

Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act FAQs for Parents

Q: I heard there is a new law about school lunch, is that true?

A: Yes, in December 2010 the [Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act](#) (HHFKA) was signed into law. The act is the result of several months of debate and negotiations in the US congress and was passed and signed into law. The bill has many provisions that impact school lunch, school breakfast, Woman Infants and Children services (WIC), as well as other federal nutrition programs. A large portion of the bill focuses on school lunch and breakfast programs.



Q: What is the intent of the new law?

A: The United State Department of Agriculture, the agency which oversees meal programs says:

“This legislation includes significant improvements that will help provide children with healthier and more nutritious food options, educate children about making healthy food choices, and teach children healthy habits that can last a lifetime.”

Q: What are the improvements expected in school meals?

A: There are several changes expected in school meals. Over the next few years changes to school breakfast and lunch programs will be phased in. Please see below for a detailed description:

Whole Grains

One of the most significant changes includes the inclusion of whole grain on the menus in the place of refined grains. Bread, pizza crust, rolls and buns will now need to be “whole grain rich”. Beginning July 1, 2012 at least half of the grains served must be whole grain rich. In two years, the requirement will increase to 100% of grains served.

Fruits and Vegetables

Another major change will be the inclusion of more nutrient dense fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables will now make up a larger portion of the meals served on daily basis. In addition to a larger portion of fruits and vegetables, lunch meals will now allow up to 2 cups of fruits and vegetables to be served as part of a meal. It also sets minimums on how much of fruits and/or vegetables must be taken by students. For most students, that minimum will be ½ cup of total fruits and vegetables. “Nutrient dense” item includes the sub-groups “dark green” and “red/orange” vegetables. Examples of those vegetables are: broccoli, kale, mustard greens, acorn squash, pumpkin, sweet potatoes. These items are example of some of the types of foods school menus will now include.

Sodium

For the first time, the new law sets standards for sodium in school lunch and breakfast menus. A sodium reduction is required to be phased in over a 10 year period. During that period, total sodium must be reduced by more than 50%.

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Q: I heard that Pizza is now considered a vegetable, is that true?

A: This is untrue. During debates last fall, Congress voted to consider tomato paste as a vegetable portion. The tomato paste used to make pizza can be considered a vegetable, but the rest of the pizza is not considered a vegetable.

Q: When will these changes take effect?

A: Changes to the nutrient standards will take effect on July 1, 2012. After that date, all school meals (breakfast & lunch) must meet the new standards.

Q: It sounds like food will be more expensive, where will the money come from to pay for this?

A: HHFKA authorizes additional federal support for school lunch up to and additional \$0.06 per meal served. These new funds are intended to offset the increased costs associated with the new law. However, the USDA expects school meals to increase between \$0.17 and \$0.24 per meal once the law is fully implemented.



Q: How will this affect my child's lunch?

A: Your child will begin to see different items and/or different ingredients used in the preparation of his/her meal. The fruit and vegetable selection may change to include more fruits and vegetables or beans and those portions may be larger.

Q: What changes will we see in our school?

A: Although new national school nutrition guidelines are causing sweeping changes to meal programs across the country, the Medford Township Public Schools nutrition program has been proactive in making menus healthier in order to meet the strict guidelines of the Healthier US School Challenge, a USDA program that promotes good nutrition and physical activity. Therefore, we will be minimally impacted by the new guidelines and will continue to serve healthy, nutritious and delicious meals to students. One of the changes you may notice to the district's nutrition program is a decrease in the number of entree choices at some schools. This is being done to help make the transition to our new menus as smooth as possible for students. Regardless of the number of entree items available in each school, we pride ourselves on creating healthy and fun meals that kids like to eat, and we are confident that you will like what we have to offer.

Q: What do I need to do?

A: Discuss the upcoming changes with your child(ren). When they return to school in the fall, some menu items may be different and will take some adjustment to the new tastes. Our experience tells us that there is an adjustment period to new flavors. Given the opportunity to adjust, students do become accepting of new items. It is also important to communicate to the food service management about your thoughts and ideas. A successful transition depends on students participating in the program and sharing likes and dislikes.

Q: What if I have questions?

A: Please feel free to contact the General Manager of food service, Charlene Zimmerman. She can be reached at (609) 654-6416 ext 8326.

