**2010 BEST PRACTICES AWARDS**
**USDA FOODS PROGRAM**
**AWARD APPLICATION FORM**

Please attach this form to the first page of submitted summaries. Please forward completed applications to the Office of General Services, Division of Food Distribution & Warehousing, Corning Tower Bldg. – 37th Floor, Empire State Plaza, Albany, New York 12242.

**Name of Applicant (School Code & Name):** 4052 Poughkeepsie City School District

**Address of Applicant:** 70 Forbus ST. Poughkeepsie, NY 12603

**Telephone #:** (845) 451-4780

**Fax #:** (845) 451-4873

**E-mail address:** amuhlnic@poughkeepsieschools.org

**Your District's Federal ID #:** 14-6004158

Please attach a short summary describing the activity or initiative and its impact on the success of your program.

2010 APR 23 AM 10: 51

# Poughkeepsie City School District
# Food Service Department
# 2010 Best Practices Awards Application

Laval S. Wilson, Superintendent

Kevin Sheldon, Assistant Superintendent for Business

Alan J. Muhlnickel, Food Service Director

Beth Van Norstrand, Assistant Food Service Director

Poughkeepsie City School District is 71% Free and 13% Reduced as of the Feburary Figures. This community's ethnic make up is 60% African American, 23.5% Hispanic, 15% Caucasian and 1.5% Asian/American Indian. The district has 4470 students in one high school, one middle school and 5 elementary schools.

The children of Poughkeepsie live in an area where there is a desert for resources when it comes to fresh produce. Poughkeepsie is a desert in the respect that there are no local or chain grocery stores where the population can purchase fresh vegetables and fresh fruits with in the city limits. Many people in the area do not own vehicles and although public transportation is available, it is not easy for the population to travel to distant stores to shop for fresh vegetables and fresh fruits. When I arrived in Poughkeepsie my staff told me in no uncertain terms that in their opinion "their kids would never eat a fresh apple". Now three years later, I serve 25 cases of 130 count apples every other week, or about 3250 portions in two weeks and I regularly order oranges and bananas during the week. I knew students could choose fresh fruits and I wanted to increase vegetables in the children's diet. In our menu mix, Poughkeepsie has served entrée salads for at least 6 years and they sell well in the elementary schools composing approximately 20% of the entrees at the Kindergarten to 5$^{th}$ grade level. Yet at the Middle and High School the entrée salads would sell less than ten a day. We menu salad cups, and other fresh items on a weekly basis, but they are not the most popular choice by a long shot. As I looked for a solution, we had the great opportunity to receive fajita chicken from commodity foods. We used the product one spring in Chicken Caesar Salads for the Pastabilities event with local Chef's in training. I found the response to the item very popular for a salad!! And I never forget a popular reaction to an item.
A few sleepless nights and many days pondering how to introduce students to fresh vegetables has lead to **Salad Days.**

From the beginning, I knew I could not pre package the salads and expect students to choose the salads. The prepackaged salads were not a good answer for our middle and high schools students. We were selling less than 10 boxed salads a day. Pastabilities is a display cooking event that students recognized as a better food even if it is the same food just shown off differently. So I had learned that when we could display the food it was better received. I choose to display the salads on the serving line for better effect and to get more students to choose the salad entrée.

The high school kitchen has challenges in presenting food to students. The lines are small for the number of students fed. The serving lines we have are largely set up for quick grab and go items to maximize the wait time for the students in the line. The serving line has only two hot wells a hot sandwich display case that is twice the surface area of the area for the hot wells, and a cold food display case. Two identical lines let us serve about 600 students a day. In addition we have a Senior Dining Room where we make sandwiches to order and offer grab and go sandwiches. Daily we serve three hot sandwiches, one hot entree, one hot vegetable, and three to four cold sandwiches and salads to approximately 700 students.

I worked with the existing facility and purchased colored bowls, different serving tongs, different crocks and containers to cut down on the "stainless steel-institutional" look to the serving line on salad days. The first day of salad days my cook manager only

wanted to cut 3-4 heads of lettuce for the meal. It was a Friday and I'm sure she was thinking she would have to throw away the cut lettuce that would not last till Monday. Well after the first of four lines where we serve about 200 students we were out of lettuce and the cook manger was chopping lettuce for the next three lines. In total we served over 60 salads in the four lines the very first day. Now on Fridays we serve in excess of 100 salads instead of 10. This translates to about 15% of the population that chooses the entrée salad.

The Middle School kitchen has four hot wells and less free counter space than the high school. Still I wanted to explore the salad days at this grade level. The Chef moves equipment and rearranged the line for a display set up every Friday. The middle school has a population of just over 1000 students with a Free & Reduced population of about 80% and we feed over 800 meals a day. The building also did not sell a large quantity of pre-packaged salads; for the week of April 12, 2010 we sold no more than seven a day from Monday to Thursday before our Friday Salad Days where we sold 160 Taco Salads and on our best Friday we have sold 225 or 26% of the population chooses salads. When we started offering salad days there was some confusion as to the salad being the meal entrée but students quickly adapted and we are now serving over 160 every Friday.

I have started with three menus for salad days, a Chicken Caesar Salad, Taco Salad, and a Chicken Fajita Salad. The Chicken Caesar uses Fajita Chicken from the Commodity Diversion Program. The Taco Salad uses ground beef crumbles from the Commodity Diversion Program, cheese sauce from Land o Lakes commodity diversion program, and salsa from OGS. Chicken Fajita Salad uses Fajita Chicken from the commodity diversion Program, shredded Cheese from the Land o Lakes commodity diversion program, and salsa from OGS.

I am always looking to using commodity foods in the menus I plan. Fajita Chicken was a natural for its appeal to students and ease in preparation for my staff. Cheeses would be served to control the portion and fat consumption.

In my opinion, students are savvier about food than when I was their age. Students have probably eaten out quite often and look for the presentation of the food, our students "eat with their eyes" before they even taste anything.

By the middle and high school years, students want to be in control even if they are too young to fully understand what control truly is. We have given students better control as to what goes into their salad and by doing so we have given students better choices, we have given students a restaurant quality meal, and we are giving students more vegetables in their diet.

Adults have noticed too, such as Evan Panagiotopoulos, Director of technology, and have told me that in their opinion the Caesar salad was "perfectly prepared and an excellent meal."

I would use the money I receive from the Best Practices grant toward creating two different serving lines. I would leave one in the current grab and go style we have, and I would organize a new line organize around more hot wells, more space for display of the food such as Salads Days everyday. Who knows, someday fast food could be the exception rather than the rule in our kitchens.