



POWAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Food and Nutrition Department
Myths about School Meals



Myths about School Meals

There are essentially two types of foods offered in schools during the school day. Meals served through the federally funded USDA National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, and foods served outside of these programs through vending machines, a la carte choices, fundraisers, class parties, etc.

- **Myth #1: The Food and Nutrition Department is responsible for all food on school campus.**

Fact: The Food and Nutrition Department is responsible for food served in school nutrition centers (formerly known as cafeterias). The Food and Nutrition Department is not responsible for food and beverages offered outside the nutrition centers through vending machines, fundraisers, class parties, etc. These foods are known as “competitive foods” because they compete with school meals.

- **Myth #2: School meals make children obese.**

Fact: Students who eat meals served through the National School Lunch Program are more likely to be at a healthy weight. Additionally, research from 2007 found that students gain weight during the summer months when they are at home and lose weight during the school year when they are able to eat school meals.

- **Myth #3: Schools serve junk food for school lunch.**

Fact: Meals served under the National School Lunch Program must, by federal law, meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. School meals have to comply with age-appropriate calorie ranges and sodium limits, must provide less than 10% of calories from saturated fat, and contain zero grams trans fat. In addition, all grain products served in school meals (such as breads, pastas, rice, and crackers) must be whole grain-rich.

- **Myth #4: Schools do not serve enough fruits or vegetables for lunch.**

Fact: Every school lunch is required to include a minimum of ½ cup fruit or vegetable. Students are not allowed to leave the serving area without selecting a fruit or vegetable. All schools in Poway have salad bars that offer a variety of fruit and vegetable choices each day. These choices consist of fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruits and vegetables. In addition, vegetarian entrée options are served in all schools each day.

- **Myth #5: Schools serve fried, greasy foods.**

Fact: Schools may serve baked chicken nuggets or pizza at times. However, because all meals are required to meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the foods still meet required nutrition standards, including saturated fat. Kid favorites are baked rather than fried, made with low-fat or lean ingredients, and served with vegetables, fruits, and other options that make each meal balanced and nutritious. In fact, Poway removed deep fat fryers from all schools and eliminated fried foods many years ago.

- **Myth #6: Sack lunches from home are better than school meals.**

Fact: Research by Dr. Alice Jo Rainville of Eastern Michigan University concluded that school lunches are lower in fat, provide more nutrients overall, and provide more variety than lunches brought from home. In addition, the research found school lunches contain three times as many dairy products, twice as much fruit, and seven times the vegetable amounts as lunches brought from home.



POWAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Food and Nutrition Department
Myths about School Meals



- **Myth #7: Soda is served with school lunch.**

Fact: The only beverage served as part of the school lunch meal is low fat or fat free milk. Federal and state regulations only allow the sale of specific categories of beverages to be served or sold on school campuses, and soda is not one of them. The allowable categories include water, milk, fruit or vegetable juice, and low calorie electrolyte replacement beverages (at high schools only, beginning July 1, 2014).

- **Myth #8: Only junk food is available through a la carte lines and vending machines.**

Fact: The terminology of “junk food” is subjective. There is a misconception that food items served in schools are the same as what would be found in a commercial restaurant. Foods sold outside the meal program (such as a la carte foods and vending machines) must meet specific standards for calories, fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and sodium. For example, pizza served in Poway has a whole grain crust and is low in sodium and fat. Hot dogs, served on a whole grain bun, are a turkey product to reduce the fat content. Hamburgers are low in fat and sodium and are served on whole grain buns. Chicken nuggets have a whole grain breading and are baked, not fried.