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Step 1: Create or Leverage Social Accounts

While some districts may have existing social media accounts through the school district at large or through the food service department, everyone will be starting from a different point. It is much more effective to use existing accounts for your posts, as you will not have to work nearly as hard to build up a following. In this way you can hit the ground running and reach many more families right from the start. If you must start from scratch, consider collaborating with your district's communications team to get up and running. Smaller districts may need to [set up new accounts](#), which can be done in most cases simply with an email and password. Keep in mind that if you do start a new account, gaining traction with families will be critical. Ensure that you are leveraging partnerships with local organizations, parent organizations, and interest groups to get the word out about your new social presence.



Some districts have had great success centering the food service department alone, like Chicopee Fresh, who post regularly to [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). Franklin County Technical School, on the other hand, uses their [district Facebook page](#) to advertise meals. While this may be simpler administratively, especially for a smaller district, posts can get crowded out by general district updates for athletics, learning models, and other announcements.

In part because options for social seem boundless, it is important to anticipate what platform families will use most. Are there community organizations, city departments, or interest groups that already use social effectively? Does the district already post announcements on Twitter or Facebook? Is there a way to ask parents where they would like to see updates? Use the answers to these questions to inform where you focus your efforts.

The type of graphics and information you use depend on the platform you will post on. If you need to share text heavy captions and images, then Facebook might be a better platform for your audience. Facebook allows you to add links to your caption (which are automatically hyperlinked), which is quite convenient if you are trying to redirect your reader to your website or other websites. Facebook also makes it easier to share or repost existing posts, from other accounts.



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For example, if a parent or participant shares a picture of your site, you can easily share their post on your feed. In order to reach more families, you may want to consider boosting particular posts through built in ads that expand your viewership and cost only a marginal fee.

On the other hand, since Instagram's feed design is a bit more simplistic, we recommend you keep the captions short and succinct. Instagram is a mobile-centric application, which means it only allows you to post images and content via your phone. However, users can access any public account online and view posts. You should not add links on the caption because they cannot be hyperlinked. The simple user interface of Instagram allows for quicker posts that more actively highlight visual content.



Twitter allows you to reach a wider audience, as opposed to Instagram and Facebook, which focuses on your friends and followers. Although Twitter allows you to reach more people, it can be quite limiting in terms of content, allowing only 140 characters in the caption box. If there is a lot of information you need to share, try adding a short blurb with essential information followed by a link that contains more information.

We recommend you accompany every post with an image, regardless of platform. When saving images to post on social media platforms, make sure you save them as image files (PNG or JPEG.) Files such as Word documents or PDFs are not compatible with

these platforms. Dimensions also matter, so make sure you can see the whole image before you finalize your post.

Step 2: Decide Who Will be Posting

Another key to successful social media presence is consistency. If parents know that they can check your Instagram or Twitter for weekly menu updates, they will be more likely to come back over and over. To maintain consistency, it may be useful to assign one person to manage social media posting. While this lead may come from within the food service department with work hours allocated to social, there are other options for staffing this role.



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The most convenient option might be to connect with the existing communications team or staff for the district. While most districts may not have anyone dedicated to social media, they may have administrative staff in charge of regularly communicating with families. Consider creating a schedule with your district social where you can share regular updates for them to post about the meal program.

If nobody from the administrative or communications department can help your school with social media, consider designating a staff member to work on it thirty minutes to an hour per week. It might be best to assign someone who has easy access to the information you will be sharing on social media. If your staff is already at capacity, you might consider employing an intern.

While some districts may have success assigning high school students to social media duty, it is generally best to recruit a recent graduate or college student for the task. Whoever ends up taking the lead can organize your online presence by creating a monthly posting plan at the beginning of each month. This can look like a calendar where posting days (with content and image) are already decided on and approved by the school.

Finally, to make the process of posting a bit quicker, [you can link multiple social media outlets to each other](#). For example, if you create a post for Twitter, you can choose to have Facebook and Instagram share that post on their respective platform.



Step 3: Create and Post Content

Once you have decided what platforms to use and what audience you will target, you can focus on content creation. Ask kitchen staff to take daily pictures of their work, including photos of finished meals, staff preparing food safely, the kitchen, grab and go meal sites, or anything related to meal production or the people who make service possible. It is often helpful to create a folder where staff can upload all the pictures they take or have them send content directly to the social media lead.

You don't have to limit your content to pictures of menu items. Feel free to get creative and share anything that your followers/community might find interesting. Try creating a mix of informative text, staff-centered lighthearted posts, and community support posts. You can also include information graphics, like including the [weekly menu](#) or [general information](#) about your meal site. The CNOP team has also [developed social graphics](#) that can be posted immediately with suggested captions. These are a fantastic way to get your social presence off the ground.

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Although captions might seem daunting to write, they don't have to be. Make sure that your caption compliments the image you have chosen, since photos speak for themselves. The best way to create a solid following is to be consistent with postings, stay relevant and follow relevant people. Focus on expanding your following, connecting with existing accounts, and asking your partners to request that their members follow your pages. Creating a following is the only way to use social media effectively! If you have great content, but no followers, all your hard work may be for nothing. It is also important to tag relevant people and organizations when you post, this way you can broaden your post's reach. Tag [Child Nutrition Outreach Program](#) (@meals4kidsma), [Project](#)

[Bread](#) (@projectbread), elected officials, families, and staff. Furthermore, include your new social media handles in your district communications (newsletters, emails, robo calls and texts) Mention that you will be regularly posting useful information about the school and school meals on your platforms.

If there are any community-based partners that you work with on a regular basis, it may be useful to tag them in any content related to their programs. You can also highlight your outside partners, parent-teacher organizations, the local parks department, or even general city accounts to bolster your reach. Illustrating how the meal program interacts with other local assets is a fantastic way to show families how you help build community.

Finally, make sure that whatever images you use, whether they were taken by you, your staff, or someone outside your organization, you have permission to use. Copyright infringements can be quite serious, so it is better to ask for permission and attribute ownership than to post without permission. When reposting on Facebook or Twitter, by using the share button, you do not need to get such permission. Instagram on the other hand, does not allow you to repost or reshare, so make sure you have copyright permission. If you are using somebody else's picture, make sure to give credit in the caption by writing: "Photo Credit: (name)".

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