

Today was the last meeting of the year for the North Alabama Dietetic Association. The speakers were the following smart, hard-working Registered Dietitians: Betsy Speer, RD, Brandi Tarvin, RD, Stephanie McMurray, RD, and Marty Tatar, RD. They educated us on the changes in the National School Lunch Program. Boy, school lunches sure have changed since I was a little girl...back in the Stone Ages. Read on and find out about the new hipster, healthy, hot lunch programs.



### **BETSY SPEER, RD from the Muscle Schools, AL School District Lunch Program**

Betsy provided a thorough overview of the new regulations for the National School Lunch Program. These changes were made due to the passage of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA), signed into law by President Obama in 2010. The last changes made in the School Lunch Program regulations were 15 years ago. Here are a few of the major changes:

1. Hurray! More fruits and vegetables are offered every day.
2. Every meal has minimum and maximum calories, based on the Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) for the age of the child.
3. By the end of 10 years, the sodium intake in the meals will meet the Institute of Medicine recommendations.
4. The meals will have reduced saturated fat and trans-fats will not be tolerated.
5. Milk must be fat-free or 1% milk.
6. The program must meet weekly requirements for subgroups of foods, such as dark green vegetables, red/orange fruits and vegetables, and legumes.
7. Water will be available as a free beverage.
8. Whole grains are on the menu more frequently.
9. The school lunch programs should buy locally whenever possible.
10. The school lunch program will help promote health of the children through a more health-conscious school environment and nutrition education activities.

Betsy loves the emphasis on good food and nutrition. The downside of the new regulations, according to Betsy, is that there has been an increase in plate waste. When the school tried to serve bread that was 100% whole grain, the children rebelled and refused to eat it. This fiber-filled bread ended up in the trash. Betsy and her team found a bread product that was 51% whole grain, which the children found more acceptable and less food was wasted. Betsy anticipates children will grow to like the foods and it is just a matter of frequent exposure to new foods. I agree.



### **BRANDI TARVIN, RD from the Boaz, AL School District Lunch Program**

All of the speakers mentioned that they are always working on marketing their program to increase participation. Ms. Tarvin shared fun ideas on her program promotions. Two principals participated in a pie-eating contest to attract students to the cafeteria for a school meal. Football reigns in Alabama. The parent of a Boaz school child was on the 1992 University of Alabama college football championship team. They made him available to sign autographs during National School Breakfast Week. Children headed to the school cafeteria in droves to eat and obtain his "John Hancock." Roll Tide Roll!

The School Lunch Program helps defeat hunger. Ms. Tarvin shared the sobering statistic that the percentage of children in her program receiving free/reduced priced meals went from 44 percent in 2005 to 63 percent in 2013, a 19 percent increase over the past five years. When school began last fall, she received sad, apologetic letters from parents when they applied for the program. "We never had to rely on government help before, but we are having hard financial times now," was a frequent theme in these notes. She also relayed a story that broke her heart about a little girl "who was so glad to be back at school so she could get something to eat." She closed her talk with a slide with cute kids eating in the school cafeteria. She summed up her feelings "Feeding kids makes me happy and makes all the hard work worthwhile!"



### **STEPHANIE MCMURRAY, RD from the Huntsville School District Lunch Program**

There was an innovation this year in the School Breakfast Program in Huntsville, AL. Title 1 schools are schools in which the majority of students come from low-income families. School Superintendent, Dr. Casey Wardynski "strongly suggested" that school breakfast should be served in the classroom in a number of the Title 1 schools in the "Rocket City." Ms. McMurray joked, "Well, if the School Superintendent tells you to do something, you do it." Even though meals in the classroom involved a little more work, there has been a huge benefit. Children help set-up and clean-up the meals in the

classroom. The math and reading scores have improved in these schools. Here is an added benefit for the teachers....the children behave better after having breakfast in the classroom!

Lastly, veteran Marty Tatara, of the Madison, AL School District Lunch Program provided her perspective. Marty has been working in this program for 24 years and serves on a number of school lunch committees. Madison, AL is an affluent school district, and only 19% of her school children are on free/reduced price lunches. In order for her program to survive, she has to convince high-income parents that her program offers "Good Value." There are 47 languages represented in the school district; the most common are Korean and Hindi. Vegetarian items are on the menu because of the large Indian population. Lots of tech-savvy engineers who work for NASA and various defense contractors reside here. As a result, she has a great computer program to analyze her school lunch menus. Did you know research has shown that if children serve themselves from a salad bar, they will eat more fruits and vegetables? It's true. With that fact in mind, all of the school cafeterias in Madison, AL have salad bars, chock-full of fresh fruits and vegetables. Cost? \$2.50. I want to eat at Marty's school lunch program. Sign me up!

**MARTY TATARA, RD from the Madison, AL School District Lunch Program**

