Conference night dinner planning kit

A head start for your PTO or PTA board. Take what's useful and change the rest.

Timeline

4 to 5 weeks out

- [ ] Confirm conference dates and staff numbers with the principal

2 to 3 weeks out

- [ ] Ask staff about dietary needs
  A quick anonymous form works well.
- [ ] Choose the menu or a caterer
- [ ] Set the budget
- [ ] Share the sign-up for dishes and helpers
- [ ] Reserve the staff lounge or a room
- [ ] Order catering, if you're using it

The final week

- [ ] Confirm who brings each dish
- [ ] Buy paper goods, drinks, and decorations
- [ ] Tell staff when and where dinner is

Conference night

- [ ] Set up before the first conferences
- [ ] Keep food covered and fresh through the evening

After the dinner

- [ ] Thank volunteers, and pass on staff thanks
- [ ] Record receipts and reimburse anyone who paid
- [ ] Write down what to change next time
  Conferences come around again, so a few notes now help in the spring.

Volunteer spots

A sample to adapt. Add, cut, or rename spots to suit your school.

Spot	When	People
Setup Crew Set out tables, plates, and drinks.	3:30 PM to 4:00 PM	2
Main Dishes Make and drop off a main dish.	3:30 PM to 4:00 PM	4
Salads and Sides Make and drop off a salad or side.	3:30 PM to 4:00 PM	3

Spot	When	People
Desserts Make and drop off a dessert.	3:30 PM to 4:00 PM	3
Host and Refill Keep food stocked and the table tidy.	4:00 PM to 7:00 PM	2
Cleanup Crew Pack up, wipe down, and leave the lounge clean.	7:00 PM to 7:45 PM	2

Sample budget

Placeholder amounts to help you get started, not real prices. Swap in your own numbers.

Item	Example	Our budget
Catering or food beyond donations	$200	
Drinks and coffee	$40	
Plates, cups, and utensils	$30	
Table decorations	$25	
Thank-you cards	$10	
Total	**$305**	

Shopping list

Warehouse club

- [ ] Water and soda
- [ ] Coffee and creamer
- [ ] Plates, cups, and utensils
- [ ] Napkins

Party or dollar store

- [ ] Tablecloths
- [ ] Table decorations
- [ ] Serving utensils

Office supply store

- [ ] Thank-you cards
- [ ] Labels for dishes

Easy things to overlook

Staff who eat late
Conference schedules vary. Keeping some food back helps the teachers who can't break until the evening.

Dietary needs
A quick, anonymous question beforehand means everyone finds something to eat.

Food safety over a long evening
Covering dishes and keeping hot food hot matters more when dinner runs for hours.

Labels on every dish
Busy teachers grab and go. A label saves a lot of questions.

Thanks both ways
Passing staff thanks back to the families who cooked makes the next sign-up easier to fill.

Want it all in one place?
PineBoard can hold your tasks, volunteers, shopping, and budget together, and copies the plan to next year. Try it free for 60 days at pineboard.app.