

A Parent's Guide to **The Latest Nutrition Guidelines for School Meals and The HealthierUS School Challenge**

*Brought to you by
School Nutrition Association of Vermont (SNA-VT) and VT Child Nutrition Programs*

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New Federal Nutrition Guidelines for School Meals - BACKGROUND

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act was passed in December 2010. This law reauthorized the Child Nutrition Act which governs school meals and proposed many updates and changes to the way in which school meals are provided to children across the nation.

One of the most important changes proposed in the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 are the new nutrition guidelines for school meals. These new guidelines ensure that meals served in schools reflect the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Overall these guidelines are intended to ensure that school meals provide good, sound nutrition, based on current research about what helps students maintain health.

CHANGES TO LOOK FOR IN SCHOOL MEALS

Some of the changes that the new guidelines outline will be familiar ones as many school nutrition programs have been working on these improvements for a long time. Others are clearly the next level of making lasting improvements to the nutritional quality of school meals. The following requirements in the school meal pattern will begin September 2012

- 1) **More Fruits and Vegetables.** A fruit or vegetable will be a required part of both school lunch. In addition, fruits and vegetables will be offered to students at lunch in larger portion sizes, increasing fiber and essential vitamins and minerals!
- 2) **Fruit or vegetable as part of the "meal".** In order for a school lunch to be considered "a meal" and therefore be eligible for the reimbursable meal rate, students will have to choose a fruit or vegetable as part of their meal.
- 3) **Bright orange, dark green, and legume vegetable subgroups.** These specific subgroups of vegetables must be offered as part of the lunch each week. This requirement helps us increase variety and balance in school menus.
- 4) **Whole Grains Emphasized.** Bread and grains must be whole grain rich products (50% or more whole grain) at least half of the time to start and eventually all of the time.
- 5) **Low Fat Milk.** Only skim chocolate (or other flavored) milk and only 1% or skim white milk will be allowed. High-fat dairy products are also high in saturated fats and should be limited in daily consumption
- 6) **No Trans Fats.** Products must indicate 0 grams of trans fats per serving.
- 7) **Limits on Sodium.** School meal programs must make gradual but major reductions in sodium content of food over a ten year period.
- 8) **Access to Water.** Students must have access to water in the cafeteria every day.
- 9) **Limits on Juice.** Juice will be limited to no more than half of the fruit offerings and must be 100% juice, and have no sugar added.

In so many ways this is an exciting time for School Nutrition Programs and presents many opportunities for professional development, community involvement, and commitment to health and nutrition throughout the school environment.

What are the costs of these new guidelines?

While the new nutrition guidelines for school meals are positive, they will undoubtedly result in increased costs for both labor and food. More fruits and vegetables will be required at lunch. In addition the new requirements favor scratch cooking techniques over less costly processed foods which may result in higher labor costs overall. It is estimated by USDA that the new requirements will initially cost an additional 6.8 cents per lunch. This cost is further estimated to increase steadily over a five year period.

There will be a need in many schools for staff training in the preparation of more varied fruits, vegetables, and whole grain offerings as well as scratch-cooking techniques including replacing sodium with a variety of herbs and spices.

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP

Stay Informed

Your understanding of the New Nutrition Guidelines is an essential part of making sure that school nutrition programs are successful in implementing these changes.

Parents can be advocates and allies in the maintenance and development of good school nutrition practices. Keep in touch with your school nutrition staff and find out how they are meeting the challenges and opportunities of the new nutrition guidelines.

Encourage student participation in school meals programs

In order to meet the challenges faced by the new nutrition guidelines, school nutrition programs must have high student participation to meet financial goals. By encouraging your students to participate in school meals you can ensure that resources will be available to maintain quality in school meals.

Remember school meals are part of student education.

Talk to your students about the changes they see in school meals and always encourage them to try new foods at school, reminding them that the food served at school is part of their education and an opportunity to learn about new foods and new ways of eating.

HealthierUS School Challenge

School Communities Working Together to Support Student Health

The HealthierUS School Challenge is a USDA program which is designed to bring teams of school food service staff, parents, teachers, and administrators together to review school meals, nutrition education, and physical activity. Participation in the Challenge helps schools to prepare to meet the new federal nutrition guidelines with the full support and understanding of the school community. School teams submit information to USDA about the three areas of the school environment which contributes to student health.

Schools receive recognition and cash rewards for meeting the criteria in each of the three categories.

Criteria for School Meals to Meet the Challenge

- 1- **Serve orange and dark green vegetables at least three times a week.**
- 2- **Serve different whole grain rich foods three times a week.**
- 3- **Serve beans or legumes once a week.**
- 4- **Serve only 1% or skim milk.**
- 5- **Serve different fruits every day.**

Criteria for Nutrition Education

- 1- **Nutrition Education offered at every grade level with multiple levels of communication: classroom, cafeteria and community**

Criteria for Physical Education

- 1- **Specific time requirement for physical education in school.**
- 2- **Specific time requirement for physical activity other than PE classes.**

Parents can play an important role in supporting their schools to take the HealthierUS School Challenge, receive a cash reward and be recognized by the USDA for achieving a very high standard of excellence.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about [New Nutrition Guidelines](#) or the [HealthierUS School Challenge](#), contact your school's Child Nutrition or Food Service Staff, the VT Child Nutrition Program Office at 802-828-5152, or visit the School Nutrition Association of Vermont website at snvt.org for a listing of SNA-VT Board member contact information.