

**SNA Talking Points:
USDA Releases New School Meal Patterns
Wednesday, January 25, 2012**

On Wednesday, January 25th First Lady Michelle Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will announce USDA's new nutrition standards for school meals. The event will capture the interest of national and local reporters. School nutrition professionals may receive media inquiries about the new meal patterns and how their programs are working to meet the new requirements.

School Nutrition Association is still reviewing the details of the new meal pattern. School nutrition professionals asked to comment do not need to provide answers or specifics related to details immediately but we do encourage comment on positive areas we want to emphasize and efforts, particularly:

- offer more fruits and vegetables
- serve more whole grain-rich foods
- offer only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties
- make sure kids are getting proper portion sizes.

Below are suggested talking points to help school nutrition professionals respond to local media inquiries.

- We are still reviewing all the details of the new meal pattern, but our school district has already brought a variety of healthier choices to our school cafeterias that address goals in the new regulations. *Provide a few specific details demonstrating how your program is offering healthier choices. For example:*
 - We serve at least one fresh fruit and vegetables every day
 - We already made the switch to 1% or fat free milk
 - Our sandwiches are served on whole wheat bread
 - Our cafeterias have introduced lower sodium entrees
 - We offer salads every day
- After thorough review of the meal pattern, we'll begin building on the progress we've already made and plan our menus for next school year to reflect these new nutrition guidelines.
- We know it's critical that students accept and consume these healthier options. Our school nutrition staff has found great ways to get students excited about healthy food choices and we'll continue to work on creative solutions to ensure healthy foods appeal to students. *Provide specific examples of nutrition education initiatives, such as:*

- Our farm to school program is bringing fresh, local produce into the cafeteria and teaching students about what foods are grown in their communities
 - We have hired/partnered with a chef to introduce some exciting new healthy recipes on our menus
 - We host student taste tests to get feedback directly from students and get them involved in the menu planning process
 - Our harvest of the month program is introducing students to a new fruit or vegetable every month
 - We involved students and parents in getting recipe suggestions to reflect ethnic and regional favorite foods into our menus
 - We offer unlimited fresh fruits and vegetables to students
 - Students are offered free samples of fresh fruits and vegetables to encourage them to try something new
- We'll face some challenges to meet all the new requirements on a tight budget, but our school nutrition program will be working hard to make these healthy changes for our students. We hope parents will support this effort by encouraging their students to give the healthier meals a try.