

**By Carolyn Lee**

**The Imperial Republican**

When students returned to Chase County Schools on Wednesday, they likely noticed several changes in the school lunch program.

Parents will see the changes reflected in their lunch bills, as well.

School Supt. Dr. Brad Schoeppey said, "I want parents to understand there are going to be changes. These are not made by the school district but by the federal government, and we have to follow the regulations."

If the regulations aren't followed, the school won't be reimbursed. Dr. Schoeppey said one third of the school lunch budget comes from the federal government.

"If we lose that we'll have to charge people more," he noted.

Last year, the school's lunch program was reimbursed with \$80,000 by the federal government. "The frustrating thing for me is that we are supposed to solve the world's obesity problem" with these changes, he continued. He said Chase County youths are generally in good shape.

"You don't see a lot of kids eating fast food because there's not a lot of fast food available. Also, we have active kids here involved in a lot of activities, sports, farming. So we get punished because of what other kids in cities are doing," he said

Cindy Brunkhorst, cafeteria manager, said healthy new choices will be provided to meet the tough new federal nutrition standards, ensuring that meals are healthy, well balanced and provide students all the nutrition they need to succeed at school.

School meals offer students milk, fruits and vegetables, proteins and grains, and they must meet strict limits for saturated fat and portion size.

Starting this fall, school lunches will meet additional standards requiring age-appropriate calorie limits; larger servings of vegetables and fruits (students must take at least one serving of produce); a wider variety of vegetables; fat-free or one-percent milk; more whole grains and less sodium.

The salad bar will now be called the fruit and vegetable bar, with no meats, pudding or potato salad.

Brunkhorst said she is planning to let students know she will have pre-shredded cheese, eggs and meat so that they can make a chef salad.

Food such as pudding, macaroni salad and potato salad will be sold as extras and will vary day-to-day, Brunkhorst said.

The new lunch program requires all students to have three-fourths to one cup of vegetables plus one-half to one cup of fruit per day.

"If they don't have it on their plates we don't get reimbursed for the meal," Brunkhorst said.

It calls for grades K-8 to have one ounce of meat per day; and grades 9-12 to have two ounces of meat per day.

As far as grains, grades K-8 must have one ounce per day, while grades 9-12 must have two ounces per day. At least half of the grains must be whole grain rich. By 2014, all grains must be whole grain rich.

Students must have one cup of fat-free or one percent milk per day.

Students will be charged for second helpings of anything.

Dr. Schoeppey pointed out that the federal guidelines provide "strict limits on a student's calorie count for the week, but kids can go back for seconds." It doesn't make sense.

Providing fresh fruits and vegetables here during the winter will be expensive, he stated. That can affect the school budget.

“This didn’t happen overnight,” Brunkhorst noted. “It’s been in the works for the last four years.”

“This is the most drastic changes made in 30 years,” she said. “You can’t put corn on the menu the same day as mashed potatoes and gravy because they’re in the same category. It’s getting challenging coming up with different menus.”

Brunkhorst stated, “We need parents to understand it’s affecting every school in the U.S. Cafeteria managers are pulling our hair out.

“A lot of it makes no sense. It’s sad,” she said.

### **Free, reduced lunch program**

The Nebraska Department of Education’s Nutrition Services office has announced the income eligibility guidelines for free and reduced price meals for persons unable to pay the full price of meals served under the National School Lunch, Breakfast, Special Milk and Child and Adult Care Food Programs.

Participating schools, child care and adult care centers have a copy of the policy, which may be reviewed by any interested party.

The following household size and income criteria will be used for determining eligibility.

Participants from families whose income is at or below the levels are eligible for free or reduced price meals:

A household of one, annual income \$14,521; two, \$19,669; three, \$24,817; four, \$29,965; five, 35,113; six, \$40,261; seven, \$45,409; eight, \$50,557. For each additional family member add \$5,148.