



The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, signed into law in December 2010, charged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with updating school food nutrition standards to reflect the latest nutrition science. Updates to the nutrition standards for school meals went into effect at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, and schools across the country have been making changes to provide students with healthier choices. The law also provides schools with increased funding, training, and technical assistance to meet the new meals standards; calls for stronger local wellness policies, more transparency, and improved compliance measures; and strengthens USDA's commitment to other nutrition and wellness programs. In addition, USDA recently updated the standards for snacks and beverages sold outside of meals—in school stores, à la carte lines, and vending machines. These updated standards will go into effect at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year.

Topeka, Kansas

Niki Jahnke, food service director for Topeka Public Schools, came to her position at least in part because she had a background in nutrition. But perhaps more importantly, Jahnke was a parent who was disappointed with the quality of the school lunches.

When she became food service director, Jahnke helped Topeka schools move away from canned fruits and vegetables and towards more fresh and frozen produce. Seventeen Topeka schools now are working with the Healthy Schools Program of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which provides tools and support to schools working to create healthier campuses. Those schools also are pursuing certification under the HealthierUS School Challenge, a voluntary USDA program that recognizes schools for creating environments that promote nutrition and physical activity.

The many years Jahnke and the district have put into creating healthier school meals have paid off, because they have been able to meet the updated federal nutrition guidelines. She has changed old recipes and is continuing to develop new ones. In doing so, she's especially enjoyed the support of the Kansas State Department of Education, which has provided an all-day training for food service

staff, and has been available to answer questions and provide technical assistance.

Most of the students, especially the younger ones, have accepted the updated menus. Jahnke has seen some objections from high school students and a bit of a decrease in meal participation at some high schools. But after talking through the changes with students, much of the initial skepticism has died away.

Jahnke thinks the new flexibility in the guidelines, which allow for more grains and proteins, will help in middle and high schools as well. She's exploring how to use the flexibility, and continues to revamp menus, to get all students on board with the healthier meals.

Jahnke is staying busy in other ways too. The school district provides breakfast in all schools for those students who need it, and she's rolling out a dinner program. All of the snacks sold in vending machines meet state nutrition standards too. All in all, Jahnke has been able to make a lot of healthy changes, so that other parents of Topeka Public Schools students can be happy with the choices their kids have in school.



The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation, works to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity and to empower kids to develop lifelong, healthy habits. The Alliance works with schools, companies, community organizations, healthcare professionals and families to transform the conditions and systems that lead to healthier children.

To learn more and join the movement, visit HealthierGeneration.org.

