

Support of the New Meal Pattern

The new 2012-2013 school year has brought about changes for students, as well as professionals who work within schools. Change can be difficult, but it is how a person goes about making the change and the attitude they choose, that determines the outcome. As a school nutrition professional, I was challenged with the change to the New Meal Pattern. The New Meal Pattern is a change from the past; however it is a positive change for the health of our nation's students. I believe this is a positive change for our students as well as the school staff that choose to eat school meals.

The new school meals are based on the latest scientific recommendations from the Institute of Medicine and are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines. The standards require that we meet one third of the student's total daily caloric need for elementary, middle and high school students. In a society where more is better; more calories, fat, sodium are not always better. With the New Meal Pattern, we are not only feeding students meals, but we are teaching students about healthy choices and portion sizes. Students are receiving adequate portions of protein, grains, dairy, fruits and vegetables to meet the goal of one third a student's daily caloric need if they take all items offered. Students do have the choice to refuse items offered. It is encouraging students to take those items that they may not be accustomed to eating such as fruits and vegetables where there is no federal limit on amount. This will better help fulfill a student's hunger. This encouragement should not only happen at school, but also needs to happen at home. For the highly active students who may need additional calories, not only may they choose additional fruits and vegetables based on a districts budget, most secondary schools offer a la carte items that can be purchased. The table has been set to help guide our youth towards making healthy choices. I encourage our students, parents, school nutrition staff, and communities to embrace this change and challenge us all to focus on the positive benefits of the New Meal Pattern.

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