangements for Tasting Sessions

Question 9.
Are schools allowed to invite three suppliers only to a tasting session?

Answer:
Tenderers who are qualified for the tasting session within a selection process abiding in the principles of openness, fairness and justice should have a certain level of capability. The tasting session is held for the purpose of assessing the taste of the meals to be provided. With five healthy meal choices provided by each contesting supplier, there will already be a total of fifteen meal choices from three suppliers. This means that to finish the tasting of each meal choice by the amount of just one teaspoon, every taster has to taste 15 spoonfuls of food. It would then be understandable that if the number of suppliers to be invited is set at five, each taster has to taste yet 25 spoonfuls of food. As such, an excessive number of suppliers for a tasting session would spoil the purpose of tasting and result in a huge wastage. To avoid this scenario, DH does not recommend the invitation of more than three suppliers to a tasting session.

Question 10.
A tasting session can offer a large variety of food items. Some lunch suppliers even provide a buffet session, offering salmon, sashimi, sushi, dessert, etc. Then what should one taste in a tasting session?

Answer:
Well before the tasting session, MCCA can learn from the tender documents about the suppliers in relation to their food quality, ancillary arrangements for healthy diet promotion, administrative arrangements and other details.

The arrangements for the tasting session should emphasise the assessment of nutritional quality and the taste of the lunch boxes/on-site portioned meals provided by suppliers in a realistic school setting. As such, suppliers should provide only healthy meal items which would be supplied to school children in the future and the food samples should be realistic. Also, suppliers at a tasting session should not offer high-risk items or those that will never appear on the daily meal lists of schools. As for the arrangements of the tasting session, please refer to “Invitation to Tasting Session” (Document 4).

Marketing Tactics

Question 11.
During a tasting session, some lunch suppliers give out a generous amount of gifts and souvenirs to students and parents with voting rights, or even host gift-awarding games for them. Is this an example of “transfer of benefits”?

Answer:
According to the “Guidelines on Conducting Trading Operations (Appendix 2)” (at http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/fin-management/notes-sch-fin/ref-trading-operations/

Appendix%202%28E%29.pdf) issued by EDB, "schools should not allow the choice of suppliers/contractors to be in any way influenced by a donation or any other form of advantages".

As such, in order to ensure a fair, just and transparent process of selecting a lunch supplier, headmasters/headmistresses and MCCAs must remind the prospective lunch suppliers and parties involved in the selection of suppliers (e.g. those having the right to vote) that they shall not provide, solicit or accept any advantages, or arrange for any activities, services or gifts which are beyond the scope of meal tasting, in order not to influence the selection results and cause unfair competition. Such malpractice may constitute a breach of the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance. Teachers, parents and members of MCCAs, who are devoted to education, must be careful of such a pitfall.

In addition, schools shall include prevention of bribery clauses in the quotation/tender documents and the contract with a supplier/contractor as stipulated in the "Guidelines on Conducting Trading Operations (Appendix 2)" issued by EDB.

About Lunch Suppliers

Question 12.
Every lunch supplier uses a different production system. Some schools and parents think that the "cook-serve" system produces fresher food with better appearance and taste. Which production system serves best for the provision of school lunch?

Answer:
School lunch is usually produced under "cook-chill" or "cook-fresh" system; it can also be cooked in school canteens. For the sake of appearance, it is always better to cook on-site with fresh ingredients. However, from the viewpoint of dietetics, each way of cooking does not differ much from each other, so DH has no preference for any certain types. Schools can choose their suppliers according to factors like the number of students, space available, location, prices, parents' volition, etc., but it is most important to consider food safety, nutritional quality and the supplier's enthusiasm to promote healthy meal choices.

Question 13.
Schools and parents may not have adequate knowledge of nutrition to ascertain that lunch suppliers implement the healthy lunch policy. How should schools ask the suppliers to provide healthy lunch?

Answer:
When schools communicate with suppliers, they should state clearly the intention and determination of schools and parents to have healthy lunch offered to school children; they should also include in their commercial contracts, signed with the suppliers, important clauses about quality and quantity of food, as specified in "Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students" (latest version); such contracts are the basis on which suppliers are required to adhere strictly to the nutritional recommendations.

Also, schools, parents and MCCAs have to join hands in setting up a monitoring mechanism of healthy school lunch provision. Schools and parents should communicate with each other often for the issue of lunch. It is also recommended for schools to invite parents to share the duties of MCCAs. Meanwhile,

schools can use the "Lunch Monitoring Form" (https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/en/template/index.asp?pid=2007&id=2003) designed by DH to supervise the quality of lunch boxes on scheduled dates and make sure they offer value for money.

Question 14.
Where can schools get information on the lunch suppliers that participate in the "Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches"?

Answer:
The DH has launched the "Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches" since the 2017/18 school year. For details of the Scheme and information on the participating lunch suppliers, please visit the "EatSmart@school.hk" Campaign's thematic website at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/en/template/index.asp?pid=2009&id=3566

Question 15.
At the beginning of every school year, schools may receive promotional materials from many lunch suppliers. Some of them boast their large scale of operation, some boast their long history in the industry, some boast healthy food, some are just the simple restaurants at the street corner… so how do we choose a suitable one?

Answer:
EDB circulars about school lunch arrangements provide clear instructions on the choice and arrangements of lunch supply. First, the schools shall appoint only suppliers with a valid "Food Factory Licence Approved to Supply Lunch Boxes" issued by FEHD.

In order to follow the instructions of the above-mentioned circulars and to assist schools and parents in choosing the suitable lunch suppliers, DH has formulated the "Procedures of Selecting School Lunch Suppliers", which lists all the points to note and the assessment criteria, hoping that schools and parents will consider carefully before they select the most suitable lunch suppliers to provide students with healthy and delicious lunch. (For details, please refer to this handbook or visit the "EatSmart@school.hk" Campaign's thematic website at https://school.eatsmart.gov.hk/en/template/index.asp?pid=2009&id=3042). Meanwhile, a number of school lunch suppliers with a valid "Food Factory Licence Approved to Supply Lunch Boxes" have already informed DH on a voluntary basis of their operation details and contact; in return, DH has also uploaded such details to the "EatSmart@school.hk" Campaign's website for the public's reference. If necessary, the schools should enquire with the lunch suppliers in question and verify the contents in this particular database. DH does not assume any legal liability or responsibilities for the accuracy or completeness of the information in the database.

Question 16.
Sometimes the lunch suppliers procure their food ingredients from other sub-contractors to make sure they can provide a wide variety of food items. Are lunch suppliers allowed to acquire part of their supply from other sub-contractors?

Answer:
According to EDB circulars about school lunch arrangements, schools are reminded that their lunch

suppliers must possess a valid food factory licence permitted to supply lunch boxes issued by FEHD. The schools shall also find out whether the licensed food factories in questions have assigned sub-contractors to supply lunch boxes or whether the lunch boxes contain ready-made food manufactured by sub-contractors. If so, licensed food factories and their sub-contractors shall comply with the additional licensing conditions imposed on 1 March 2019 by FEHD, i.e. additional conditions for food factory approved to supply lunch boxes engaging a sub-contractor and conditions to be observed by sub-contractor in supplying meal boxes or ready-to-eat food.

For general enquiries on meal arrangements at schools, please contact the Senior School Development Officers of the districts in which the concerned schools are located. For enquiries on regulatory control of lunch supply provided by licensed food factories, please call the hotline of FEHD on 2868 0000 or contact the district environmental hygiene offices.

Question 17.
School lunch suppliers must observe food safety and hygiene. Some suppliers have even attained certifications such as HACCP and ISO 22000, reflecting their commitment to food hygiene and food safety control. When choosing our lunch suppliers, how do we know that they are committed to these issues?

Answer:
FEHD has very stringent requirements on licensed food factories and conducts inspections to ensure a hygienic environment in the factories and food safety. Schools and parents may request that the lunch suppliers submit copies of all the inspection reports issued by FEHD within the past twelve months together with the tender documents; they can consider the suppliers' performance and related issues with reference to their demerit points, if any.

Besides, some lunch suppliers have adopted the HACCP or ISO 22000 certification systems for the management, monitoring and control of the entire food processing procedures, including sourcing control, food storage, food processing, cooking, cleaning and sterilisation, to ensure that lunch provided to students is safe. Schools and parents can either request lunch suppliers to produce proof of HACCP or ISO 22000 certification awarded to them by accredited certification bodies, or enquire with relevant certification bodies to verify the suppliers' certification status.

Question 18.
What are HACCP and ISO 22000? How can school lunch suppliers obtain the HACCP or ISO 22000 certification?

Answer:
HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) is a systematised approach to the identification, assessment and control of food safety hazards. Through this approach, lunch suppliers can analyse the hazards possibly created in the food processing procedures and set up control points for supervision in order to prevent contamination of food and guarantee food safety.

ISO 22000 is an international accreditation of food safety management system. It combines HACCP and other internationally accepted principles to formulate a set of requirements on food safety management system. By establishing and implementing a food safety management system complying

with the ISO 22000 standard, lunch suppliers can control their food processing procedures efficiently to ensure food safety.

Lunch suppliers can apply for the HACCP or ISO 22000 certification status. Successful accreditation will lead to the award of corresponding certificates.

Question 19.
There are a lot of certification bodies which can issue HACCP or ISO 22000 certificates to lunch suppliers. Which ones are trustworthy?

Answer:
When requesting lunch suppliers to produce their proof of HACCP or ISO 22000 certification, schools and parents are advised to verify whether such certificate is issued by a certification body accredited for performing HACCP or ISO 22000 certification.

Accreditation can ensure that the certification body is able to provide certification service at the international standard of practice. Before a certification body is awarded with certification status, it has to undergo rigorous assessment by independent technical professionals of the accreditation body to assure that it meets the relevant international standards. Therefore, the HACCP or ISO 22000 certificates issued by accredited certification bodies are more reliable.

At present, local certification bodies can obtain accreditation from local or overseas accreditation bodies. Certificates issued by accredited certification bodies bear logos or symbols of the accreditation bodies concerned.

Hong Kong Accreditation Service (HKAS), which is under the Innovation and Technology Commission of the HKSAR Government is the local accreditation body in Hong Kong. Examples of other accreditation bodies include UKAS of the United Kingdom, ANAB and IAS of the United States, CNAS of China and SAC of Singapore. To select accredited certification services, please visit https://www.hkctc.gov.hk/en/tcsector/ba/food_c.html for relevant information and the list of accredited certification bodies.

Question 20.
At present some lunch suppliers do not fully comply with the "Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students" (latest version); some even reprimand the schools when being requested to supply healthy lunch in accordance with the guidelines. Do schools and MCCAs have the right to request lunch suppliers to provide healthy lunch in accordance with the Guidelines?

Answer:
As smart consumers protected by the law, schools and parents have the absolute right to request lunch suppliers to supply healthy lunch to students in accordance with the nutritional requirements stipulated in lunch contracts. We also understand that the majority of lunch suppliers support the provision of healthy lunch at schools. Thus, it is important for the schools and parents to uphold the principles of healthy diet, and no compromise should be made for the sake of the students' health.

Besides, various suppliers providing lunch services to primary schools have been accredited under DH's EatSmart School Accreditation Scheme (please refer to the homepage of the scheme for details). This illustrates that with the collaboration of suppliers, schools can provide lunch which fully complies with the nutritional requirements of the Department. We therefore believe that the suppliers have the capability to achieve our standard.

Question 21.
If lunch suppliers provide disposable lunch containers which can be recycled, i.e. recyclable lunch containers, instead of providing washable and reusable lunch containers, is it good enough for protecting the environment?

Answer:
It is not good enough. Although recyclable containers can be recycled, the process of recycling inevitably involves consumption of energy and resources. Moreover, recyclable lunch containers must be washed for clean recycling, thereby increasing the difficulty to recycle. Hence, washable and reusable lunch containers and cutlery should be used to minimise waste production. For further information of green lunch, please visit the website of EPD at http://www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en/schools/green_lunch.htm.

Question 22.
The Handbook of Selection of Lunch Suppliers has updated its "Procedures of Selecting School Lunch Suppliers" and the parts about "Green and Waste Reduction Measures" in its templates of tender documents. If a school lunch supplier is currently still using disposable lunch containers, is it necessary for the school to request the lunch supplier to use reusable lunch containers and cutlery by amending the contents of the contract signed with the lunch supplier before the contract expires?

In response to the implementation of the first-phase regulation of the Product Eco-responsibility (Amendment) Bill 2023 for regulating disposable plastic tableware and other plastic products from 22 April 2024, the answer for this question has been updated accordingly. For details, please refer to **Appendix**.

Production of Lunch Boxes

Question 23.
According to the "Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students" (latest version), meat only constitutes one sixth of the content of a lunch box for children. For growing children, how can such an amount of meat be adequate?

Answer:
The required level of protein intake for adults and children is not too high in fact; it only constitutes 15% of the daily calorie intake. Grains, which are carbohydrates, take up 50% to 60% of the daily calorie intake. As such, we only need to take a small amount of protein-rich food (like meat, fish, eggs or beans) in each meal every day to satisfy the daily requirements for normal body functioning and development.

For example, a junior primary student only needs 4 to 8 slices (equal to 1 to 2 servings) of meat for lunch whereas a senior primary student needs 6 to 10 (equal to 1.5 to 2.5 servings). Excessive intake of meat can lead to excessive intake of fat, which in turn may induce obesity.

Question 24.
Healthy food is often thought to taste bland. As a result, children and parents do not go for healthier choices in general. Does healthy food really taste awful?

Answer:
Every natural food item has its own unique aroma. It is regretful that our palate has been manipulated by unhealthy diet culture and bad eating habits for the past few decades. The general public have developed a preference for strong tastes and dislike fruit and vegetables, resulting in a rampant situation of chronic diseases nowadays.

In fact, healthy food is not only beneficial to health but can also be delicious. In this aspect, the cooks play a very important role. Good cooks can amplify the aroma of natural food without using much seasoning like oil, salt and sugar, so that their customers enjoy delicious and yet healthy dishes!

Of course, it is not easy to change an adverse food culture that has lasted for decades. As parents, however, we do not want our children to follow bad examples and suffer from chronic diseases in future. Starting from today, for the sake of their health, we should set good examples ourselves, encourage them to make healthy lunch choices and foster their healthy eating habits at a young age.

Health Promotion

Question 25.
Parents and children may not keep a copy of their monthly lunch order forms, nor would they keep track of their lunch order patterns. Can lunch suppliers provide parents with monthly reports of their children's lunch order pattern? What purpose will such information serve?

Answer:
Parents should set a good example for their kids and stand by the principles of healthy eating. They should help and encourage their children to make healthy lunch choices, which is amongst the most important steps to foster healthy eating habits among children.

Through negotiation and communication, it is not difficult for lunch suppliers to meet parents' reasonable demands. Most of the lunch suppliers have computerised the children's lunch order data, to provide parents with monthly reports of lunch order. This in turn helps parents to understand and trace their children's dietary habits and patterns, with reference to which they can educate their children and guide them to make the right choices. As for the frequency of such reports, it depends on the requirements of both the schools and the parents. The most important issue is to understand and follow up on the dietary pattern of children.

Handling Complaints

Question 26.
In order to enhance the quality of customer service, some lunch suppliers may set up a hotline service for parents. As soon as parents receive "negative" feedback from their children, they may call the hotline and ask the suppliers to handle their request at once, and yet these callers might just lodge the complaints from their perspectives, or they might be only partially informed of the actual circumstances. However, complaints like these from individual parents may have an impact on lunch quality affecting all children. How can the other parents render their help and have a better understanding of the situation?

Answer:
It is agreeable that enhancing service quality is always important and that is why there is the hotline for communication with customers and for collection of comments and complaints from schools and parents. However, unless for urgent matters that require immediate attention, the lunch suppliers are obliged to communicate and negotiate with MCCAs or their appointees regularly upon receipt of parents' comments. They should be committed to the ideals of healthy diet and make incessant effort to improve the supply of healthy lunch to the campus.

A two-way communication channel can indeed strengthen the cooperation between lunch suppliers and parents. MCCAs or their appointees are advised to inform all parents regularly of the consensus reached with lunch suppliers or measures of improvement as agreed on upon negotiation with them. They can also consider explaining to parents why certain comments of theirs run against the principles of healthy diet or why such comments have been rejected by MCCAs and lunch suppliers, all at one go. This can help parents understand better that the ultimate goal of healthy school lunch is to promote health among children by fostering a healthy-diet campus established via the cooperation of various parties.