

Key Relationships in FoodCorps Service

As you engage with members of your school and the broader community, remember that building relationships with your school principal, cafeteria staff, and teachers is especially important. Consider the following tips:

Relationship with the Principal

The principal is the key decision-maker or gatekeeper at every school. This person supervises the school's instructional program; maintains order and discipline; enforces federal, state, and district rules, policies, and laws; evaluates and supports teachers; and represents the school to parents and the community. To make an impact in the classroom and garden, it will be important to establish a respectful, collaborative relationship with the principal. Remember to include the principal as a key person to share successes with, as referenced in the Tips for Celebrating and Sharing Success section on p. 47.

Relationships with Cafeteria Staff

Building a relationship with cafeteria staff is one of the most important things you can do in the Nourishing School Meals area of service. These staff members are in charge of navigating child nutrition programs—including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and others—to develop a menu for students, and they have great influence on how students make choices in the cafeteria line. Just as a teacher sets the tone for expectations in the classroom, cafeteria

staff can choose to influence the tone during meals. Building a positive relationship with cafeteria staff is key to everything from leading successful taste tests to your ability to borrow equipment such as trays needed for classroom-based cooking lessons. Cafeteria staff are sometimes undervalued within a school's culture, so it is important to acknowledge their hard work and essential role in student nourishment. Here are some tips for success:

- Spend time in the kitchen to build relationships.
- Collaboratively set expectations for working in the cafeteria.
- Be consistent and reliable with how you show up to help.
- Listen to challenges, ask questions, and identify opportunities for your service to support these efforts.
- Give assistance, not demands.
- Be humble, not the expert.
- Acknowledge barriers and successes.
- Connect and relate personally.
- Eat the food served in the cafeteria.
- Be appreciative!

As you are building your relationships, consider asking cafeteria staff these questions:

- How can we stay in touch? (Email? What is the best time to call?)
- What are your important kitchen logistics?
- What foods do you want to serve?
- How do you plan your menu?
- How are contracts and decisions made?

- Are there opportunities for a FoodCorps service member to have a daily presence in the cafeteria? If so, how would this be helpful?

Just as it's important to understand how learning standards influence classroom curriculum, a key part of doing your research when building relationships with cafeteria staff is understanding the National School Lunch Program and National School Breakfast Program (see Glossary on p. 137 for details). These programs provide the basic structure and parameters under which cafeteria staff operate. Find out more on the Toolshed.

Relationships with Teachers

It is important to get to know the teachers in your school because you will often be in their classrooms leading hands-on lessons. The more you can develop a partnership and level of trust with the teachers, the easier it will be to meet your goals. Here are some tips for building relationships with classroom teachers:

- **Lead with empathy, and remember that teachers care about their students.** Teachers have a lot on their plates. It is important to recognize their hard work and remember that FoodCorps service members are on hand to help enhance their students' experience in and out of the classroom.
- **Ask what the norms of the classroom are and what the teacher's behavior management structure is.** What strategies and systems does the teacher use to reward positive and redirect inappropriate behaviors, and how can you emulate these practices? It may be helpful to spend time in the break room or teachers' lounge and chat with teachers during their planning period (although be aware this is valuable teacher time!).

- **Ask to observe a lesson.** Explain that you're eager to learn from an experienced educator.
- **Understand the daily schedule.** What times are best to meet? Are there grade-level or curriculum meetings you could attend?
- **Understand what guides teachers.** What are the broad school goals, curriculum parameters, and standards that inform classroom instruction? How is their performance being evaluated, and can you help them succeed?
- **Ask what concepts and skills the teachers are passionate about.** What is their favorite topic to teach? Why did they start teaching? What are their favorite memories from being a student?
- **Seek teachers' advice and feedback.** Is the teacher willing to review the lesson you're thinking of teaching before you teach it? Does the teacher have advice on how to ensure it goes smoothly? Also ask the teacher to observe you teaching the lesson and give critical feedback.
- **Find out what responsibilities teachers have besides leading their class.** For instance, do they act as a recess monitor or participate on a school committee? How can you be a resource to teachers during their often maxed-out time?
- **Ask what topics the teacher might not feel confident or comfortable teaching.** How can you provide support and help the teacher, just as he or she is helping you?
- **Ask what motivates each teacher.** What does each teacher enjoy about his or her students? What can you learn from watching the teacher teach?
- **Ask how each teacher prefers to communicate.** Does the teacher want to hear from you by email, by phone, or by you dropping by their desk?