**How do the National School Lunch & Breakfast Programs Work?**

* School districts that choose to take part in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National School Breakfast Program (NSBP) receive cash subsidies and donated commodity food items from USDA for each meal they serve.
* In return they must serve meals that meet federal nutrition standards and they must offer free or reduced-price lunches to eligible children.
* School nutrition directors and business managers face the challenge of operating nutritionally sound programs that meet federal requirements, are cost effective, and are enjoyable for children to eat.
* Schools can also be reimbursed for snack served to children through age 18 in afterschool educational or enrichment programs.

**What are the Nutritional Requirements for School Meals?**

Lunch must provide 1/3 of a student's daily needs for calories and key nutrients and breakfast must provide 1/4 of a student's daily needs for calories and key nutrients.

**Specific Nutrient Standards for School Meals:**

USDA Requirements

* Calories
* Fat
* Saturated Fat
* Protein
* Calcium
* Iron
* Vitamin A
* Vitamin C

National Guidelines

* Sodium
* Fiber
* Cholesterol
* Carbohydrate

What to Expect From a School Lunch:

* Low-fat milk offered every day.
* Increased use of whole grain products.
* Age appropriate portions and serving sizes.
* A variety of fruits and vegetables every day.
* Some schools offer multiple choices for students to pick from at each meal.
* Some schools offer salad bars with a variety fruits, vegetables and low-fat protein sources.
* Healthier versions of children's favorites: pizza, chicken nuggets, hamburgers.

###### School meals are Appealing to Children and Taste Good!

School lunches are not what they used to be. There have been enormous advances in the variety and flavor of school meals. Cooks at schools are providing meals that are not only nutritious but also taste delicious. Schools are using quality products and are working hard to stay up to date with food trends to satisfy their students.

###### The Parents Role in School Meal Choices

School lunches must meet Federal nutrition requirements, but decisions about what to eat is left up to the students. Most schools offer a variety of choices for students to pick from at meal times. Parents should discuss these choices with their children. Parents are welcome to eat a meal with their children at most schools. It is important for parents to go to the school and find out firsthand what the choices are so they can help their children make the best choices.

The fact that fruits and vegetables are being served with the school meal is no guarantee that children are eating them. A student with two dollars in his pocket may opt to spend his money on a candy bar and a soft drink, rather than the balanced meal offered through the National School Lunch Program. Parents should encourage the right choices.

###### How Do Schools Decide What to Serve Students?

While federal regulations state the food components and portion sizes that must be offered, child nutrition professionals at local school nutrition service departments make decisions about what specific foods to serve and how they are prepared. While the menus offered over the week must meet USDA nutrition standards, they also have to appeal to student customer tastes. The decision-making process in the school varies by the district, and often, the size of the district. In smaller school districts, those that may be one or two schools, site-based decisions related to menus are often made at the school level. In the larger school districts, there is very little site-based decision-making related to menus in the cafeteria. In the larger school districts, there may be a nutrition services director to help managers make decisions. It is best to contact one of those individuals to start a constructive dialogue.

###### How Are School Nutrition Programs Funded?

Most child nutrition programs in Wyoming school districts must be self-supporting. That means they receive no funding from the school district and must earn enough money to pay all their expenses which include food, salaries and benefits, utilities, repairs and purchases of equipment, cleaning supplies and disposables. The total federal reimbursement for each school lunch served for the 20010-2011 school year is $.26 for paid students, $2.32 for reduced prices students, and $2.72 for free students. Cash sales from reduced-price and paid students, and revenues from a la carte sales make up the rest of the income a program receives.

**Free and Reduced Priced Meals and Eligibility**

All schools participating in the National School Lunch and/or Breakfast Programs, must make free and reduced priced meals available to eligible children.

Eligibility for free or reduced priced meals is based on household size and income. The free guidelines are at or below 130 percent the Federal poverty guidelines and the reduced price guidelines are between 130 and at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines.

Some students are categorically eligible for free benefits because of the status of one of the following:

* A member of a household, as determined by the administering agency, receiving assistance under the Food Stamp Program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Children Program (TANF);
* Enrolment in a Head Start or Even Start program on the basis of meeting that program's low-income criteria;
* A homeless child as determined by the school district's homeless liaison or by the director of a homeless shelter;
* A migrant child as determined by the State or local Migrant Education Program coordinator
* A runaway child who is receiving assistance from a program under the Runaway and Homeless Act and is identified by the local educational liaison.

**What about other foods served on the school campus?**

A la Carte

In addition to offering meals to students, some nutrition service departments may sell other food items that are called a la carte. A la carte items are selected and purchased by the nutrition service department and are not controlled by USDA regulations. If the revenue (federal reimbursement) from meal programs does not adequately cover the expenses then departments look for other sources such as a la carte to increase their revenue. When purchasing items to sell a la carte, it is recommended that food service directors carefully look at the nutritional content and purchase items that meet strict nutritional standards as outlined by their district's wellness policy. One of the requirements of the wellness policy mandate was to establish nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus during the school day. With the establishment of nutritional guidelines, a la carte programs can serve an important role in maintaining financial soundness for the nutrition service department as well as providing nutritious choices for students who want additional food items.

**Competitive Foods**

What are competitive foods?  
Competitive foods are foods offered at school, other than meals served through USDA's Child Nutrition Program. USDA defines two categories of competitive foods:

1. Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) described in the regulations for the National School Lunch Program include soda water, water ices, chewing gum, hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy coated popcorn.  
   *Current federal regulations prohibit the sale of FMNV in the nutrition service area during the school meals periods.*
2. All other foods offered for individual sale that students purchase in addition to or in place of a reimbursable school meal, such as a la carte sales and other foods and beverages purchased from vending machines, school stores, and snack bars.  
   *Regulations do not prohibit the sale of these foods at any time during the school day anywhere on the school campus, including the nutrition service areas.*

**Why are Competitive Foods Sold?**

Many schools are facing increased financial demands and are compensating for the funds lost through budget cut by selling competitive foods. Profits from the sale of competitive foods are often used to support athletics, educational programs, and other activities.

What are the Issues Associated with Competitive Foods?  
If there are no nutritional standards in place guiding the selection of these items, they can be low in nutritional value and high in fat, sugars and calories. Therefore, they may contribute to poor dietary habits and result in obesity. Students may be receiving a mixed message if they are taught about good nutrition in the classroom, but this message is not reinforced throughout the school environment. It is important that strict nutritional standards are established in district wellness policies and adhered to for all foods available to students; by any group or organization; and at any time of the school day or after.

School Wellness Policies

Understanding and Getting Involved with Your School Wellness Policy:  
One of the key policies that your parent team should become very familiar with and to use as a guide for your work is your District Wellness Policy. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 mandated all local school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program to have a school district wellness policy in place by July 1, 2006. This legislation was in response to overwhelming concern about the rising rate of child obesity.

School wellness policies must include:

* Nutrition education goals,
* Physical activity goals, and
* Nutrition standards for all foods available on school campus during the school day
* Goals for other school-based activities should be designed to promote student wellness
* A plan for measuring implementation of the policy
* Parents, students, school nutrition services, school board members, school administrators, and the public be involved in the development of the school wellness policy.

The law clearly articulates that the wellness policies be developed locally as a means of allowing schools and districts to customize the policy based on local needs and resources. It is clear there are targeted areas in which parents can help with implementation and support of changes that will provide support and education for children to establish healthy habits for eating and physical activity. To access a copy of your school/district wellness policy contact your school or district.

###### Do You Have A Concern About The Meals At Your Child's School?

If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the meals served at your child's school it is best to contact the Food Service Director at the District level.

At most school districts the Food Service Director writes the menus for the schools and chooses which vendors to purchase food from, etc. If you have questions or concerns about other foods served at school (vending, school stores, non-reimbursable school meals) it is best to contact the school's administrator.

**Does Your Child Have Special Needs or Food Allergies?**

USDA regulations require substitutions or modifications in school meals for children whose disabilities restrict their diets. A child with a disability must be provided substitutions in foods when that need is supported by a statement signed by a licensed physician. The physician's statement must identify:

* the child's disability;
* an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet;
* the major life activity affected by the disability;
* the food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet, and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted.

**In Cases of Food Allergy**  
In General, children with food allergies or intolerances do not have a disability as defined under either Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or Part B of IDEA, and the school food service may, but is not required to, make food substitutions for them. However, when in the licensed physician's assessment, food allergies may result in severe, life-threatening (anaphylactic) reactions, the child's condition would meet the definition of "disability," and the substitutions prescribed by the licensed physician must be made.

The school food service may make food substitutions, at their discretion, for individual children who do not have a disability, but who are medically certified as having a special medical or dietary need. Such determinations are only made on a case-by-case basis. This provision covers those children who have food intolerances or allergies but do not have life-threatening reactions (anaphylactic reactions) when exposed to the food(s) to which they have problems.

**Medical Statement for Children with Special Dietary Needs**  
Each special dietary request must be supported by a statement, which explains the food substitution that is requested. It must be signed by a recognized medical authority.

The medical statement must include:

* an identification of the medical or other special dietary condition which restricts the child's diet;
* the food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet; and
* the food or choice of foods to be substituted.

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