



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on October 4, 2012

## USDA Urges Parents to Use School Lunches as a Model For Family Meals

The federal government's new "healthy" school lunch program, which is now stirring controversy in public schools across the country, should act as a model for nutrition in the private home, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) said in a [blog post](#) October 1. Deflecting concerns about widespread cases of students trashing the government-sponsored healthy foods, the USDA emphasized the importance of students consuming (what *it* deems) a healthful portion of calories that will help keep them alert and energized throughout the school day.



While school lunches have gone through a significant transformation, the USDA explains, most schools have continued to serve the "old favorites." But instead of fried chicken nuggets, kids are now being served baked ones, and instead of fully-loaded pizza slices, schools are now serving pizzas with low-fat cheese and more vegetable toppings.

Further, the agency adds, schools may also allow students to choose only the foods they intend to consume, a concept the USDA brands as "offer vs. serve" (OVS). OVS provides kids with some flexibility in what they would like to eat, allowing them to decline one or two food items offered in their lunch meal. However, the agency notes, it's unhealthy for students to make a habit of avoiding unfamiliar fruits, vegetables, and other healthy food items:

That's why USDA is encouraging schools to get students involved in guiding and shaping the food selections offered by their school districts. Students across the country are participating in [taste testing sessions](#), providing feedback on meals to food service staff, and trying the new foods and recipes in the cafeteria every day....

Adapting to the changes may be challenging at first, as students are introduced to new flavors and foods in the cafeteria. But as you can see there are many ways to make the transition easier.

But instead of just preaching to the kids, the federal government is now honing in on parents, urging them to help make the controversial healthy-food transition flow more smoothly. "We know that many parents are already making changes at home to help the whole family eat healthier," Dr. Janey Thornton, deputy under secretary for food, nutrition, and consumer services, wrote in the blog post. "We recommend reviewing school menus with kids at home and working to incorporate foods that are being served at school into family meals as much as possible."

Naturally, the federal government's ambitious drive — headlined by none other than First Lady Michelle Obama — to "healthify" America's youth has met heavy resistance, and not just from the more ripened critics, but also from the students themselves. A recent [video](#) created by a group of high school students and teachers at Wallace County High School in Kansas parodied the Obama administration's



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rigid “war on obesity” program, featuring kids falling asleep during class and young athletes fainting from food deprivation.

The parody video, based on a hit song by the band “Fun,” showed zombie-eyed students staring grievously at their lunch trays, smuggling junk food into their lockers, and crawling on the floor in exhaustion. “There’s just not enough food,” [protested](#) Callahan Grund, a 16-year-old football player who was featured in the video. “When you have chores in the morning and football practice after school, you need energy. This doesn’t cut it.”

The controversy stems from a new federal policy funded by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 — the first major overhaul of school lunches in 15 years — that enacts calorie maximums for school lunches: 650 calories for elementary-schoolers, 700 for middle-schoolers, and 850 for high-schoolers. But critics in Kansas and other states argue that 850 calories is not nearly enough for many high school students, especially athletes who burn thousands of calories just during practice.

Brenda Kirkham, an arts and publications teacher at Wallace County High School, posted a photo of her lunch on Facebook, displaying a plate with some raw spinach, one bread stick, a tiny portion of marinara sauce, and three apple slices. Kirkham supplemented her lunch with foods from the salad bar, including bacon bits, dressing, and small cubes of ham, items that are available only to teachers. The photo sparked outrage from a number of critics, who protested the lack of protein in Ms. Kirkham’s meal.

“I asked why the sauce had no meat and I was informed that due to the breadsticks containing cheese, the meat would put us over the guidelines for protein,” Kirkham asserted. “Now think of a high school boy who works out at least three hours a day, not including farm work.... I’m furious. The ‘cheese’ inside the breadstick is approximately three bites. This is ridiculous.”



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