Minnesota Department of
Education

DATE: September 11, 2012

TO: Superintendents

FROM: Deb Lukkonen, Supervisor
School Nutrition Programs
Safety, Health and Nutrition Division

School's back in session and as you all know, the school nutrition programs have faced the biggest change in the past 20 years with the new menu requirements. We've heard from some schools that high school students are having the most difficult time with the changes. Other schools are weathering the changes with little or no reaction from the students.

Healthy changes take a school-wide effort. That's why we are reaching out to you to encourage you to support your food service staff in their quest to make school menus healthier, prepare food that tastes good, and show that it is a real value for parents.

Meeting the new meal standards will mean more money from USDA!
Starting this October, schools will receive an additional 6 cents for each school lunch meeting the new standards – which can really add up. In all likelihood, your school nutrition staffs are aware of the mandated meal pattern changes *and* the menu certification documentation that is required to receive the additional 6 cents. However, there are several ways you can support the food service staff.

1. **Labor Hours**. Food service staff need to attend training in order to fully understand the new meal requirements and to prepare for the menu certification process. In addition, the process of menu certification with MDE is not necessarily difficult, but it can be intimidating. Staff may be requesting additional help or labor time – and justly so – to prepare the report documents. *Please give serious consideration to their request for additional labor hours to complete these tasks. This is a task for this school year only and will not have to be completed in subsequent years.*
2. The **menu certification** documentation must be submitted electronically to MDE. Does your school food service staff have the proper tools to complete the task? This would include access to computer and Excel software. If not, these issues must be addressed.
3. Does the food service staff have the **computer expertise** or "know-how" to use a computer and manipulate an Excel program? If not, staff will need some IT assistance or computer training. Data entry and minimal navigational skills are necessary.
4. Menu certification documents can be **submitted anytime during the 2012-2013 school year**. But the 6¢ additional reimbursement takes effect the month of the one-week menu that is served/planned for students, providing that the submitted documentation is complete and validated. We are offering a variety of training opportunities throughout the state this fall and winter. It is essential that staff attend training if they haven't done so already.

Understanding and supporting the changes
On the MDE website, we have a great "parent letter" template to help schools explain the new changes and their benefits. You can download a copy titled "HHFKA Parent Letter" via this link: http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/SchSup/FNS/HHFKA/index.html

In addition, USDA has a newly developed tool kit "The School Day Just Got Better" that highlights available resources related to the new meal changes for administrators, students, parents, school staff, and principals. This toolkit can be downloaded from the link: http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/healthierschoolday/default.htm

Upcoming training and technical assistance
School food service staff can receive free training throughout this school year from MDE staff. Our next training sessions are planned for September and October as listed below. We hope to see all of our schools in Minnesota represented. If your school nutrition staff needs additional help or technical assistance, *please give us a call!* We have several different training modules, and we want all schools to be meeting requirements plus receiving the maximum in reimbursement. The MDE Food and Nutrition Service can be reached at 651-582-8526 or toll free 800-366-8922 if you have additional questions.

I look forward to working with you to make Minnesota school nutrition programs the best in the nation!

Training Schedule

Date	Location	Time	Topic	Registration Link
Sept 17	MDE	2:00-5:00 **Caterer's Only**	6¢ Menu Cert	http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6JQNJ9W
Sept 26	Marshall	All day	1. Menu Planning Basics 2. 6¢ Menu Cert	*Space is limited; registration restricted* Shareen Neumann 507-537-2279
Oct 3	Stewartville SW/West Central Service Coop	2:30-5:30	6¢ Menu Cert	http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/56HS23K
Oct 11	MDE	2:00-5:00	6¢ Menu Cert	http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/56ZNGYP
Oct 19	Duluth	1. 8:30-11:30 2. 1:00-4:00	1. Menu Planning Basics 2. 6¢ Menu Cert	1. http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5Z7MD3Q 2. http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5ZK6JSJ
Oct 25	MDE	2:00-5:00	6¢ Menu Cert	http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5ZKVKCQ