

Testimony
School Meal Regulations:
Discussing the Costs and Consequences for Schools and Students
House Committee on Education and the Workforce

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Good morning. I'm Margo Wootan, the director of Nutrition Policy at the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nonprofit organization, where I've worked on school foods and other nutrition issues for over 20 years.

We probably all agree on the importance of our children's health. Unfortunately, a third of children are overweight or obese, and unhealthy eating habits and obesity are major contributors to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other diseases. Obesity adds \$190 billion a year to national health care costs, about half of which are paid by taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid.

Where there may be some disagreement is on what the federal government's role is in protecting children's health, and specifically for this hearing, the federal role in determining school meal standards.

That question was answered before I was born. Unlike other aspects of education, school foods have long been predominantly a federal program. Since the 1940s, dating back to the Truman Administration, Congress and USDA have set the nutrition standards for school meals.

While most education funding comes from states and localities, they contribute less than 10% of the funds for school meals. Congress invests more than \$13 billion a year in the school lunch and breakfast programs. It is a matter of good government and fiscal responsibility to ensure that those funds are well spent—that these nutrition programs provide good nutrition to children.

In 2004, the Bush Administration and the Republican-led Congress passed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, requiring USDA to update the school meal standards to align them with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Over the next seven years, USDA formed internal working groups, solicited feedback from industry, food service, and nutrition experts, and commissioned an Institute of Medicine study to develop recommendations to update the meal standards.

USDA proposed standards based on all that input, and then gave ample opportunity for parents, schools, food companies, Congress, and others to comment on them. Over 130,000 people commented—the overwhelming majority in favor of the proposed standards. Parents were particularly loud and clear—over 80% support the new school meal standards.

As you contemplate whether the new school meal standards are achievable, I urge you to consider the tens of thousands of schools that have already made great progress, including schools I'd be happy to put you in touch with in Indiana, Tennessee, Minnesota, California, and other states. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation has recruited over 14,000 schools; USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge has certified over 6,500 schools (see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/awardwinners.html> for a list), and there are a growing number of schools qualifying for the six cents in additional school lunch reimbursement, which is available to schools meeting the new standards.

Change takes time, and not surprisingly, some schools are experiencing challenges. USDA, the Alliance, and others are providing technical assistance, trainings, model menus and product specifications, and other resources to help schools work through challenges.

USDA has shown that it is listening to schools' concerns. When schools faced challenges with the grain and protein limits, USDA responded and gave them additional flexibility, which the agency has said it plans to make permanent. In April, USDA also provided additional flexibility on paid-meal pricing.

The answer to the challenges faced by some schools is not to revert back to serving unhealthy food in schools. Our kids need us to persevere and ensure that schools get the help and support they need. I hope that one outcome from this hearing will be enhanced efforts to help struggling schools with additional technical assistance, including the opportunity to learn from the many schools that are successfully implementing the new school meal standards.

And there's a lot to learn from successful schools around the country. For example, simple things like taste tests, having students vote for favorite menu items, giving menu items catchy names, and sprucing up cafeterias are some of the ways schools have been increasing student acceptance of healthy school meals. The photos in my written testimony depict a few of the appealing and healthful meals that many schools are serving.



Provo School District (UT)



Saint Paul Public Schools (MN)



DC Public Schools



Burlington School District (VT)

As you can see, these meals provide plenty of food and should meet the needs of the vast majority of young people in schools. For those students who want more, many schools offer additional servings of fruits and vegetables at no additional charge. And for those students with exceptional calorie needs, such as competitive athletes, they can purchase a second lunch or healthy a la carte options to supplement their meal or take advantage of afterschool snack or afterschool supper programs.

Importantly, the school meal standards are being achieved at current reimbursement rates by thousands of schools, and USDA is providing an additional six cents per lunch to schools that meet the new school meal standards.

USDA's updates to the school meal standards are long overdue, are achievable, are critical to our children's health, and will maximize the taxpayer investment in these important child nutrition programs. We need to give some schools and students a little more time to adjust, and ensure that struggling schools get the technical assistance they need to join the thousands of schools that are successfully serving healthy school meals to students.

Thank you.

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The Dollars and Cents of the New School Meal Regulations

An Investment in Our Kids

The National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs provide balanced meals to 32 million children each day. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) final school meal standards call for meals with more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free and low-fat milk, and less sodium and unhealthy saturated and trans fats. The federal government currently invests \$13 billion a year in these programs, and the updated standards will help maximize that taxpayer investment by helping to ensure all children receive healthy, nutritious meals.



The Cost of Inaction

Child nutrition and obesity affect our nation's physical and fiscal health. One-third of children are overweight or obese. Obesity causes heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other diseases. Obesity adds \$150 billion a year to national health care costs, about half of which are paid by taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid.

Obesity also poses a threat to national security. One in four young adults are too heavy to qualify for military service and weight issues are now the leading medical reason that young adults are unable to serve in the military.

USDA Meal Patterns and Nutrition Standards

Since the Truman Administration, Congress and USDA have set nutrition standards for school meals. However, current nutrition standards have not been updated in 15 years and are not consistent with current nutrition science.

In 2004, the Bush Administration and Republican-led Congress passed the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, requiring USDA to update the standards to align school meal patterns with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Over the next seven years, USDA formed internal working groups, solicited feedback from industry and advocates, and commissioned an Institute of Medicine (IOM) study to develop recommendations to update the nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

Schools Are Leading the Way

The final school meal standards are achievable and are already being met at *current reimbursement rates* by the thousands of schools participating in USDA's HealthierUS Schools Challenge and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program. Schools have made changes that are consistent with the provisions in USDA's final rule with little or no additional funding. Unfortunately, those schools represent a small percentage of the 101,000 schools participating in the national school meals programs. The updated federal standards will help ensure all children receive a healthy meal, regardless of where they live.

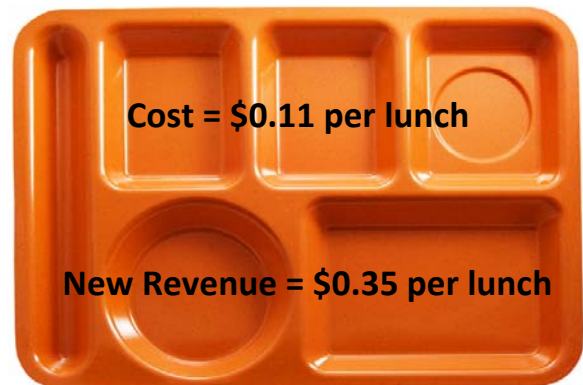
Increased Funding for Healthy School Meals

In January 2012, USDA released final regulations to update the standards for school meals. USDA estimates that implementation of these updated standards might increase total costs by roughly 8 percent or \$3.2 billion over five years.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) includes a strong package of provisions designed to increase funding for healthy school meals. Timely implementation of these provisions will help increase revenue to school food service programs to facilitate implementation of USDA's proposed school meal standards.

- Section 201 provides a 6-cent-per-lunch increase in reimbursement for school lunches that meet the new school meal standards, adding an estimated \$1.5 billion over five years if all schools met the standards immediately.
- Section 205 requires school districts to gradually begin closing the gap between paid meal revenues and free meal revenues to ensure that funds meant for providing healthy foods for low-income children are not diverted to other purposes. USDA estimates that closing this gap would raise \$323 million for school meals programs over the next five years with minimal impact on participation in the NSLP, even among low-income children.
- Section 206 is designed to ensure that the prices charged for foods sold in vending machines, a la carte lines, and school stores cover the costs to produce and sell them. A national meal-cost study conducted by USDA showed that revenues from non-program foods (such as foods sold a la carte) do not cover their costs and schools often use federal meal subsidies to offset their production. USDA estimates that implementation of the provision will bring an additional \$7.2 billion in revenue to school food service accounts over the next five years and will result in over 900,000 more children participating in the school meal programs.

Timely implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act will fully pay for USDA's school lunch regulations.



By the Numbers

Cost of Improvements to School Meals

Breakfast: \$ 1.3 billion

Lunch: \$ 1.9 billion

Total Cost: \$ 3.2 billion

Increased Revenue from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

Section 201: \$ 1.5 billion

Section 205: \$ 323 million

Section 206: \$ 7.2 billion

Total New Revenue: \$ 9 billion

***All figures over 5 years**

Our Children Cannot Wait Any Longer

USDA's updates to school meal standards are long overdue, achievable, critical to our children's health, and will maximize the taxpayer investment in the programs.

For more information, contact Margo Wootan with the Center for Science in the Public Interest at nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org or 202-777-8387.

Tips for Making Healthy Lunches for Less

Serving healthy school meals on a tight budget can be a challenge. The following tips were gathered from school food service professionals across the country to help make serving healthy foods more affordable. We recognize that school nutrition program costs and challenges vary from one community to the next, so while these tips may not work for everyone, we hope some will be useful at your school. For more resources on the new school meal standards, visit www.schoolfoods.org or contact nutritionpolicy@cspinet.org.

Menu Planning and Preparation

- Use less expensive healthy items.
 - Mix in less expensive items along side more expensive ones. The goal does not have to be for all students to take a less expensive item. If 20 percent of students choose a less expensive option, then you save money on 20 percent of the lunches served that day.
 - Switch from more expensive proteins, like chicken, beef, and pork, to beans one meal a week. Buy dried beans over canned for even more savings.
 - Market and test less expensive and less processed healthy items.
 - Some schools have found with good recipes or marketing they can swap out higher cost, more processed foods, like chicken nuggets and patties, for less expensive, less processed foods, like roast chicken.
- Incorporate more-costly items wisely.
 - When considering a new, slightly more expensive item, think about how many students will actually take it. If only a third of students are likely to try the new item, prepare that many portions. This way you are serving a new, healthy item, but not spending extra on waste.
 - Serve popular but expensive items less often.
 - Just because an item is popular does not mean it makes money. If the item is popular and expensive, like hamburgers, less “profit” per lunch will be generated. Take the total revenue (reimbursement rate X meals by category) and deduct the total cost per meal to determine how much “profit” that meal will generate.
- Increase school meal appeal.
 - Cook vegetables to preserve vibrant colors and textures, and vary the way you cut the fruits, vegetables, and sandwiches to provide more interesting or appealing presentations.



- Use catchy names, like “fire engine red tomatoes” in elementary schools or “southwest chipotle chicken” in upper grades.
- Have a basic salad bar, with both fruits and vegetables.
 - Cut down on staff preparation time by not dishing out individual portions.
 - Try placing the salad bar at the beginning of the line and allowing students to choose the fruits and vegetables they like.
 - Allowing students to choose which items they like, as well as how much they want to take, will help reduce waste; students are less likely to take fruits or vegetables they won’t eat.
 - Salad bars also are a great place to offer legume salads. Don’t expect that all students will love them right away. Give them a chance.
- Standardize recipes to ensure the right amount of each ingredient is in the meal. This will make ordering easier and ensure the item fits into the meal standard.
- Limit dessert. Make dessert a special occasion food, to save money and calories.
- Research milk options.
 - If certain options like flavored milk or plastic bottles are more expensive, consider offering unflavored milk (unless meal participation will be affected) or cardboard cartons.
- Use the same product multiple ways. Using a product in different recipes can cut down on inventory and reduce waste.
 - Avoid buying many different types of chicken products. Instead, change them up with new names and sides. For example, roast chicken can be rotisserie style, barbeque, teriyaki, or used on a salad.
 - Change up your sides. Roasted vegetables, for example, are inexpensive and versatile.
- Limit main ingredients to reduce waste and spoilage and save precious storage space.
- Choose fruits and vegetables that are in season when possible.
 - Purchase frozen, canned, and produce that stores well (apples, sweet potatoes, etc.) in the off season.
- Offer a la carte items that could be combined into a reimbursable meal.
 - Depending on what kids choose, cashiers could urge students to grab milk and fruit to have a reimbursable meal. It costs the student less money and the school could get the meal reimbursements.
- Manage waste.
 - Wedging fruit can provide a cost-savings benefit. Students can choose how much they want to take, which helps avoid having students throw out whole fruit.



- Batch cooking is essential for food quality and cost control. Try not to cook all the food for the day at once. If a certain option doesn't sell well in the first couple lunch periods, you may not need to prepare as much for later in the day.
- Keep good production records. This will help you determine how many servings to prepare in the future.
- Pay attention to serving size. Make sure you serve the correct serving size of each option. For example, use half-cup scoops for foods with a half-cup serving size.
- Stop using disposable utensils if possible. If you are concerned the kids will throw away utensils, place a bucket of soapy water right next to the trash.
 - Analyze the cost of real flatware. How many times does a real fork need to be used before it is cheaper than using a disposable one? One district found it was only 17 times!
- Reduce use of unnecessary paper and plastic products. Stop using paper boats, bags, plastic cups, and wraps around sandwiches. They add unnecessary cost to the meal that could be spent on food.
 - This also may appeal to students who are interested in environmental issues. Try marketing the changes using posters or materials that remind students that reducing waste is good for the environment.
- Offer a limited number of entrees in elementary schools.
 - Consider instituting a four-week menu cycle with a standard alternative offered every day, such as deli sandwiches, for students who do not like the main entrée item. Offering fewer options can reduce waste and allow for better estimates of how many servings to produce.
 - High schoolers expect options. However, for younger children, too many choices may slow down the lunch line, giving them less time to eat lunch.

Purchasing and Inventory

- Perfect purchasing practices.
 - Consider joining or starting a buying club with districts in your area. This will allow you to make bulk purchases and cut down on product and delivery costs.
 - If you don't have adequate storage space at your school, share freezer/cooler space with nearby districts or other larger institutions (hospitals, workplaces, etc.).
 - Plan your menus in advance, and tailor your orders carefully to those menus.



- Check your delivery schedule.
 - Purchasing an extra cooler may save money in the long run by reducing delivery charges.
- Be smart about USDA Foods.
 - Focus commodity purchases on items that are most expensive on the open market.
 - Do not spend extra for processing that is unnecessary (like breading) or can be done in house less expensively.
- Keep track of inventory.
 - Know what is on hand, and use it.
 - Increase the number of times you do inventory.
 - Make sure your orders are correct before the delivery people leave the school. Ask them not to deliver at meal time when staff will be distracted.
 - Before ordering new supplies, like serving spoons, check to see if another school in your district has extras.
- Use competitive bidding practices.
 - Develop bids that have sound bid conditions and product specifications that meet your nutritional goals. Use competition between multiple vendors to get the best nutrition for the best price.
 - Save time by using an online bid tool, such as Interflex's BidAdvantage. This platform allows districts to update bid specs through the year and electronically submit bids to multiple vendors.
 - Consider selecting a prime vendor, such as a Group Purchasing Organization. This can save staff time by streamlining invoices and deliveries.

Staff

- Professionalize your staff to increase productivity.
 - Give staff the training, tools, and respect they need to do their job well.
 - Find ways to build relationships between your staff and the students, so your staff feel more connected to the school and feel more ownership of their jobs.
 - Consider having two, or even three, shifts if the kitchen is crowded or staff regularly wait for equipment. Some staff can start early in the day and stay through lunch, and others could come in just before lunch and stay later in the afternoon.



Other

- Seek out a mentor.
 - If you are a new food service director or just think you could learn from another director, ask your state child nutrition program or state School Nutrition Association for a suggestion of a successful director.
- Market your program to students and staff to increase participation.
 - Use catchy or appealing names, conduct taste tests, have students vote on meal options, engage students to become ambassadors of the meal programs, hold recipe contests, etc.
- Analyze current paid meal and a la carte item prices to ensure they reflect the true cost of purchasing, preparing, and selling the item, including indirect costs.



Resources

USDA: Food Buying Guide, Menu Planning and Preparation Resources, and Other Resources
<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/>

NFSMI: Financial Management Resources
<http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=63>

NFSMI: Meal Pattern Guide
<http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=425>

NFSMI: Purchasing Manual
<http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=64>

SNA: Marketing and PR Tools
http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Level2_NSLW2012.aspx?id=16980

SNA: Meal Pattern Resources (for SNA members only)
www.schoolnutrition.org/mealpattern

USDA: Using USDA Foods
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/healthy/Professional.htm>

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, signed into law in December 2010, charged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with updating school food nutrition standards to reflect the latest nutrition science. Updates to the nutrition standards for school meals went into effect at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, and schools across the country have been making changes to provide students with healthier choices. The law also provides schools with increased funding, training, and technical assistance to meet the new meals standards; calls for stronger local wellness policies, more transparency, and improved compliance measures; and strengthens USDA's commitment to other nutrition and wellness programs. USDA is now working to update the standards for snacks and beverages sold outside of meals—in school stores, à la carte lines, and vending machines—which the agency hasn't revised in more than 30 years.

Topeka, Kansas

Niki Jahnke, food service director for Topeka Public Schools, came to her position at least in part because she had a background in nutrition. But perhaps more importantly, Jahnke was a parent who was disappointed with the quality of the school lunches.

When she became food service director, Jahnke helped Topeka schools move away from canned fruits and vegetables and towards more fresh and frozen produce. Seventeen Topeka schools now are working with the Healthy Schools Program of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which provides tools and support to schools working to create healthier campuses. Those schools also are pursuing certification under the HealthierUS School Challenge, a voluntary USDA program that recognizes schools for creating environments that promote nutrition and physical activity.

The many years Jahnke and the district have put into creating healthier school meals have paid off, because they have been able to meet the updated federal nutrition guidelines. She has changed old recipes and is continuing to develop new ones. In doing so, she's especially enjoyed the support of the Kansas State Department of Education, which has provided an all-day training for food service

staff, and has been available to answer questions and provide technical assistance.

Most of the students, especially the younger ones, have accepted the updated menus. Jahnke has seen some objections from high school students and a bit of a decrease in meal participation at some high schools. But after talking through the changes with students, much of the initial skepticism has died away.

Jahnke thinks the new flexibility in the guidelines, which allow for more grains and proteins, will help in middle and high schools as well. She's exploring how to use the flexibility, and continues to revamp menus, to get all students on board with the healthier meals.

Jahnke is staying busy in other ways too. The school district provides breakfast in all schools for those students who need it, and she's rolling out a dinner program. All of the snacks sold in vending machines meet state nutrition standards too. All in all, Jahnke has been able to make a lot of healthy changes, so that other parents of Topeka Public Schools students can be happy with the choices their kids have in school.



The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation, works to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity and to empower kids to develop lifelong, healthy habits. The Alliance works with schools, companies, community organizations, healthcare professionals and families to transform the conditions and systems that lead to healthier children. To learn more and join the movement, visit www.HealthierGeneration.org.

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Jackson, Tennessee

The updates to the federal meal guidelines were just the latest opportunity to focus on student health in Tennessee's Jackson-Madison County School System. The district has been working on a healthy café concept to improve school meals for several years now. The organizing concept is a simple one: any decision regarding the café has to enhance or strengthen the school district's nutrition program. Improving access to and increasing consumption of healthy foods is one of the district's main goals as a participant in the Healthy Schools Program of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which provides tools and support for schools working to create healthier campuses.

One summer the deep fat fryers were removed from the kitchens. At the beginning of another school year, more whole grains were added to the menu. In one school, a committee including the principal, teachers, parents, and students decided to have murals of healthy scenes painted on the lunchroom walls.

Liberty Tech High School in Jackson has a hydroponic greenhouse, where staff members can grow lettuce, cucumbers, and tomatoes. When Liberty Tech started using this extremely local produce in its café several years ago, salad bar sales rose by 30 percent. Last November, the Tennessee School Board Association presented

the school with an award in recognition of this program. A month later, Liberty Tech students spoke to county commissioners about it. The success of the greenhouse operation has led to its expansion to other schools.

Susan Johnson, school nutrition supervisor for Jackson-Madison County, says the recognition the district has received as a result of these efforts has helped pave the way for implementing the federal meal standards. There has been very little pushback over the years with the healthier meal changes and no major shifts in meal participation rates.

Johnson recommends finding champions within the school community who are passionate about improving nutrition and then supporting their efforts. One local middle school principal is interested in selling healthier options in the school's vending machines, so Johnson is working with her to make changes.

Johnson says it's also important for schools to apply for awards and other recognition, as good publicity can build momentum for further changes. Jackson-Madison County has received a USDA Best Practice Award, and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation has recognized several of its local schools. The momentum and recognition pay off. The district has met the new meal guidelines and will be receiving the additional reimbursements soon.



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Hopkins, Minnesota

The school meals in Hopkins, Minn., are not necessarily what you would expect. Food Service Director Barb Mechura has found ways to remove older, unhealthy staples and spice things up. In fact, she's been so successful at it that about 90 percent of the cooking in the district is currently from scratch. Since joining the Healthy Schools Program of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation a few years ago, the district has used resources and support from the Alliance to focus on creating healthier schools throughout the district.

But Mechura isn't relying just on recipe development and taste tests to update her menus. Market research, education and promotion also are helping the district serve healthier school meals. For instance, a campaign using school newsletters and other informational materials helped Mechura explain why the changes are important for student health, and gain broad support for them.

Hopkins also participates in a farm-to-school program, which helps increase the availability of tasty produce and extend the educational mission by teaching students about the origins of their foods. Mechura has been pleased to see kids choosing and enjoying more fruits and vegetables this year. Speaking recently to a high school journalism class, Mechura was happy to answer questions about the

availability of fresh, local produce, and did not have to answer a single question about the changing menus.

Food service staff members have made efforts to modify existing food items to meet the new guidelines, but sometimes Mechura has found such changes can bump up against students' expectations.

She's found that, in these cases, it's better to start fresh with something new that can satisfy both students' taste preferences and the nutrition guidelines. For instance, rather than tweaking the old breaded chicken entrée, she's replaced it with shish kabobs over rice. It's earning rave reviews.

Finally, Mechura works with other school staff to help them understand the importance of healthier meals, and provides them with talking points to help them discuss the changes with staff, parents, and students. She continues to collaborate with student groups in designing recipes and choosing the vegetables to be served. To other food service directors across the country, she recommends being patient and persistent, and emphasizing how access to nutritious foods and increased physical activity is better in the long run and will help kids lead healthier lives.

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Other Resource

West Salem School District: A School Food Success Story

Dec 19, 2012 Project: [Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project](#)



The Challenge

The West Salem School District, located in rural, west-central Wisconsin, houses the elementary, middle, and high schools on one campus. The district has made considerable progress in its long-term efforts toward robust nutrition standards. Offering foods that appeal to elementary school children while still pleasing the palates of high school students is not always easy. Yet for budgetary reasons, retaining school meal participation rates across all grades is essential.

Some of the Solutions

The district has made numerous changes in recent years, including the introduction of "garden bars" featuring kale, Swiss chard, peppers, squash, raspberries, and other fruits and vegetables grown on the campus. Cafeteria staff have undergone training to teach them how to cook with a wider variety of herbs and spices, which allowed them to cut back on the use of salt. The schools only serve whole wheat breads and pastas and brown rice instead of white.

Measures of Success

To keep school meal participation rates high, the district offers healthy pre-plated meals and a la carte items to assure students have flavorful choices and a short wait time. The district has reduced wait times from five minutes

to just 90 seconds—which anecdotally helps prevent high school students who are in a hurry from going off-campus for lunch. Parents also report that their children are asking for salads at home and ordering them in restaurants because they have learned to enjoy eating them at school.

Snacks and Beverages

To meet both the federal government's Healthier US School Challenge standards and district wellness guidelines, a la carte items now include yogurt parfaits and baked chips, as well as muffins and cookies that are sold in significantly reduced portion sizes. Administrators have eliminated sugar-sweetened beverages from vending machines and replaced them with water, flavored water, and zero- and low-calorie energy drinks. Additionally, the district serves only nonfat and low-fat dairy products.

The #1 Lesson Learned

District leaders have found that giving students opportunities to sample products, such as brussels sprouts, before they appear on the menu is instrumental in gaining student buy-in. Administrators and cafeteria staff report that students are much more receptive to eating such foods after they have been introduced to them through samples.

Read more "[School Food Success Stories](#)" from school districts across the nation.

Date added: **Dec 19, 2012**

Project: [Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project](#)

Related Resources

Infographic Urges USDA to Set National Standards for School Snacks

Media Coverage Yesterday [Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project](#)

Although some states and districts have created standards for what can be sold as snacks and beverages in schools, the USDA hasn't updated national guidelines in over 30 years. An infographic recently released by the Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project summarizes research that supports the need for national nutrition standards for snack foods and beverages sold in schools.

[More](#)

AT A GLANCE

Location: West Salem, Wisconsin

Number of Schools: 3

Students Enrolled: 1,700

Meals Served Per Day: 1,300

Students on Free or Reduced-Price Meals: 24%



Health Initiatives

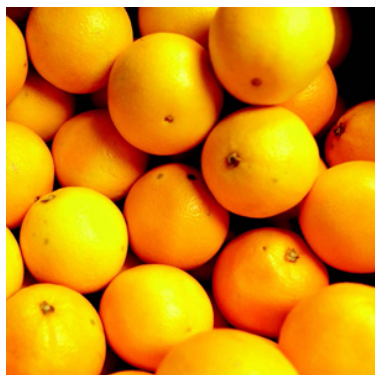
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The Challenge

While the district had been working to instill healthy eating habits among students and staff for a decade, school administrators formalized the effort in 2010 by setting higher nutrition standards. The challenges they faced included limited vendor options for whole-grain products; inadequate storage for additional fresh fruits and vegetables; and overall increases in meal preparation time, as they used fewer processed foods.

Some of the Solutions

Cafeteria staff estimated that increasing the variety of fruit and vegetables added 30 to 60 minutes of labor per day. Food service staff now keeps labor costs manageable by adjusting menus to balance healthy options with efficient preparation. When menus include a fresh-cut item (e.g., oranges, apples), staff pairs it with a whole fruit or another side requiring minimum labor (e.g., frozen broccoli). To maintain sufficient storage for the increased volume, produce deliveries are scheduled for twice a week. Staff also closely monitors food preparation and student consumption to avoid over-production and minimize waste, which helps offset the higher costs of whole-grain products.

Measures of Success

The schools now serve a different fruit and vegetable each day of the week; three to five are fresh, with many being seasonal and locally grown. School nutrition administrators estimate consumption of fruit has increased by 40 percent and vegetable consumption by 30 percent. The numbers also indicate that the changes have not impacted the school's revenue. School lunch participation held steady during the 2010-11 school year, while breakfast participation rose by 5 percent.

Snacks and Beverages

To supplement the changes taking place in the cafeteria, school administrators eliminated sugar-sweetened beverages from school vending machines. They now serve only water and 100 percent fruit juices. Alternative fundraisers, such as t-shirt sales during homecoming and sports team play-offs, have offset the lost vending revenue.

The #1 Lesson Learned

Carrollton City administrators and food service staff agree that buy-in from all staff members, including teachers, has been fundamental to the district's success. Establishing a team approach among school administrators, teachers, and cafeteria staff was a critical first step.

Read more "[School Food Success Stories](#)" from school districts across the nation.

Date added: Dec 19, 2012

Project: [Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project](#)

AT A GLANCE



Location: Carrollton, Georgia

Number of Schools: 4

Students Enrolled: 4,700

Meals Served Per Day: 3,860

Students on Free or Reduced-Price Meals: 55%