SNA of Ohio
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Need to Know

Meals Per Labor Hour – A Key Tool for Smarter Staffing Decisions

Are you making the most of your staffing resources? Meals Per Labor Hour (MPLH) is one of the most effective tools in school nutrition for measuring productivity and efficiency. Understanding and implementing MPLH can help you optimize labor, improve operations, and make data-driven staffing decisions.

What is Meals Per Labor Hour?

MPLH is a metric that calculates how many meal equivalents are produced per labor hour worked. It provides insight into kitchen efficiency and helps ensure staffing levels align with operational needs.

The formula for MPLH is:

MPLH = Total Labor Hours Worked / Total Meal Equivalents

Where:

- Total Meal Equivalents includes all reimbursable meals and converted equivalents for à la carte sales, catering, or snacks.
- Total Labor Hours Worked accounts for all staff hours, including full-time, part-time, and substitutes.

Why is MPLH Important?

- Optimizes staffing to ensure the right number of employees for meal production.
- Identifies efficiency gaps and highlights areas where workflow improvements are needed.
- Supports budget decisions by helping balance labor costs with meal revenue.
- Provides benchmarking to allow comparisons with industry standards or past performance.

How to Start Using MPLH in Your District

1. Collect Your Data
    - Track the total number of meals served, including reimbursable meals and à la carte conversions.
    - Gather total labor hours worked across all kitchen staff.
2. Calculate MPLH for Each Site
    - Use the MPLH formula to determine productivity levels at each location.
    - Compare results across sites to identify inconsistencies.
3. Set Benchmarks and Goals
    - Research industry standards (typically 14-18 MPLH for traditional kitchens, but it varies by service model).
    - Use historical data to set realistic improvement targets.
4. Make Adjustments Based on Findings
    - If MPLH is too low, assess inefficiencies—consider cross-training, workflow improvements, or adjusting schedules.
    - If MPLH is too high, ensure staffing levels are sustainable without compromising meal quality.
5. Monitor and Adjust Regularly
    - Track MPLH over time and adjust staffing as needed.
    - Involve kitchen managers in discussions to get real-time insights on workflow and challenges.

Final Takeaway

Implementing MPLH can lead to smarter staffing decisions, increased efficiency, and better budget management in school nutrition programs. By tracking this simple yet powerful metric, you can ensure your team is set up for success while maximizing resources.

Want to learn more about MPLH and other operational strategies? Stay connected with SNA for best practices and industry insights!