

## Schools Across the Nation Debut Smart Snacks in Schools

Beginning this school year, the School District of Pickens County along with school foodservice programs across the nation will offer kids a wider variety of healthy food options beyond the standard breakfast and lunch meal periods.

Schools are now required to conform to a new set of guidelines governing the food and beverages sold as snacks. The “Smart Snacks in Schools” nutrition standards took effect July 1, 2014.

The new standards promote whole grains, fruits and vegetables, leaner proteins and lower-fat dairy while limiting items containing too much sugar, salt and fats.

“The USDA has set healthier requirements for foods sold à la carte, in school stores, snack bars and vending machines to ensure that kids are only offered nutritious foods during the day. The goal is for those in education to be role models for students about eating healthy and living an active lifestyle. It is great when everyone is trying to be on the same page. Students will get the same nutritional message throughout the day.” said Sally Nicholson, RDN, LD, Director of Student Nutrition Services program for the School District of Pickens County.

The Smart Snacks in School standards also extend to school fundraisers and booster clubs held during school hours.

The new regulations are part of the “Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010” which established nutrition guidelines for food and beverages served in the reimbursable school meal program. The act set new standards for calories, fat and saturated fat, sodium and sugar contained in breakfast and lunch menu items.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that in 2012 more than one-third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese. In addition, childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents over the past 30 years, according to the CDC.

According to the new nutrition standards under the Smart Snacks in Schools, any food sold in schools must:

- Be a “whole grain-rich” grain product; or
- Have as the first ingredient a fruit, vegetable, dairy product or protein food; or
- Be a combination food containing at least a quarter cup of fruit and/or vegetables; or
- Contain 10 percent of the daily value of one of the nutrients of public health concern in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (calcium, potassium, vitamin D or dietary fiber).

Food items also must conform to several nutrient requirements under the Smart Snacks in Schools standards:

- Snack items must contain fewer than 200 calories per item;
- Snacks must contain less than 230 mg of sodium per item;
- All items must contain zero grams of trans fat per item;
- Total sugar must be no more than 35 percent by weight;
- Foods must contain 35 percent or less total calories from fat per item and no more than 10 percent total calories from saturated fat per item.

In cases where schools typically offered such items as chocolate sandwich cookies, donuts, fruit-flavored candies and regular cola before the regulations took effect, the new standards recommend replacing them with such items as peanuts, light popcorn, low-fat tortilla chips, reduced fat ice cream, granola bars, fruit cups and no-calorie-flavored water.

The new standards also allow schools to offer entrée items for sale in the à la carte line on the day they are served as part of the meal as well as the day after. The USDA says those entrées would be exempt from the nutrition standards on those days in order to send a consistent nutritional message about school meals. The exemption helps school foodservice operations better manage their programs and prevent waste from leftovers.

Beverages also fall under the new Smart Snack regulations. For example, schools may sell:

- Plain water, with or without carbonation;
- Unflavored low-fat milk;
- Unflavored or flavored fat-free milk and milk alternatives permitted by the National School Lunch Program/School Breakfast Program;
- 100-percent fruit or vegetable juice; and
- 100-percent fruit or vegetable juice diluted with water — with or without carbonation — and no added sweeteners.

Elementary schools are allowed to sell up to 8-ounce portions, while middle and high schools may sell up to 12-ounce portions of milk and juice. Only decaffeinated tea and coffee may be sold in middle schools.

The Smart Snack standards also state that high schools may sell “no calorie” and “lower calorie” beverage options. Options include no more than 20-ounce portions of calorie-free, flavored water, with or without carbonation; other flavored and/or carbonated beverages labeled to contain less than five calories per eight fluid ounces or less than 10 calories per 20 fluid ounces; and no more than 12-ounce portions of beverages with up to 40 calories per 8 fluid ounces or 60 calories per 12 fluid ounces.

To help food service programs determine whether a product meets the new USDA Smart Snacks guidelines, they are required to use the Alliance for a Healthier Generation calculator. The website for the calculator is below.

[https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/focus\\_areas/snacks\\_and\\_beverages/smart\\_snacks/alliance\\_product\\_calculator/](https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/focus_areas/snacks_and_beverages/smart_snacks/alliance_product_calculator/).

Many food companies have jumped on board by developing healthy snack items that are kid friendly, such as Granola bars, breakfast bars, a variety of whole grain crackers, Greek yogurt, low fat ice cream, whole grain cookies and cupcakes. Many of the new items have been kid tested and kid approved. “Snacking is not bad for a person. It is the type of snack and the amount of snack that can make a difference. By offering healthy snacks throughout the school day, children will learn about ways to eat healthy and that can pay dividends in the long life ahead of them. The goals are to involve students along the way as they are the ultimate customer, to educate students about the important role that the right snacks can play in helping fuel their bodies whether it is to give them energy for sports or to help them concentrate in the classroom, and to educate the school community about the new standards.” Nicholson said.