



An Interview with Karen Brown Child Nutrition Director, Sumner School District, Washington

“Healthier Choices Make a Healthier You!” is the message that Sumner School District communicates to their students. When introducing seafood to students, Sumner School District serves a variety of seafood dishes including fish sticks, fish tacos and fish sandwiches featuring Genuine Alaska Pollock®. They also serve tuna sandwiches and breaded trout shapes.

Strategies for Success

In Sumner School District, Karen has a few simple but effective strategies for introducing seafood items – involve the students in the item being served, look for the energetic cheerleaders on your staff to provide support, and don’t pair a new menu item with another menu item that you know the kids love. Her strategic approach helps kids choose the new seafood item as their preferred lunch.

- **Sampling for Success** — “Fish isn’t very new for us, but we sometimes have the elementary kitchen staff cut up pieces of the fish so the kids can try it,” said Karen. So usually by the time they are served their first fish taco, the kids have already sampled Alaska pollock fish sticks.
- **Mix it Up** — The next step for Karen was to menu Alaska pollock fish sticks with tartar sauce and fruit and vegetable sides. Once the fish sticks were well received by her students, she was ready to expand her menu to offer Alaska Pollock Tacos using the same popular fish stick.
- **Try and Try Again** — “We might menu a fish taco with a graham snack in an effort to get the kids to try a new item. Most importantly, though, is to menu it at least four times so the kids get used to it. The more times they see it, the more likely they will be to take it,” recommended Karen.

- **Smart Sourcing** — According to Karen, “We use Alaska pollock if at all possible.” You get a few chances with students, so it’s important that they are introduced to fish that tastes good and has a pleasant texture. Both USDA and commercial products made from once-frozen Alaska pollock are the highest quality seafood schools can get.
- **Cook it Right** — “I know a lot of kids, and adults, who don’t like fish because they think it tastes “fishy.” The reality could be that the fish was of poor quality to start with or it wasn’t prepared very well, or they just think it will taste fishy even if it doesn’t,” said Karen. We agree – it’s also important that fish is not overcooked; and breaded products should be crispy.
- **First in Line** — “In elementary school, a good amount of the students choose the fish. It’s on the menu with the cheese enchilada which isn’t their favorite,” Karen reports. She places the fish entree first on the line, followed by the enchilada, which increases the likelihood that students will choose the fish. She learned this and other strategies via a pilot program she participated in called Smarter Lunchroom Strategies.

“Try it because your kids might surprise you. That happens to me all the time. I never would have eaten some of the things we serve, ever, not in a million years, because I wasn’t used to eating that type of food at home. You can’t give up. Try something and keep trying.”



Karen Brown

Director,
Child
Nutrition
Services

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for Great Kids!*



Genuine Alaska Pollock

Realistic Expectations

Sumner School District staff try to be open and receptive to change. “We know change is hard, but we’re all about the kids. Our team will throw ‘left-field’ things on the menu and our staff will do it,” said Karen.

Karen also says, “We don’t always get a true read the first time we try it. After the second or third time, we get more of an accurate picture of how much kids like it and how much we need to prepare.”

According to Karen, on any given day, about 30 percent of the kids will take the seafood option. The kids that try something new will also usually take it the next time it’s on the menu.

Recipes

Sumner School District uses the [Alaska Pollock Tacos](#) recipe and they serve the taco with tartar sauce or ranch dressing. They have also developed their own kale slaw which students have enjoyed on the fish taco; and it’s a great way to help students get their dark green vegetables.

Sourcing Seafood

Karen agrees that sourcing high quality fish is important to having success with seafood. Sumner School District sources some of their Alaska pollock from the USDA,

using their commodity dollars. Genuine Alaska Pollock is a USDA Food and has several benefits that Alaska pollock purchased elsewhere might not have. USDA sourced Genuine Alaska Pollock is once-frozen, has no additives or fillers, and is made with whole fillets, unlike most twice-frozen and minced products.

Karen shared that she doesn’t always purchase Alaska pollock as a USDA Food, because “Fish doesn’t usually fluctuate in price; it’s actually not expensive at all through our distributors, so we sometimes buy it commercially because the cost isn’t prohibitive,” she says.

When purchasing Alaska pollock through a distributor, it’s important to accept no substitutes, so that you receive the same high-quality Genuine Alaska Pollock that you would receive through the USDA. The specifications need to include that the fish is once-frozen (not twice), that it’s whole fillet, has no additives, and that it is caught and processed in the United States. More information on smart sourcing: <http://www.greatfishforgreatkids.org/smartSourcing.html>

THANK YOU Karen! *What a great example in showing how perseverance, teamwork, and great strategies can go a long way toward having success with seafood!*

“ We like to expose our kids to many different foods so they can try things they may not have at home. Our nutrition goals are to expose our students to all types of foods in the hopes that we can make them more adventurous eaters.”



A Sumner School District lunch tray on Fish Taco day. Students can choose ranch dressing, tartar sauce, or Sumner’s delicious homemade kale slaw.

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