

Get the FAQs about the “ACT” Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA)

Source: MDE Web site

School cafeterias are meeting challenging new federal nutrition standards for school meals, ensuring that meals are healthy and well-balanced and provide students all the nutrition they need to succeed at school.

Here are some of the common comments from parents and students. Improving the nutrition of school meals is an important investment in the future of America’s children. In 1946, the National School Lunch Program was given permanent status. The goal identified then, still weighs strong NOW! – “To protect the health and well-being of our nation’s children.”

You’re starving our kids!

Starting this school year, students will actually be receiving larger servings of vegetables and fruits, a wider variety of vegetables, and in some schools, more whole grain-rich products. Many schools across Minnesota have already been serving a wide variety of fruits and vegetables each day and have made the change to whole grain-rich products over the last few years.

The new menu requirements provide approximately the same recommended amount of calories as last year. A 12th grader will be offered roughly 850 calories per day averaged over the week.

The football players are not going to get the calories they need.

A typical school lunch will provide about one-third of the daily nutrient needs of a student, which includes 24 key nutrients that children need for growth and development. If a student is physically active or participates in sports, he or she may need additional calories supplemented from another source. The goal of the National School Lunch Program is, and always has been, to provide adequate nutrition for the average student in different age/grade groupings.

I’m paying higher prices for my child’s meal, and they’re getting less food!

Students will not be receiving less food this year. And the food that they are receiving is more nutrient dense than ever before. Because healthy, high quality food can cost more, some schools needed to increase prices in order to ensure that the school nutrition program remain solvent to continue offering healthy meals to all students.

All we will have is garbage cans full of fruits and vegetables.

As in previous years, the new regulations allow for an “offer vs. serve” option, which allows children to take smaller amounts of food, or refuse an item they don’t intend to eat instead of wasting larger portions. Students are required to select a minimum of one-half cup fruit or vegetable with each meal. Other than that, schools participating in the offer vs. serve option can allow students to refuse two out of the five food items offered.

I’m still hungry after lunch!

If students are feeling hungry after eating a school lunch, we need to consider that they may be “choosing” to go hungry rather than make their food item selections from the bounty of fruits and vegetables, and reasonable portion sizes of meat/meat alternates, grains and milk choices that are offered this school year. Students have access to a minimum of five food items: meat/meat alternates, milk, fruits, vegetables and grains, served in portion sizes appropriate for their age and grade group.

This is too much control! My kids should be able to make their own choices.

Nutritional guidelines for the school lunch program have been in place for almost 70 years – relying on the latest scientific research and response to the demographics of our children. Currently, we are fighting a battle on obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure for an increasingly larger segment of our nation’s children while also addressing hunger issues for others. For many children, school lunch and breakfast may be the only meals they receive on a regular basis.

The goal of the National School Lunch Program is to not only provide the healthiest meals possible, but to use the meals as a way of teaching students what a balanced meal looks like in order to instill lifelong healthy eating habits. We want our children to live a long and productive life.

My children are now forced to take food whether they like it or not.

The HHFKA requires that all students select, at a minimum, one-half cup of fruit or vegetable with each meal. Schools have been encouraged to offer a variety of fruits and vegetables each day so that students will not only be tempted to take one, but will actually want to try many of the different offerings.

Research shows that very few children and adolescents consume the recommended amount of vegetables, especially those that are dark green, orange, red and dry beans and peas. These vegetables contain key nutrients that can prevent many diseases later on in life.

The problem isn't food – it's that our kids don't get enough exercise!

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is also doing their part to try to get our kids fit and healthy in a variety of means, including the "Let's Move" campaign that promotes physical activity and healthy eating, the "MyPlate" visual, along with the new school lunch meal pattern requirements. Schools are encouraged to participate in the USDA Team Nutrition program and apply for the HealthierUS School Challenge, which combines nutrition education, physical fitness and meal pattern requirements.

I think our district will just "opt out" of the new meal pattern requirements. We don't need the additional six cents.

Sponsors do not have the option of opting out of providing the new meal pattern requirements.

If you would like to share your comments or concerns about the HHFKA, please contact your elected United States Congressional Representatives. You can find out who represents you in Washington DC from this link: [U.S. Congressional Representatives](#)

You can also send comments to USDA:

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