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## NF97-315 Overview of the USDA School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children

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## Overview of the USDA School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children

*by Darlene Martin, Extension Nutrition Specialist*

The USDA School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children provides school food authorities with the flexibility to choose different menu planning systems. School districts can choose more than one system if needs within the district vary.

### **Menu planning systems:**

- Keep the same traditional method
- NuMenus
- Assisted NuMenus
- Food Based Menus

The new regulation requires states to review school menus every five years. The nature of the review will depend on the menu planning option the school selects. When schools choose NuMenus or Assisted NuMenus, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) will review whether meals are being served according to the menus that have been developed and whether the nutrition analysis is being done properly. When the food based option or traditional method is selected, NDE will review whether component and quantity requirements are being met and will also perform a nutrition analysis to determine the degree to which the school is using the meal pattern to meet the nutrition standards.

Nutrition standards for school meals require that school lunches provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for protein, calcium, iron, vitamins A and C, and one-third of the Recommended Energy Intake (REI) for calories over a week's cycle of menus. School breakfasts must provide one-fourth of the RDA and REI. In addition, school meals must comply with the applicable recommendations of the most current Dietary Guidelines for Americans including limits on fat (30 percent of total calories) and saturated fat (less than 10 percent of total calories). Current nutrition research has established that over consumption of certain dietary components such as cholesterol, fat, and saturated fat can have severe consequences for future health and well-being. Therefore, USDA updated the nutrition standards to include compliance with the recommendations of the Dietary

Guidelines. This updating constitutes the first major overhaul of nutrition standards in the nearly 50 year existence of the National School Lunch Program. The school lunch program can be viewed as preventive health care for children.

Nutrient levels and portion requirements are based on grade levels. Older children need higher levels of nutrients and calories than younger children. Regardless of the menu pattern option chosen, all schools are required to meet the nutrient standards as listed in the nutrient charts on the next page.

The USDA School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children underscores our national health responsibility to provide school meals for children that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and current scientific nutritional recommendations.

If you desire to view Internet information on USDA's School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children, the URL is: <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001>.

## **Required Grade Nutrient Standards — Lunch**

### **Calorie and Nutrient Levels for School Lunch (school week averages)**

	<b>Preschool</b>	<b>Grades K-6</b>	<b>Grades 7-12</b>	<b>Option Grades K-3</b>
Energy Allowances (calories)	517	664	825	633
Total fat (g) <sup>3</sup>	17 <sup>1</sup>	22 <sup>1</sup>	28 <sup>1</sup>	21 <sup>1</sup>
Total saturated fat (g) <sup>3</sup>	6 <sup>2</sup>	7 <sup>2</sup>	9 <sup>2</sup>	7 <sup>2</sup>
Protein (g)	7	10	16	9
Calcium (mg)	267	286	400	267
Iron (mg)	3.3	3.5	4.5	3.3
Vitamin A (RE)	150	224	300	200
Vitamin C (mg)	14	15	18	15

<sup>1</sup>Total fat not to exceed 30 percent over a school week.

<sup>2</sup>Saturated fat not to exceed 10 percent over a school week.

<sup>3</sup>The grams of fat will vary depending on actual level of calories offered.

## **Required Grade Nutrient Standards — Breakfast**

### **Calorie and Nutrient Levels for School Breakfast (school week averages)**

	<b>Preschool</b>	<b>Grades K-12</b>	<b>Option Grades 7-12</b>
Energy Allowances (calories)	388	554	618
Total fat (g) <sup>3</sup>	13 <sup>1</sup>	18 <sup>1</sup>	21 <sup>1</sup>
Total saturated fat (g) <sup>3</sup>	4 <sup>2</sup>	6 <sup>2</sup>	7 <sup>2</sup>

Protein (g)	5	10	12
Calcium (mg)	200	257	300
Iron (mg)	2.5	3.0	3.4
Vitamin A (RE)	113	197	225
Vitamin C (mg)	11	13	14

<sup>1</sup>Total fat not to exceed 30 percent over a school week.

<sup>2</sup>Saturated fat not to exceed 10 percent over a school week.

<sup>3</sup>The grams of fat will vary depending on actual level of calories offered.

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***B-5, Meal Planning***

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