

**Child Care & After-School Nutrition Standards  
Direct Observation Tool**

**Evaluation of Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities**

Facility name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child care facility ID (*Transtria use only*): \_\_\_\_\_

Facility address: \_\_\_\_\_

Size of facility (number of youth): \_\_\_\_\_

Photographer 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Community partnership: \_\_\_\_\_

Photographer 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Assistant 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_ : \_\_\_ ○ AM ○ PM

Assistant 2: \_\_\_\_\_

End Time: \_\_\_ : \_\_\_ ○ AM ○ PM

**Section A: Facility characteristics**

1. What is the type of facility? (*Circle one.*)

School	Community center	Child care center	Faith-based center	Other, specify:
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2. What types of services does this facility provide?

2.a. Early child care and education only	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
2.b. After-school care and education only	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
2.c. Both early child care and after-school care/education	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
2.d. Summer care and education (all ages)	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
2.e. Other, specify:	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes

Days of service	Start time	End time	Not open
3.a. Sunday			
3.b. Monday			
3.c. Tuesday			
3.d. Wednesday			
3.e. Thursday			
3.f. Friday			
3.g. Saturday			

**Section B: Background nutrition information**

1. What type of meal provided by the facility is being observed? (*Circle one.*)

Family style	Non-family style hot meal	A la carte	Snack	Other, specify:
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2. Which meal or snack is being observed? (*Circle one.*)

Breakfast	Morning snack	Lunch	Afternoon snack	Dinner
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3. Provide a description of the meal or snack.

3.a. Meal options (including a la carte):

3.b. Snack options:

3.c. Beverage options:

4. Staff present during meal or snack (number of unique staff):

5. Staff joining youth for snack or meal (number of unique staff):

6. Staff encouraging youth to try everything on their plate (number of unique staff):

**Comments:**

## Child Care & After-School Nutrition Standards Direct Observation

### Introduction

This tool and protocol were developed by the evaluation team from Transtria LLC (Laura Brennan, PhD, MPH, Principal Investigator; Allison Kemner, MPH; Tammy Behlmann, MPH; Jessica Stachecki, MSW, MBA; Carl Filler, MSW) and Washington University Institute for Public Health (Ross Brownson, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator; Christy Hoehner, PhD, MSPH), with feedback from national advisors and partners. This tool and protocol were adapted from the Environment and Policy Assessment and Observation (EPAO) tools, protocols, and operational definitions.

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### Prior to conducting the observations

#### Items to remember

- Digital cameras
- Pencils, a copy of the paper tools for all data collectors, clipboards
- Comfortable shoes
- Disposable gloves (to assist in handling food/beverages for photos)
- Laptop (if needed to download pictures in between observation periods)
- Data collectors' contact information (in case of emergency)
- List and map of child care facilities for data collection
- Letter from the Project Director or Coordinator explaining the reason for data collection
- Transportation to and from the site for observers, if needed

### Direct Observation schedule

Recommended timeframe for observations:

- Entire lunch/breakfast/dinner/snack period

Schedule observations at different times of the day (2-3 times per day recommended if available). Example times:

- Breakfast (7:30 AM)
- Snack 1 (10:00 AM)
- Lunch (12:30 PM)
- Snack 2 (3:30 PM)
- Dinner (6:30 PM)

Schedule observations for multiple times a week (2-3 days recommended if available). Example schedules:

- Two weekdays (Monday through Friday) and one weekend day (Saturday and Sunday) if applicable
- Example: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday

**Nutrition Standards in Child Care Settings Direct Observation (Instruction Sheet)**

The purpose of this tool is to record individuals’ purchasing and/or selection behavior and consumption patterns. The average amount of food taken will be reduced by the average amount of food thrown away to determine the average amount of food consumed. Observers should also record the behavior by food service staff and what types of food are available for purchase and consumption.

You will need digital cameras, pencils, clip boards for audit participants, and paper copies of the tool for the direct observations. Review and become familiar with the tool prior to the observation day at child care setting. There are two main activities:

- 1) Complete the observation tool, including facility name and address, observer names, size of facility, community partnership name, date and time of the observation, facility characteristics, and nutrition information.
- 2) Photograph youth food and beverage selections prior to consumption and immediately following consumption (prior to disposal).

All sections of the tool should be completed for each observation.

Section A asks for general information about the facility and should be completed as accurately as possibly on the day of observation. Any information that cannot be determined that day should be completed as soon as possible.

Section B may be completed by using a menu but should be compared during the observation to the meals and a la carte items or snacks being served that day.

**Observers:** Both observer teams will start at the purchase/pick-up station.

Purchase station (or food pickup station):*	Photographer 1 Assistant 1
	Photographer 2 Assistant 2

As the number of youth at the purchase/pick-up station decreases (and prior to any meal/snack disposal), one observer team moves to the disposal station (followed by the first observer team once the purchases/pick-ups are complete).

Disposal station (or trash cans):	Photographer 2 Assistant 2
	Photographer 1 Assistant 1

\*In the case that meals or snacks are served family-style, the photographer and assistant will have to move from table to table to capture photos (including food and beverage selections and portion sizes).

**Roles**

There should be at least four observers per facility. For larger facilities, more observers are recommended as the pace of purchases and disposals may be too rapid to be captured by only two teams and/or there may be multiple points of purchase/pick-up or disposal areas.

There are two main roles:

Photographer: The photographer will use a digital camera to capture a clear image of each child’s meal.

Assistant: The assistants help ensure that children display their food in a manner conducive to a clear photo.

### Process

Prior to the meal/snack time:

1. Photographers can ensure the camera is set to adjust for the appropriate lighting and adjust the lens to be as close as possible to the meal/snack as possible while still capturing the meal/snack in one image.
2. Assistants can create a diagram of the eating area (see example below), highlighting the purchase/pick-up station and the disposal station (as well as the location of the foods/beverages and the tables/seating). If possible, it is helpful to group all the trash bins into one area to ensure that all youth come to the same disposal area.

During the meal/snack time (prior to consumption):

1. Photographers should capture an image for each youth of the entire meal/snack prior to consumption – this includes drinks, sides, and main dish(es). Every effort should be made to make sure the photos are clear. So, be sure not to move the camera while taking a photo.
2. Assistants can ask the youth to hold out their trays or meals/snacks (if no tray) for the photographer. Assistants should also slow the pace of youth leaving the purchasing/pick-up area to allow for enough time to take photos.

During the meal/snack time (after consumption):

1. Photographers should capture an image for each youth of all of the food/beverage waste following consumption and prior to disposal. Again, these photos need to be clear.
2. Assistants can remove all obstacles (napkins, towels, etc.) and tilt beverage containers to show whether any liquid is remaining, so that the photographer can accurately capture all remaining food.

After meal/snack time:

1. Photographers should download and identify the photos: <site>\_<observation period>\_1, <site>\_<observation period>\_2, <site>\_<observation period>\_3, and so on. Be sure to download and identify the photos after each observation so it is clear what photos belong to what facility and/or what observation period.
2. Assistants can rearrange the room so that it is left the way it was found.

