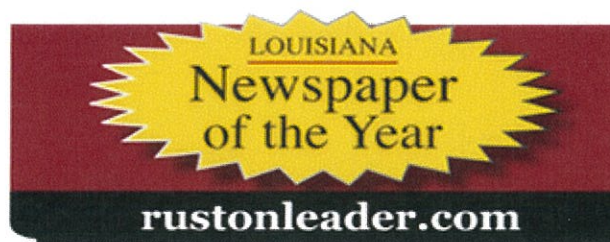


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SCHOOL LUNCHES UPGRADED

Submitted by Ruston Leader on Mon, 08/20/2012 - 10:42am

in

Fat, sodium limited; produce increased

Elizabeth DeGrie

Though students may not notice a difference, parents may notice the additional energy and overall wellness that comes from healthier eating in their children this school year.

Doris Marzett, child nutrition supervisor for the Lincoln Parish School system, said the food services department is making a few changes to school lunches this year. These changes are the latest in mandates handed down by the federal government to help make the country's children healthier.

"I don't know that the kids will notice much difference," Marzett said. "We're really focusing on healthier foods. We had started changing it last year, so there's not a lot that is noticeable this year."

However, noticeable or not, there are quite a few changes this year. The changes for this year's lunches include age-appropriate calorie limits; larger servings of vegetables and fruits (students must take at least one serving of produce); a wider variety of vegetables — including dark green and red/orange vegetables and legumes; fat-free or 1 percent milk; more whole grains and less sodium.

Marzett said she had made other changes — such as removing all desserts except for fruit — in the past year and a half, getting ready for these final changes. This time around, Marzett said there will be no big additions or subtractions from the menu.

"Basically what we've done is to make sure all the items we're serving are more nutritious and healthier," Marzett said.

For example, Marzett said students would still be allowed to have pizza. However, the pizza will feature whole-grain crust, low-fat cheese and low sodium tomato sauce.

"These are the sort of things we're focusing on," Marzett said.

"Chicken patties will be coated in whole-grain flour, rather than white flour. The cornbread is going to be a whole-grain cornbread."

Other changes will include using whole-grain white buns for hot dogs and hamburgers.

Marzett said having students eating these healthier foods, as well as following appropriate calorie limits will benefit them.

"Eating healthy foods and eating controlled portions will definitely make us have healthier kids," Marzett said. "They will fill up and they won't be eating a lot of junk, which is what tends to make them gain weight. If they eat the meals we prepare, they will be much healthier kids."

And, that's not just speculation. Marzett said studies have been done that proves it.

"Studies have been done to prove that if kids eat their meals in the cafeteria, they tend to not be overweight," Marzett said.

Marzett said parents could encourage students to eat the healthier options available in the cafeteria by offering similar options at home.

"I think the thing that helps kids to eat the healthy options is if the parent provides it at home and encourage them to eat it at home," Marzett said.

"And if the parent eats it too. Students also tend to emulate the teachers. If they eat with their students and encourage the students to eat the healthier options, they'll do it. They like to follow their role models."

Marzett said while these are the final changes to the lunch menu, next year there will be changes to make the breakfast menu healthier as well.

Marzett said food staff has also been learning how to make the food more appealing and healthier at the same time.

"We had a workshop for our employees (Aug. 6-8) at Louisiana Tech, and their faculty worked with our employees," Marzett said. "It was funded by the Lincoln Health Foundation."

Marzett said the food services staff was taught to use spices to make the food more flavorful, and it appeared to have worked.

"We prepared some foods in the regular way and modified some to make them healthier," Marzett said. "Many times they picked the one modified as the better tasting. That was really encouraging."

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