

Healthier offerings on lunch trays

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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National program participants must meet standards.

If you think school lunches are loaded with fat, sugar and other unhealthy ingredients, think again.

During the last couple of decades, national nutrition standards for schools like District 20, that participate in the National School Lunch Program, have become stricter, according to Joni Jacobsen, food service manager.

For example, the district is required to use ingredients like 100% whole-wheat flour.

“We try to prepare or purchase students’ favorite foods using whole grains and reduced fat whenever possible,” she explained.

A snack bar, open to students grades 7-12 during lunchtime, is also monitored closely for nutritional value.

Jacobsen said candy like Snickers can be sold at the snack bar because it contains nuts and peanut butter and is considered to have nutritional value while Skittles and Starburst cannot.

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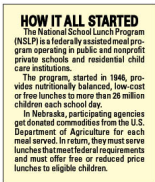
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She said the district has also implemented some components of the HealthierUS School Challenge, spearheaded by First Lady Michelle Obama, to combat childhood obesity.

As an example, students are offered at least a half cup of a different vegetable each day as well as a different fruit.

Meals are also portioned for all students.



Since participation in the challenge includes other aspects of wellness such as keeping physically fit and keeping track of the nutritional value of food sold for school fund-raisers, Jacobsen said the district has not yet signed up.

“But we’re talking about it,” Jacobsen said.

In fact, District 20 was one of 35 schools invited to attend a workshop about the challenge last summer in Lincoln.

Jacobsen became food services director at Gothenburg Public Schools in 1996.

That was two years after the United States Department of Agriculture—which administers the NSLP—upgraded nutrition standards.

NSLP participants must have standards for calories (less than 30% from total fat and less than

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10% from saturated fat), protein, calcium, iron, vitamins A and C, cholesterol, dietary fiber, sodium and carbohydrates.

Three years ago, schools adopted local wellness policies that include nutrition education and plans for physical activity and other school-based activities to promote wellness.

Jacobsen said some of the homemade food has disappeared from school lunch trays because

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