Why are these changes being made to the school meal nutrition standards?

- **Obesity is a national epidemic that requires bold solutions.** The nation faces an obesity epidemic with nearly 1 in 3 children at risk for preventable diseases like diabetes and heart disease due to overweight and obesity. Left unaddressed, health experts tell us that our current generation of children may well have a shorter lifespan than their parents. Since kids may consume as many as half their meals in schools, school meals play a critical role in helping children learn how to lead healthy lifestyles.

- **Tremendous advancements in our understanding of what a healthy school meal should look like have occurred since the last time the standards were updated.** The nutrition standards for school meals have not been updated since 1995, and the new standards reflect the latest knowledge base about health and nutrition. The standards are based on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGAs) – the Federal government’s benchmark for nutrition – as well as the recommendations of the nutrition experts at the Institute of Medicine (IOM) – a gold standard for scientific analysis.

- **The changes are mandated by the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA).** Section 201 of the HHFKA requires USDA to update nutrition standards for school meals based on the recommendations of the DGAs.

What kind of nutrition will students be getting under the new standards?

- **The new school meals are intended to be high in nutrients and adequate in calories, consistent with the latest nutrition science.** The new portion sizes and calorie ranges also reflect the latest scientific recommendations from nutrition experts on the dietary needs of school children.

- **Under the new science-based standards, school meals are “right-sized” and reflect the appropriate balance between food groups.** Based on their age, students are getting the recommended portions. In addition to lower-fat dairy and leaner proteins, the new school meals offer more fruits and vegetables at lunch– roughly double compared to the previous standards. Whole grains are also increased substantially.

- **School meals are designed to meet only a portion of a child’s nutritional and energy needs over the course of the day.** Breakfasts and lunches are designed to meet roughly one-fourth and one-third, respectively, of the *daily* calorie needs of school children. Other programs also support nutritional needs and can offer students the additional foods they may need depending on their specific circumstances.

- **School meal standards are in line with dietary recommendations for protein intake.** USDA recommends that children, depending on age and sex, should get about 4-6 ounces of protein foods (e.g., lean meat, poultry, nuts, seeds, and beans, and seafood) *over the course of an entire day*, which will provide protein and other beneficial nutrients. School lunch guidelines, which are intended to ensure that almost all children receive at least one-third of their daily nutritional and energy needs, require a minimum of 1-2 ounces of protein foods *per meal*, consistent with current dietary guidelines. Further, other types of food contribute substantial protein to school meals, including fluid milk, which is part of every school meal.
What about those highly active students that might need more calories?

- **Educate students about the new standards.** USDA data shows that students have tended not to take all the food available to them in the cafeteria line. Understanding the amount of food that can be selected the first time through the cafeteria line can help ensure that active kids are getting maximum energy benefit from their meal.

- **Help increase awareness of the options for feeding those extra hungry students.** Schools and families have options to help meet the energy needs of highly active students, such as athletes. Schools have no limit on making available second helpings of fruits and vegetables at lunch, and a second carton of milk may be an option, depending on how close they are to the calorie limits. Schools can also structure after-school snack and supper programs to include service to athletes. Individual students and/or sports teams can also supplement food provided through Federal programs with items provided from home or other sources.

How can schools minimize food waste?

- **Let USDA’s standards help by allowing students to select those foods that they prefer most.** The new school meal standards provide local options for schools to allow students to select at least three of the five food components on their plate. This local flexibility helps schools to avoid situations where kids take too much food; food which may end up getting wasted.

- **Schools can creatively engage and educate students to increase acceptance.** To encourage students to consume foods to which they may not be accustomed, school may employ multiple strategies, including taste tests before introducing new foods on the menu, creative marketing/presentation of foods, and offering multiple choices within food components.

Will the extra 6-cent reimbursement cover the changes required by the new standards?

- **Schools across the country have already been successfully implementing the new standards within current resources.** Many schools have been making healthy changes to their menus in recent years, and additional funding is available to meet the standards and provide a healthy, good tasting meal.

- **There are several opportunities for increased funds for school meals.** In addition to the 6-cent reimbursement rate increase, the HHFKA sets common-sense business standards that complement the Federal resources included in the Act in order to ensure that enough revenue is being brought in to cover the cost of producing healthy school meals. When taken together, these additional resources will, on average, provide enough revenue for schools to meet the new meal requirements.

Why isn’t every school meeting the new standards today?

- **Schools are in a transition year.** Naturally, some places are adjusting to the new standards more easily than others, but it can be done. In fact, thousands of schools are already at or near the new standards. Patience and support are needed as we continue to work through the transition phase. Schools will continue learning about the new requirements and adapting to them throughout the school year. Throughout this process, USDA will continue to be there to help schools make the new standards a success.

For more information, visit: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Healthierschoolday/default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Healthierschoolday/default.htm)