



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

HOW CAN PARENTS GET INVOLVED IN SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMS?

Getting involved in school meals programs is easy. Start with these easy steps:

- 1. Review cafeteria menus with your child and be encouraging about trying new menu items. Try new foods – especially fruits and vegetables – at home and your child may be more willing to try these foods at school.*
- 2. Visit the school cafeteria to make your own observations and have lunch. Check with the office first or contact Child Nutrition Services to make sure that they set aside time to answer your questions.*
- 3. Introduce yourself to the school nutrition staff at your child's school. They can answer questions or concerns about everything from product offerings to meal preparation methods to waiting time in line.*

ARE SCHOOL MEALS NUTRITIOUS?

- School meals are well-balanced, healthy meals that are required to meet science-based, federal nutrition standards.*
 - No more than 30% of calories can come from fat, less than 10% from saturated fat*
 - Meals must provide 1/3 of Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamins A and C, iron and calcium*
 - School meals are served in age-appropriate portion sizes*
- Every School Lunch Includes five great choices that add up to a great value:*
 - Milk – Fat free or 1% – flavored or regular*
 - Vegetables – From jicama slaw to fresh carrot sticks*
 - Fruit – Everything from kiwi to locally grown apples; often fresh*
 - Grains – More whole grain items like rolls or sandwich bread*
 - Meat or meat alternate – White meat chicken, bean chili, lean beef*
- Federal nutrition standards for school meals are currently being updated. In January 2011, the US Department of Agriculture released proposed nutrition standards including new calorie and sodium limits, larger fruit and vegetable serving sizes and requirements to expand the variety of vegetables served in schools each week. The standards will be finalized in 2012. Schools are already working toward these goals. However, with the new standards expected to increase the cost of preparing school lunches by 15 cents per meal and the cost of breakfast by 51 cents per meal, schools will require additional support to cover increased food, equipment and labor expenses.*



ARE SCHOOL MEALS SAFE?

- *School nutrition professionals care for the children they serve, and through strict food safety procedures and staff training, school nutrition professionals maintain a superior safety record while providing nutritious meals. Some of the steps schools take to ensure their meals are safe include:*



- *Taking at least two internal temperatures from each batch of food being cooked*
- *Maintaining records of cooking, cooling, and reheating temperatures in the food preparation process – the basis for periodic reviews of the overall food safety program*
- *Pre-chilling all salad ingredients to help maintain cold food temperatures*
- *Preheating transfer carts before food is transported*

WHY SHOULD I ENCOURAGE MY CHILDREN TO EAT SCHOOL MEALS?

- *Providing students their choice of milk, fruits and vegetables, grains and proteins, school meals are a great value and a huge convenience for busy parents. School cafeterias offer students a variety of healthy choices and help children learn how to assemble a well-balanced meal. Parents can rest assured that there's no super-sizing in school cafeterias because federal regulations require schools to serve age-appropriate portions.*

DON'T SCHOOL MEALS CONTAIN PROCESSED FOODS?

- *What have become known as “processed foods” are increasingly being prepared with healthier ingredients, as well as less fat, sodium and sugar.*
 - *Pizzas are made with whole grain crusts, low-sodium sauce and reduced fat cheese.*
 - *Chicken nuggets use whole grain breading and are baked rather than fried.*
 - *French fries are without trans fat and baked instead of fried – and many schools are now serving baked sweet potato fries*

My child's school has vending machines – are the foods sold in these machines subject to the same regulations as school meals?

- *Currently, foods sold in school vending machines, snack bars and a la carte lines are required to meet federal and state nutrition standards.*

WHAT ARE THE BEVERAGE OPTIONS WITH SCHOOL MEALS?

- *School nutrition programs offer fat free or low-fat milk (flavored or regular) with each meal. School meals offer flavored milk as an option because experts agree that to ensure intake of calcium, vitamin D, protein and other nutrients important for growth and development, it is better for children and adolescents to drink flavored milk than to avoid*



milk altogether. In fact, leading health and nutrition organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Heart Association, American Dietetic Association, the National Medical Association, and School Nutrition Association, have all expressed their support for low-fat and fat-free milk in schools, including flavored milk.



- *Federal law prohibits the sale of soda in the sodas in the schools. State and local regulations further prohibit the sale of soda before or after the lunch period or in other locations on the school campus.*

HOW ARE SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS WORKING TO MAKE HEALTHY MEALS KID-FRIENDLY?

- *Children can be notoriously picky eaters, but school nutrition directors are always working to find new healthy recipes that children are willing to eat. Schools conduct student taste tests and involve students in menu planning.*
- *Schools and the foodservice industry are making student favorites more healthy, such as serving pizza on whole grain bread with low-sodium sauce and low-fat cheese. Students often don't even notice the difference.*

DO ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST PROGRAMS?

- *All children at participating schools may purchase meals, meeting federal nutrition standards, through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, but families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Families receive applications for the free and reduced price program from their school nutrition department at the start of the school year.*

