



## School Lunch Grows Up, Gets Healthy

Federal requirements call for more healthful school menu offerings, and, as America copes with an epidemic of childhood obesity, the rules are getting tougher. Congress, for example, recently introduced a Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection bill. Their goal was to remove junk food from schools by updating nutrition standards for all foods sold on school campuses, including those outside the federal school meal programs.

While this bill is not aimed at federal lunch programs, many school foodservice directors are taking the call for more healthful food to heart in the federally subsidized meal program itself. They are enticing students to buy into new, innovative menus. At the same time, their success in these endeavors is building participation and boosting their bottom line.

Here's a look at how some operators around the country are boosting both the healthfulness of their offerings and student participation:

- Westhill High School in Stamford, CT, has succeeded in reaching one of the most difficult student groups to please—high school kids—with a new **made-to-order deli bar** featuring popular sandwiches with new condiment flavor twists. Selections include, for example, turkey on a poppy seed roll with chipotle mayonnaise, tarragon chicken with apples, and roast beef with horseradish. The school's new **salad bar has a "corporate dining" look**, bringing the cafeteria "into the 21<sup>st</sup> century" while focusing on health, says Alan Dean, general manager for Sodexo, which operates the program. The new equipment includes the deli bar, heat lamps, sneeze guards and hot plates. Investment cost: \$60,000.
- New Jersey's Lakewood High School offers students a **fajita lunch featuring fresh-cooked vegetables** and steamed rice.
- Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia, WA, is reaching younger students with an **organic salad bar**. Children as young as 11 years old are selecting sophisticated combinations such as organic lettuce, pita pockets and blueberries—even passing up traditional pizza for such options, according to an msnbc.com report. The district has managed to absorb the additional cost of organic food by cutting lunch costs by two cents per meal. **Eliminating dessert**, for example, covered most of the added cost. While this step was initially unpopular with students, they ultimately embraced the program, says Cheryl Peta, Lincoln principal. "Our kids don't need dessert—they have all this great fruit. It's not like kids don't get sugar," she notes.
- Thai peanut chicken stir-fry with oriental vegetables is among the offerings in a new **made-to-order program** at Manchester Elementary/Middle School in Vermont. "I run this like a restaurant—the kids put in their order and they get what they want," said Whitney Halligan, foodservice director, in a Rutland Herald report. Halligan takes special sandwich orders and prepares them on a counter that doubles as a refrigerator. Three staffers fill other lunch orders. **Soups and muffins are made from scratch** daily. A typical lunch costs \$2.25. As more students, teachers and visiting parents participate, the new program is helping to eliminate a budget deficit.