

School Pantry Program – Program Guide

School-based food pantries provide nutritious food for children and families in the safest place possible: their school. Like food pantries, they're meant to serve the most vulnerable members of our population, and they're meant to be available often.

THE THREE KEY PLAYERS

When you host a school pantry with the Food Bank of North Alabama, there are three key players: the Host School, the Program Partner, and the Food Bank. Each plays a unique role.

- The Host School provides the space and often the staff to run the pantry. Anyone who has direct repetitive contact with children must pass a National Background check, so school staff and volunteers make great pantry volunteers. The Host School is responsible for hosting the pantry, connecting with families, and staffing the pantry when possible. Schools cannot be charged for any of the items distributed in the pantry.
- The Program Partner coordinates the logistics for providing food at the school and is responsible for shared maintenance on Food Bank product. The Partner and the School plan the pantry together to fit their community, then the Partner maintains the relationship with the Food Bank. The Partner is responsible for picking up product from the Food Bank, keeping the pantry or distributions stocked, and reporting to the Food Bank.
- The Food Bank makes available donated products for the school pantry, ensures food safety and program standards, and provides best practice advice in the partnership.

RUNNING A SCHOOL PANTRY

School pantries are whatever you make them! How often you distribute food, what food you distribute, and how families access the pantry is up to you and your school.

Core requirements:

- Pantries must distribute at least once per month during the full school year
- Any adults with direct, repetitive contact with children must pass a National Background Check
- Neither the school nor the families who use the pantry can be charged for any costs associated with providing food
- Non-perishable foods that are stored on site must be 6-inches from the floor
- Storage space must be temperature controlled and locked when not in use
- At the end of each school year, the Partner must submit a Yearly Distribution Report

Once the core requirements are met, your school pantry can operate however works best for you and your school. Below are two common models, but pantries can be a hybrid of the two...or something completely different.

The Fresh Market:

Some school pantries don't store any food on site because they hand out everything during one big distribution. Partners drop off food at the school on a designated day of the week, then families come and pick up items the same day. Little or no food storage is needed, so this model is a great way to distribute more perishable items like fruits, vegetables, and frozen meat. On the other hand, more volunteers and staff are needed to run the events.

One way to make these more infrequent distributions go smoothly is to do a drive-up pantry: families drive up at the designated weekly or monthly time, then volunteers run food bags out to each car.

The Everyday Closet:

For schools and Program Partners with more limited personnel availability, or with an interest in having food available more often, permanent "closets" are the better model. Food is stored on-site at the school, and students can access it at any time with a teacher chaperon. The school can either monitor the stock or ask the Program Partner to bring more food when stores are low, or the Program Partner can have a regular inventory management schedule. This model works better with shelf-stable food items.

BEST PRACTICES

Groups around the country have been running food pantries at schools for years. Here are some tips from other School Pantries:

- Don't call it a "pantry." Sometimes, food pantries are associated with negative stigma, especially among teenagers. Instead consider naming your pantry something more relevant to your school: "West Madison Market", "Blazer Kitchen", "Fresh Stop", "Hornet Closet" are examples.
- School pantries don't have to be run by adults! Especially in high schools, having student clubs take ownership of the pantry and run it like they would the school snack stand is a great way to build student support.
- Get to know families. School pantries are just one more way that schools—and their charitable partners—connect with their communities. Many parents see schools as the safest, best place for their children to access services, so why not make it fun?
- The gold standard: client choice. Whenever families and students can choose food items for themselves, it not only increases the likelihood that they'll use the food, but it also makes families feel more welcome and respected.
- Connect with your local Society of St. Andrew coordinator and become a distribution point for fresh produce picked in your county. The group picks all kinds of items—from potatoes to kale to peaches—often without much warning!

To become a School Pantry Partner with the Food Bank of North Alabama, please contact the Agency Relations Manager at communityrelations@fbofna.org, or go to www.foodbanknorthal.org for more information.