



Dist. 15 serving more nutritious lunches

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Come May, foot-long hot dogs, chicken gyros, Fritos and stuffed-crust pizza will be things of the past for student lunches in Palatine Township Elementary District 15 schools.

Over the past couple of years, the nutrition department has made drastic changes to meals, but after nudging from the school board in recent months, more modifications are coming.

Last school year, all sliced white bread was eliminated and replaced with 100 percent whole grain slices. Pizza crusts, breakfast pancakes and rolls were also changed to whole grain.

Also eliminated from the lunch room were higher-fat ice cream and cookies.

This year, Gatorade was removed for junior high students, and fresh fruit like kiwi, grapes and apple slices were added to the menu.

"Right now, we are ahead of the pack for a lot of changes, especially with the use of the whole grains," said Bobbie Desprat, nutrition director. "We are one of the only districts I know of doing that now."

But while lunches have gotten healthier in District 15, there was a feeling that some of the items could be improved more, said school board President Tim Millar.

At a board meeting this week, Desprat said more changes will start in May to reduce calories, fat and sodium in the meals.

Students will see less macaroni and cheese and nachos on the menu until lower-fat options are available.

A wellness committee is also active right now and working on a plan addressing snacks being brought into the classrooms for special occasions like birthdays and parties, Desprat said.

One thing that's gotten results this year is switching from generic fruit cups to a brand name.

"Kids like the brand recognition," said Desprat. "We are spending more money to get the Dole name out there, and more students are eating fruit."

Since the switch, the district is selling about 600 more servings a day, she said.

The nutrition service staff plans lunches for all of the District 15 schools. Since 2001, more than 1 million meals have been served. This last year, the budget was \$1.3 million.

"All we're trying to do is teach students about healthier options," said Desprat. "And the kids seem to be liking it."

Making school lunches healthier

Changes made last year:

- Sliced white bread eliminated, replaced with 100 percent whole grain slices.

- A la carte juice drinks changed to those with 100 percent juice at junior highs.
- 100-calorie snacks introduced at junior highs along with chicken Caesar and Oriental chicken salads
- Milk offerings changed to 1 percent low-fat; strawberry and vanilla flavors introduced to increase milk consumption.

Changes being made this year:

- Chips that aren't baked or reduced-fat eliminated.
- Hamburger patties switched to lower-fat version.
- Students given option of extra fruits and vegetables for no charge.
- Fruit cups switched for generic to brand name.

Source: Palatine Township Elementary District 15