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Students at Liberal High School load up their trays with items for lunch Friday. Connie Vogts, director of nutrition services for the district, said she has noticed students picking more healthy choices during mealtimes. L&T photos/Elly Grimm

By ELLY GRIMM

• Leader & Times

Federal guidelines regarding school lunches have been implemented and even schools in U.S.D. No. 480 have had to take account of some changes in their own menus.

With the lunch patterns, there are no changes this year, so school lunches will stay the same as they have been the last couple years. However, there is one change with breakfast which requires the district to offer a full cup of fruits or vegetables every morning instead of just half a cup.

“The major change the kids will see will be fresh fruit and a carton of juice every day,” Connie Vogts, the director of nutrition services for the district, said. “They’re not required to take both but we have to have it available for them.”



The changes went into effect for the district starting July 1 and while there’s not much difference to the actual meals, there are some changes in the Smart Snacks in Schools, which concerns all foods sold in schools, including what is sold in the high school’s snack bar.

The new standards from the United States Department of Agriculture, anything sold during the school day within the school building has to meet certain nutrition standards, which include the item can only be 200 calories or less, must have less than 230 milligrams of sodium and 35 percent of its calories from fat.

Any food sold in schools must also be a whole grain-rich product, have the first ingredient as a fruit or vegetable or be a combination food containing at least a quarter-cup of fruit and/or vegetable. Each item must also contain 10 percent of a daily value of one of the essential nutrients.

“So theoretically, if you have a club who, during the school day, wants to sell candy bars or cookies or similar items for a fundraiser, they have to meet the nutrition standards the U.S.D.A. has set,” Vogts explained.

Efforts to help students stay healthy are part of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, which has been phased in over the last few years.

“The first year, we made some major changes, the second year we made a few changes and this is just the first year for this change to be implemented and enforced,” Vogts said. “They didn't try to implement everything at the very beginning, it's been gradually phased in. It's all in an effort to make all foods available to kids during the school day healthy and trying to get the most nutrition possible to our kids so they're properly nourished and ready to learn.”

With the implemented changes associated with this legislature, Vogts said she has seen many positives. She said as she's been cashiering in the high school's cafeteria, she has seen the trays going through the lunch line with fruits and vegetables.

“Exposure to fruits and vegetables is what it takes to get the kids to eat them,” Vogts said. “You have to get them exposed to them and familiar with them before they start eating them. I do feel like the kids are eating more healthy foods while in school.”

However, there have been times when the restrictions on what can be sold in schools for fundraisers has been an issue.

“It's very restrictive what we can sell – last year we were able to sell a sandwich (we all consider Subway sandwiches healthy) but to sell the sandwich in our snack bar this year, we would have had to cut it down to a three-inch sandwich and what high schooler wants a three-inch sandwich? It is challenging,” she said.

The cafeteria staff has been able to adapt to the changes though. There are more items becoming available for the district to sell, including a special beef stick developed by Yoder Meats in Yoder. The district was also able to find some baked chips and different items meeting the requirements.

Vogts said she sees many benefits in the long run from these changes. Parents are also encouraged to come to the high school and eat lunch with their students as well.

“In future generations, if we teach our kids these healthy eating habits now and they continue to follow those habits, we will see healthier adults down the road,” she said. “It's not something

we're going to see immediate results from – it's taken time for society to become overweight and accustomed to all the junk food. You listen to stories like my father's about what they ate during the 1930s, and it was very simple, wholesome eating back then and with the times, we've become more fast food-oriented, more quick-cooking oriented and fast and easy. It will take time but down the road, we will see an increased benefit of health in our children today as they become adults.”

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