FSMFA

Caregiver/Parent Interview Guide

**Purpose:** Document caregiver/parent perspectives about school meals and FSMFA to inform initial implementation (formative evaluation) and to contextualize what is learned from parents during Year 1 of the FSMFA pre/post evaluation

**Target Data Collection Dates:** Jan-Feb 2022

**Sample:** 150 caregivers/parents (including with students in elementary, middle and high schools and who participate and don’t in school meals)

**Additional Data:** Brief survey will be completed beforehand to gather information about interviewee; Focus groups or interviews will be conducted with middle and high school students to also get their perspective

**Introduction**

Hi, my **name** is **[insert name]** and I’m from **[insert institution]***.* **Thank you** for agreeing to participate in this interview today. I’d like to ask you some questions about your experiences and ideas about school meals. This will be used for research purposes and also to inform the state of **[Maine/ California]** as it prepares to continue offering free school meals to all students next school year. I want to make sure you know that your participation is voluntary and the interview should take about 30 minutes. We’ll combine all the results and you and your child’s school will not be identified with your responses. If you have any questions, you can talk with our Principal Investigator [Juliana Cohen or Wendi Gosliner]. I would be happy to give you her contact number or email if you’d like. I’m also planning to record our interview to make it easier to get all your responses, and we’ll delete the recording after we’ve written down your answers. And, again, you won’t be identified with your responses. Is it ok with you if I record this interview?

**Questions:**

Background

**[Domain: frequency of school meals (all children in household)]**

*Let’s start with some information about your family*

1. What ages and grades are your kids in?
   1. How often does *[each/your child]* currently eat school breakfast, school lunch and/or any other meals or snacks served by school?
   2. Prior to the COVID pandemic, on average, how many days did *[each/your child]* eat school breakfast, school lunch and/or any other meals or snacks served by school?
      1. [**IF DIFFERENT BETWEEN YEARS**] What do you think caused the change in eating school meals between now and before the COVID pandemic?

**[If more than one child]**

*To make this interview as brief as possible, we will just talk about one of your children’s experiences with school meals today. Please focus on your with the most recent birthday. Do you mind sharing this child’s first name, so we can then talk about them by name as we go? What grade is [child’s name] in?*

**[If only one child]**

*Do you mind sharing your child’s first name, so we can then talk about them by name as we go?*

School Lunch

**[Domains: impressions about lunch, lunch experience, alternatives and school communications]**

*First, I’d like to talk about [child’s name] experience with* ***just*** *the school lunch (we will talk about school breakfast later).*

1. Does *[child’s name]* talk about school lunch with you?

**[IF YES]**

* 1. What does *[child’s name]* think of the school meals this year?
     1. Probe about quality, quantity, and overall appeal
  2. *(if they eat school lunch)* How is their experience with getting school lunches this year?
     1. Probe about stigma, convenience, cafeteria environment, timing of the meals, amount of time students have to eat

1. (*If child doesn’t eat the lunch every day*) How do you or your child decide which days to eat the school lunch?

**[ALL RESPONDENTS WHOSE CHILDREN EAT <5 DAYS of SCHOOL LUNCH]**

1. Where does your child usually get lunch from on school days [on days they don’t eat school meals]?
   1. Probe about: lunch from home, store or restaurant, eat what a friend brings

*Now I’d like to hear a little bit about your personal impressions of the school lunch.*

1. Other than from your child, how do you know about the school lunch foods currently available at *[child’s name]’s* school?
   1. Can you tell me about any communications you’ve gotten from your school about the school lunch this year, including how you received this information (such as emails, mailings, texts, or social media)?
      1. How do you know what is on the menu?
      2. How well do you feel like you know about what is happening with the lunch program?
      3. Is there other information you would like about the school meal program that you’re not currently receiving?
2. What is your impression of school lunches at your child’s school?
   1. **Probe About**: meal quality, healthfulness, quantity, and overall appeal
   2. Are your impressions of the school lunch different now than they were before COVID?
   3. Any other impressions about school lunch you’d like to share?

**[Domain: benefits of school lunch and universal meals]**

*Thinking about school lunch more generally*

1. Do you feel there are benefits for families and children from school lunches?
   1. Do you think there are benefits for families and children to providing free school meals to all students?
      1. Probe: what about family finances, schedules, food buying and food preparation work, child’s health, social, or academic experiences at school
   2. *(if participating)* What do you think are the greatest benefits of school meals for your child, you and your family?
      1. Do you think your child has anything more or different to say?
   3. Do you think other families at your child’s school feel differently from you about the school lunch?
      1. If so, in what way?

**[Domain: barriers to school lunch]**

*Now I’d like to turn to challenges you and/or [child’s name] may be experiencing with school lunch*

1. Can you tell me about any difficulties you or your child may have experienced with the school lunch this current year or any things you or your child don’t like about it that you haven’t already told me?
   1. What do you think is most important to improve about school lunch to encourage more children and families to participate?
   2. *[If not already discussed]* Can you tell me whether you think there is any embarrassment or shame students or families feel about eating school lunch at *[child’s name]*’s school? And if this is something you or *[child’s name]* have experienced, can you tell me about it?
2. Do you think your child’s school provides meals that meet students’ and families’ differing needs? For example, are foods served at school similar to the kinds of foods you or others eat at home?
   1. If your student has any dietary restrictions for religious, health or other reasons, like Halal, vegan, nut or gluten-free, can you tell me how well you feel the school meets your child’s needs?
3. How does your school ask families to provide information about whether you qualify for free or reduced-price school meals? Can you tell me what you know or remember about that process?
   1. [**If there’s an application process**] Can you talk about how easy or difficult it is for you to complete the application?
      1. How do you feel about completing the application?
      2. How do you think this feels for other families?
      3. Are there things your *[child’s name]’s* school does that makes this work well?
      4. Are there things you wish your *[child’s name]’s* school did to make this work better?
      5. What do you think are the benefits of filling out the application? (**Probe:** perceived benefits to the family AND school)

School breakfast

**[Domain: benefits of and barrier so school breakfast]**

*Is it ok if we talk about school breakfast now?*

1. Remind me how often your *[child’s name]* eats breakfast at school in the current year?
   1. Can you tell me why *[child’s name] [*eats breakfast/doesn’t eat breakfast]?
      1. What you like about the school breakfast -if different from the things you told me about lunch?
      2. What don’t you like about the school breakfast, if different from things you don’t like about the school lunch?
   2. Do you know when and where breakfast is served in your child’s school? (Probe: before school, after the bell, in the classroom, school doesn’t provide breakfast)
   3. Where does your child usually get breakfast from on school days [on days they don’t eat school breakfast]?
      1. Probe about: breakfast from home, store or restaurant
   4. Does your child get breakfast at school more or less often than before the pandemic?

**[Domain: major reason for not eating school meals]**

*We are almost finished. I have just a couple more questions.*

**[For children who eat school meals <5 days per week]**

1. What is the main reason *[child’s name]* doesn’t eat the school meals more often?
   1. How do you think *[child’s name]* would answer that question?

**[Domain: major reason for eating school meals]**

1. What’s one thing your school could do to make you more excited about *[child’s name]* eating school meals (breakfast and/or lunch)?
   1. How do you think *[child’s name]* would answer that question?

**Wrap up:**

* *That was the last question I have for our interview today.*
* *Is there anything else you would like to discuss? I want to give you a chance to share any comments or ask any questions that you have that we did not touch on.*
* *Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your ideas today. In appreciation for your time, we would like to send you an electronic gift card for $(value). If you would like to receive this give card, can you please tell me what email to send it to? If you would prefer a physical gift card, we can do that instead. I just need your mailing address.*