

**Award:** Rising Star Award

**Nominee's Name:** Kathlyn Walter

**Nominee's Title:** School Nutrition Program Supervisor

**Nominee's Email Address:** [kathlyn.walter@pcsstn.com](mailto:kathlyn.walter@pcsstn.com)

**School / District / Company:** Putnam County Schools

**Enrollment:** 12010

**Number of Staff:** 155

**Number of Breakfasts Served Daily:** 5890

**Number of Lunches Served Daily:** 6705

**Number of Years as a Director:** 4.25

- 1. Explain the marked changes in the district's school nutrition program due to contributions made by your nominee in the five or fewer years he/she has been the director (give exact number of years of experience).**

At the beginning of each new school year, you will likely find Kathlyn in her office working late into the evening to ensure that every free and reduced application received during the day has been processed. Staff members verify and certify applications during the day. However, Kathlyn makes a personal review to ensure each student who qualifies receives services as soon as possible. This stems from a culture of caring. Kathlyn is currently the supervisor of school nutrition at Putnam County schools in Cookeville Tennessee, a position she has held for 4.25 years (Since June 1, 2015). During this time she has made significant contributions to the program. It all starts with a culture of caring; first with care for school nutrition employees and then finds fulfillment in service to students.

Kathlyn's vision to enhance the culture of Putman County School Nutrition drives employee trainings, appreciation, management and teambuilding. The school nutrition team ultimately cares for students in return. Kathlyn implemented employee recognition programs to recognize the school nutrition heroes at each school annually during the first week in May. Since its first year, cafeterias were encouraged to elect an individual on their team for the School Nutrition Super Hero award. When awards were given with some small custom goodie bags, it was explained to the winners why they are viewed as heroes to students and team members every day. The "You Make a Difference Award" is also given to recognize employees throughout the school year who make an impact in the lives of students and in the school community.

Kathlyn believes in the potential of her team. As individuals show more interest and dedication to their work, she increases responsibility and training. The School Nutrition Association has been a critical partner for employee development. Under Kathlyn's encouragement and energy, the Putnam County chapter thrives (with 24 active members) by offering staff continuing education and participation on a state and national level. When selecting staff and managers to send to SNA conferences every year, we

have begun rewarding those active members who participate in the local chapter's fund raising and volunteer efforts with paid registration to such conferences and events. The chapter participates in multiple year-round meetings, fundraisers, and training seminars, and members' efforts have improved community relations.

Kathlyn has created successful training programs with twice-annual cooks and cashiers' seminars, manager trainee competencies for new and aspiring managers, and regular manager training sessions including those provided by the ICN. At the cooks and cashiers' seminars, Kathlyn gathers input from front line workers on the practical application of policies, procedures, and simplify menus and daily concerns. Cooks try out new recipes and add ideas on how to put that little extra "love" into it. They also share tips for improving menus and recipes based on what else is being served, equipment available, or taste preferences. By implementing what they have learned, employees have provided faster service and more constructive feedback, appear more confident in their work, as well as flexible to new recipes and menu changes. Employee development and training has also nurtured loyalty and longevity. Before Kathlyn became director, only managers received special training. These educational seminars stress the important role of a cook or cashier within the cafeteria.

This culture of caring extends into student programs, which have expanded greatly under her leadership. During Kathlyn's directorship, the district has adopted universal free breakfast district wide. The breakfast program breaks even financially because all schools qualify for severe need breakfast reimbursement. Reduced priced students are not charged for lunch, which in turn decreased student debt, and increased participation among these students. Summer feeding at Putnam County has increased the access of hot meals to the community. Meals are delivered to locations countywide including all public housing and most public parks. Service is available all summer, and participation in summer feeding has nearly doubled since Summer 2015. At an average of 1,830 lunch and suppers daily, over 15% of the student population is served daily at lunch or supper. Breakfast and snacks are also served throughout the summer at various community enrichment programs.

**2. Describe the most significant program modification made by your nominee (include measurable results achieved).**

The most significant change to our program came in Kathlyn's first year when in October of 2015, Putnam County Schools began offering CACFP's At Risk Supper Program. Wishing not to take away from dinners at home for families, Putnam County calls this program "Super Snack," and is offered directly after the school day bell for students staying in afterschool enrichment programs, or taking a late bus home. In its first year, the program saw immediate success, with over 10% of the student population (approximately 1,200 meals) being served daily. All schools added this program immediately, except for the alternative school; which just this year has started offering the program. Meals are primarily cold. Items are prepared during the working day and bagged into a "kit" so that minimal labor hours were required, and after school teacher/ instructors (with proper training and monitoring) easily hand out meals to students.

There are several grant-funded enrichment programs which benefit from Super Snack. Programs which have students staying a couple of hours after school are typically required to provide snacks. By providing a Super Snack, these programs do not need to set aside enrichment program dollars to meet this need. Super Snack is a beloved outreach by the cafeteria team. It is wonderful to see students eating before going home. Parents have expressed appreciation for the Super Snack, as they recognize the children are always hungry when they come home from school. At Upperman High School on a Friday afternoon, you can see 2 cafeteria staff staying after the school day to serve 200 or more students lined up for their favorite hot pizza meal.

Additionally, there was an immediate financial gain by adding this program, with revenues from its first year of \$418,000. School administrators have expressed their gratitude, feeling more confident that those in need are being fed before going home. As the program has developed, and interest from schools and the community has increased, we have been able to expand the program. It serves all schools within our district as well as local government housing communities, which provide daily enrichment for students.

Another benefit of Super Snack is supporting schools, by providing "Super Snacks" at family engagement events. Reimbursable meals are served to students and claimed, and then the family engagement providers are charged a small, affordable charge for the adult meals served. School family engagement programs have seen increased participation because food is available. The first family engagement event our alternative school provided was in October 2018. The student population of the school is just under 100 students, and on the family engagement night when Super Snack was provided to students and families, the school had over 75 attendees. At the end of its third year (SY 2018-19), revenues from the program have grown to over \$600,000. Super Snack for Putnam County School Nutrition program, has not only increased revenues and fed students after the bell, but also built important relationships with community and schools, and helped to add to the school nutrition program's culture of caring.

**3. Describe your nominee's professional background and how he/she entered the school nutrition profession.**

Kathlyn Walter grew up in school nutrition. Kathlyn's mother, Sandi Walter, started a program at the local Christian school she attended when she was 10 years old. Throughout her high school years, Sandi managed the high school cafeteria. Some early memories in the kitchen are of her helping her mother make 1,200 JELLO Jiggle Eggs and feeding the handsome older football players on game night. Kathlyn pursued a BBA from the University of Memphis in Hotel and Restaurant management because of her interest in food and travel, and for several years worked in hotels. Her first school nutrition job began in September 2009, when she first came home from working in a hotel in Singapore. During the summers, Kathlyn would work seasonal hotel jobs and come home to school nutrition during the school year. After becoming a manager in January 2012, she decided that education would further her career in school nutrition. She pursued her MBA the following year. Her love for travel led her to take a 6-month contract with Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction, with a focus on leading their CEP information programs and new Administrative Review Processes. While the job was enjoyable, the

opportunity to be back on the front lines was calling, and Kathlyn began working for Julie Hedine at Pasco County Schools in Florida as the Program Manager for Training. This provided Kathlyn an opportunity to share her knowledge of school nutrition as well as show care to employees, giving them opportunities to grow, be acknowledged, and experience purpose within the program. Putnam County in Tennessee provided the perfect career opportunity for Kathlyn June 2015. It was the perfect fit for her family as well, as she found a place to start as a newlywed in a place close to her family. Kathlyn continues to travel, train and reach for innovations to serve through school nutrition. It is her calling and the way this young lady wants to leave her world a better place.