

# Cafeteria Plan

**By Reg P. Wydeven  
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Every school night, I pack a bologna sandwich, pineapple chunks, Jello and a juice box in my son's Incredible Hulk lunch bag. Because of his severe food allergies, we have to be pretty careful with what he eats. We're very lucky, however, because his school has a special table in the lunch room where no peanut butter is allowed so he can eat without worry.

As I pack his lunch, my daughter and I check out the menu for the next day's hot lunch. Some nights I pack the same lunch for her, but with a ham and cheese sandwich. However, with choices like tacos, hamburgers, chicken nuggets, corn dogs and pizza dippers (her favorite), many days she opts for hot lunch.

When I went to the same school 30 years ago, the pizza they served at hot lunch came in square slices and tasted like carpeting. And every Friday they served a 'mystery' casserole that we highly suspected consisted of the leftovers from the earlier part of the week mixed in with elbow macaroni.

Today, our kids have way more choices for lunch, and they all are delicious. With the help of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they'll hopefully be a lot healthier, too.

Earlier this month, the USDA issued a proposed rule to update the nutrition standards for meals served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. The new standards are part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 13, 2010.

President Obama created the Childhood Obesity Task Force to provide healthier food at schools. Likewise, First Lady Michelle Obama started the 'Let's Move!' initiative that aims to solve the problem of childhood obesity within a generation. The Obamas felt drastic change was needed in light of recent government statistics pertaining to childhood obesity. According to the data, almost 32 percent of children 6 to 19 years old are overweight or obese, which has tripled in the last few decades. Unfortunately, with obesity comes a higher risk of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes.

According to the USDA, nearly 32 million children participate in school meal programs each school day. The new proposed meal requirements will make critical changes to these kids' meals by improving their health and nutrition. The new changes raise school meal standards for the first time in fifteen years.

The changes are based on recommendations made by the National Academies' Institute of Medicine contained in its report, 'School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children,' released in October of 2009. The proposal calls for more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free and low-fat milk, while limiting levels of saturated fat, sodium, calories, and trans fats in meals.

In addition to calling for healthier meals, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act also increases school lunch reimbursements by 6 cents per meal, and increases technical assistance for schools.

The USDA is seeking input on the proposed rule from the public. Interested citizens can review the proposal and offer comments through April 13, 2011, at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), a web-based portal designed to make participating in the Federal rulemaking process user-friendly for citizens. The USDA assures reviewers that all comments received will be taken into consideration prior to implementing the rule.

My comment would be, "Where was all this awesome food when I was a kid?!"