



K-12 Foodservice



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How Gen Alpha is Reshaping School Menus (and What Kitchens Need to Keep Up)

Who is Gen Alpha?

Born roughly between 2010 and 2025, Gen Alpha represents the current and upcoming K-12 population. This generation has grown up with food content, global exposure, and personalization as the norm. Students increasingly view school meals through the same lens as restaurants, fast-casual concepts, and social media food culture. Participation rates are influenced not just by nutrition, but by perceived quality, variety, and presentation.

The Gen Alpha Menu

- Increased demand for flavor variety and cultural variety
- Growing interest in customizable meals
- Strong interest in breakfast foods beyond traditional morning hours
- Higher acceptance of plant-forward options when flavor and presentation meet expectations
- Students lean towards visually appealing meals that feel restaurant quality
- Short lunch periods demand the efficiency of “grab-and-go” options

The Gen Alpha Kitchen

- Multi-functional cooking equipment that supports diverse menu items
- High-speed ovens for rapid production
- Combi ovens for versatility across proteins, vegetables, and baked items.
- Holding equipment to maintain quality during staggered meal periods
- Refrigeration solutions that support fresh ingredients and grab-and-go programs
- Automated or programmable equipment to support limited labor environments

HOT FOOD. FAST SERVICE. HAPPY STUDENTS.



Nemco Heated Shelf Merchandisers

Keep lines moving and participation growing with hot grab-and-go meals.

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(Models Shown: 22CET3.1 & 22CET6.2)

The Edlund logo is displayed in a stylized white font on a dark blue background. Above the logo, several carrot slices are shown in mid-air, as if being tossed or falling.

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Learn More at: EdlundCo.com

Breakfast for Lunch is Booming.

Are School Kitchens Designed for It?

WHY BREAKFAST FOODS ARE SURGING IN K-12

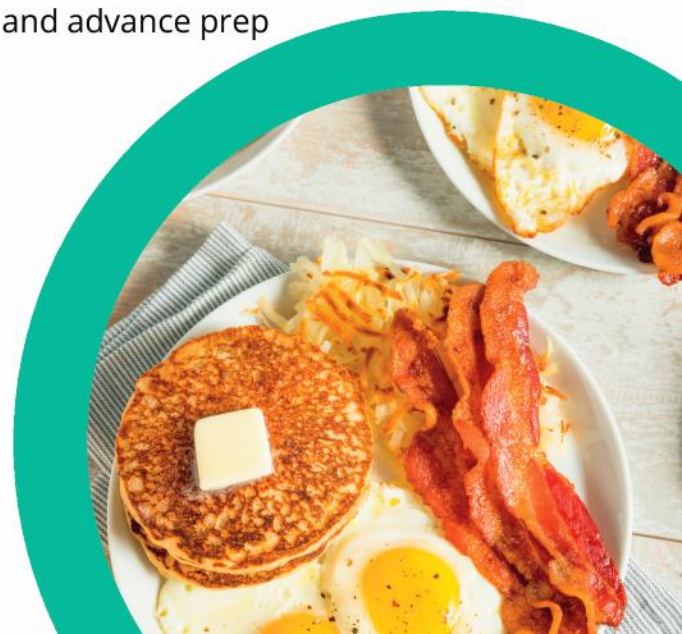
Students consistently rank breakfast items among their favorite school meals. Familiar foods like pancakes, waffles, eggs, and breakfast sandwiches feel approachable and comforting. Serving breakfast items at lunch can also increase participation among picky eaters.

PARTICIPATION AND REVENUE BENEFITS

- ✓ Breakfast-for-lunch days often produce **measurable spikes in meal participation**
- ✓ Higher participation supports program funding and **financial sustainability**
- ✓ Offering variety within familiar categories **encourages repeat participation**
- ✓ Breakfast menus can appeal across all grade levels **from elementary to high school**

BREAKFAST PRODUCTION EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- ✓ High-capacity griddles and tilting skillets for egg and protein production
- ✓ Combi ovens for batch cooking eggs, casseroles, and baked breakfast items
- ✓ High-speed ovens for finishing sandwiches quickly during service
- ✓ Holding cabinets to maintain temperature and texture
- ✓ Waffle and specialty cooking equipment for menu differentiation
- ✓ Refrigeration solutions to support fresh ingredients and advance prep





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Drop-In Induction Dry Wells offer an energy efficient, plumbing-free solution for your operation

- Durable and tough glass-ceramic well bottom can be easily adjusted to accommodate a 2.5" or 4" deep pan
- Made for use with a combination of full-size, half-size, third-size and quarter-size stainless steel food pans
- Contains two heat zones with two temperature probes in each zone
- Easy-to-use, mountable control panel with temperature arrow keys for adjusting the unit's temperature in Fahrenheit, Celsius or by five preset temperature levels between 150°F and 210°F



IWELB-FUL-A shown with 2.5" deep pan



IWELB-FUL-A adjusted for a 2.5" deep pan



IWELB-FUL-A adjusted for a 4" deep pan

Heated Merchandisers for your Hot Grab-and-Go Food Program

Attract students to your hot food offerings in this sleekly designed horizontal or slanted **Heated LED Merchandiser**. These units safely hold hot packaged food and are available in both single and dual shelf models.



HXMS-36D in standard Designer Black

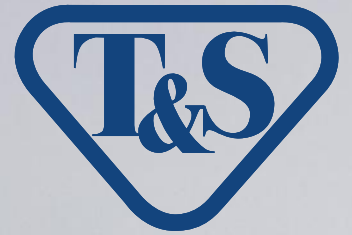
Explore our entire product line at www.hatcocorp.com.



GR2SDS-30D in optional Designer Warm Red

Glo-Ray® Designer Merchandising Warmers keep hot foods at proper serving temperatures while placing the focus where it belongs – on your food product.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a cluster of ripe, red strawberries. The hands are positioned under a modern, stainless steel faucet that has three separate spray nozzles. Water is spraying from each nozzle, creating a fan-like spray that is washing the strawberries. The background is a blurred kitchen sink area. The overall scene is clean and modern, emphasizing the ease of cleaning food with the faucet's multiple nozzles.

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TEXTURE, COLOR, & VISUAL APPEAL:

The Instagram Effect on School Dining



THE VISUAL GENERATION HAS ARRIVED

Today's students are highly influenced by visual food culture through social media and digital platforms. Presentation plays a significant role in how students perceive taste and quality, so meals that look appealing are more likely to be selected, consumed, and remembered positively. Visual appeal can directly impact participation rates and reduce food waste.

MENU TRENDS DRIVEN BY VISUAL APPEAL

- Grain and protein bowls with colorful toppings and sauces
- Fresh fruit and vegetable presentations with strong color contrast
- Handheld items with visible ingredients and textures
- Branded or themed menu days that create excitement
- Interactive stations that allow students to customize visually appealing meals

THE ROLE OF EQUIPMENT IN FOOD PRESENTATION

- Cooking equipment that preserves color and texture improves plate appeal
- Rapid-cook or finishing ovens support crisp textures without long wait times
- Proper holding equipment prevents food from becoming soggy or dried out
- Refrigeration solutions support fresh ingredients that maintain visual quality
- Display and serving equipment influence how food is perceived before selection

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