

Autumn, 2006

Nutritional Services Newsletter

LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Mission Statement

To provide a broad variety of nutritious foods and beverages
for a diverse population of and adults
in a consistent, timely, and cost effective manner.

There is growing concern regarding nutrition and obesity among children and adults in our country. These issues affect every child's well being, and are among our primary concerns. Fortunately, our school district has highly qualified educators and health care professionals to provide nutrition and wellness education. These individuals also work with us in the adoption and implementation of new and improved nutritional guidelines. We address these subjects in this newsletter for the benefit of concerned parents and students.



School food service programs were originally designed to prevent poor nutrition and to encourage healthful eating habits. These goals remain in place today. Today, we also recognize our responsibility in promoting good nutrition and reducing childhood obesity. Our department's mission is to serve high quality, nutritious and well-balanced meals. In doing so we create a positive model for students to follow. The role of parents in maintaining healthful eating habits is an extremely important role and cannot be underestimated. We support parents in their efforts to promote good nutrition through well balanced diets every day.

As always, please contact me directly if you have any questions on these matters.

Jack Koser

Director of Nutritional Services

What Do Children Really Eat?

We estimate that a person eats 18,630 meals by the time of graduation from high school. School prepared meals account for approximately 1,080 meals; about 6% of the total meals consumed. Students who purchase lunch in our cafeterias have a variety of choices that change daily. The middle and high school students have more selections than the elementary school children. However, at all levels, they always have a Type-A Meal available; which follows strict government guidelines for a balanced meal for each age group. If students eat a Type-A meal every day, they are assured of a well-balanced and nutritious lunch. For students who don't choose a Type-A Meal, we offer a la carte selections that conform to the Pennsylvania Guidelines for Competitive Foods (Phase I).

The February 15, 2004 edition of American Family Physicians Journal reported, “*Most of what your child eats depends on what you bring home from the grocery store.*” We see that approximately 50% of elementary students bring their lunch from home. A recent survey by our marketing consultant showed that most elementary school lunches included a sandwich or dinner leftovers; usually chicken. The majority of them contained a packaged snack and many had a whole fruit and/or a dessert, which was often a candy. Most children buy a beverage. Fully half of these students’ lunches included a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Our consultant’s survey included an observation of discarded food and wrappers in the trashcans. A large portion of discarded foods consisted of whole fruits, especially apples, partially eaten sandwiches, and candy wrappers. *Incidentally, small children who reject whole fruits will usually eat fruits that are cut into sections. It’s easier for them to bite. Lemon water may be used to retard discoloration and fruit sections can be packed in plastic sandwich bags.*

At the middle and high school levels, about a third of the students bring their lunches from home. Most students make their own lunches by “raiding the fridge.” Some bring in fare from fast food restaurants and supermarkets. Students who bring in their lunch usually supplement it with a beverage; and some will buy a snack food such as a slice of pizza or soft pretzel.

Of the remaining two thirds of the students, about half purchase hot entrée meals. The remaining third of the students buy deli sandwiches, salads and a combination of side dishes. Industry trade papers and professional journals report that there is a growing trend towards replacing whole meals with snacks. And that is just what we see here. When students are asked about their favorite foods, they list pizza, fries and chicken fingers. All of which are snacks.

Did You Know?

Parents who pay for their children’s meals through our Debit Plan may review a daily record of what their children have purchased. Parents may also block their children’s purchases of snacks by calling or sending a note. Simply open our Web site and follow the instructions. Call us if you have any questions.

Also, our new automated *School Messenger* will call parents when their Debit Plan balance is low or negative.

New Pennsylvania State Guide Lines

The Lower Merion School District has adopted the, “Year One” plan of the *Guidelines for Competitive Foods*, which is recommended by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Many of these guidelines are already part of our standard policy and practices. Below are some highlights of the new policies that will be implemented this school year.

- ~Portion sizes will be reduced for all a la carte foods.
- ~A larger variety of items that provide more than two grams of fiber per serving will be available.
- ~More baked foods will be offered. No foods will be deep fat fried in the school.
- ~Snacks will be more nutrient dense. No candy will be sold in any school.
- ~The majority of beverages sold in a la carte lines and in secondary school vending machines will be low fat or skim milk, water and 100% juice.
- ~Sports drinks will be available in high school after the school day.

- ~Vending machines will be permitted in secondary and middle schools.
- ~Vending machines in middle and high schools will be available during meal periods only. . They will carry baked chips, yogurt, fruit juice, string cheese, fresh and canned fruit, and 1% milk.
- ~The new guidelines will also be applied to fundraisers, and classroom activities and using, “food as a reward”, will be eliminated.

Financial Initiatives

Contracted Services

Many schools in our area do not have on-site food service facilities or the ability to prepare a lunch for their students. Lower Merion School District prepares sandwiches and hot meals for schools outside the district during off peak hours. The added revenue allows us to provide better quality foods at lower prices to our own students. We provide hot meals to four schools in addition to the ten schools in our district.

Cook-Chill Food Production System

Last year we began testing Cook-Chill equipment, and have since made it a part of our system. Cook-Chill is a kitchen technique whereby we partially cook a food, seal it in an airtight boil-in bag while it is still piping hot, and then chill it. The food is prepared in large batches at one site and shipped to other locations as needed. Days later we can heat the food, and it will retain its freshly made quality. Cook-Chill allows us to take advantage of government commodities and is highly labor efficient.

A good example of this process is tomato sauce. We receive government commodity tomato paste, and then add our seasoning to make tomato sauce. The saving is about 25% below comparable commercial products. We can also tailor the sauce to meet the tastes of our customers. Bolognese anyone?

Profile: Linda Kelly

Linda has been the Nutrition Services Manager at the Penn Valley School for the past six years. She absolutely loves her work. "It's the kids, really. They're full of energy and fun. I especially enjoy seeing how self-confident they are. When they want something or have an opinion, they just speak their minds. They're friendly, polite and well mannered, but certainly not shy. They're wonderful kids, and I look forward to seeing them each day"

Last year Linda and principal Alice Reyes began a program for students in grades one through three named **Colors to Grow By**. The students receive a colored paper feather. Their assignment is to write the names of foods and draw pictures that are represented by the food on the colored feather. "It gives the children and their parents an opportunity to work together and reinforces the nutrition education learned in class and at home," says Linda. "At the end of the week we build a peacock on the cafeteria wall using their feathers. It's a very big and colorful peacock."



Linda also works at the Town House Restaurant in Media. For the past eleven years, she has been everything from chef to manager. Penn Valley students are surprised to find their lunchroom manager overseeing the restaurant at dinnertime. "They get a big kick out of finding me there, and enjoy introducing me to their parents." If that weren't enough, she is famous for making elegant wedding cakes. Her largest cake was a spectacular eight tiers tall. "The maitre'd didn't want to put the top tier on for fear it would fall. "I guarantee it will be fine," she said. And it was.

What's New?

New Dietitian Consultant: The School Board has hired a Registered Dietitian in the role of Dietician Consultant. The Consultant will provide assistance to the Nutrition Services and the Pupil Services Departments. The Dietician will provide assistance with menu planning, product selection and serving conditions.

Low Sugar Cereals: We have been successful in introducing breakfast cereals that have 25% less sugar than their supermarket counterparts. Manufacturers and vendors are responding to the consumer demand for more nutritious foods. These reduced sugar cereals provide a good or excellent source of whole grains and greatly decrease sugar content. We will add more cereals to our menu as they become available on the market.

Whole Wheat Breads: Our effort to convince students to switch from white bread to whole wheat bread is progressing well. All cafeterias now offer whole wheat wraps, sliced breads and Kaiser rolls as alternative choices. In the elementary schools, the only bread we serve is whole wheat.

Although whole wheat breads are not the first choice of the most secondary schools students, we will continue to offer and recommend it at lunchtime. Parents are encouraged to serve whole wheat at home. Please.

Food Myths

There are myths about “bad foods” that frighten people away from enjoying one of life’s greatest pleasures. Although we are not championing Twinkies and cheese fries, we point out that there are no *bad foods*...only bad diets.

The Sugar High

This myth arose over a generation ago when the news media exaggerated the claim children get a “sugar high” and can be uncontrollable. Many schools banned sugar entirely. The fact is that there are, indeed, a small number of people who are allergic to sugar. These sensitive individuals may experience an agitation that was reported as being “high”.

Starches, such as in bread, pasta, rice and potatoes are, “fattening”.

No food causes weight gain. Only excess calorie intake compared to a person’s calorie expenditure causes the body to gain weight. Avoid foods with simple carbohydrates, such as sweets. Instead, select foods with complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain bread, brown rice, potatoes and shredded wheat.

Butter has more calories than margarine

Not true. They both contain 100 calories and 12 grams of fat per tablespoon. However, butter contains cholesterol and more saturated fat. Choose margarines that are trans-fat free. Also, look to olive oil, canola oil or other cold pressed oils.

Honey and brown sugar are more nutritious than white sugar

That’s incorrect. There is no significant nutritional difference between the three.

Extra protein from protein bars and shakes will increase muscle growth

Sorry, no. Only physical effort such as weight lifting and exercise will increase muscle development. Any “extra protein” intake will be converted to fat.

Teen athletes generally require one gram of protein per pound of body weight daily. This amount is easily achieved in a balanced diet.

Avoid eggs to reduce cholesterol

In most people, dietary cholesterol in animal foods has little effect on blood cholesterol. Actually, our own bodies produce cholesterol. One should avoid trans-fats and saturated fats because they will effect the production of cholesterol.

Vitamin C can prevent the common cold

There is no scientific evidence to prove this popular notion. However, extra Vitamin C (one gram per day) may reduce the duration and severity of cold symptoms. Excessive amounts of Vitamin C may cause diarrhea and kidney stones.

Not a Myth

The brain is the biggest calorie burner

True. The brain burns 20% of the calories of a person at rest. That’s more than any other part of the human body. It makes sense to have a good breakfast before going to school. Your brain needs it. Students and adults alike.

So, how many calories for the NY Times crossword puzzle?