



By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

With all of the federally mandated changes to the public school lunch program, things have been a little hectic at Chase County Schools for the first month of school.

Changes in the program, initiated by First Lady Michelle Obama, included larger portions of fruits and vegetables, new calorie counts for different age groups, more whole grains, fat-free or one-percent milk only, and less desserts.

Despite the strict calorie count, students are able to go back for seconds or side dishes that aren't offered with the entree. However, they are charged extra.

School Superintendent Brad Schoeppey said "Overall the kids have not complained about the food. A lot like the additional fruits and vegetables on the (fruit and vegetable) bar. They may be mumbling somewhere else."

Dr. Schoeppey laughed that he misses salt when he eats in the cafeteria, because salt is no longer placed on tables. "The teachers make good comments about the selection and choices compared to the past," he noted.

Cafeteria Manager Cindy Brunkhorst said "I think it's going very well. Our count is picking up," referring to the number of students eating at school.

She said lots of parents have come to eat at school. While there have been some complaints about what is or isn't offered, those are in the minority.

Brunkhorst said "We listen to the kids all we can. If they don't like something we say 'Write a letter to Mrs. Obama,'" laughing.



She noted that cookies are whole wheat now. Beans, which are required, are added to things like Cowboy Salsa, which got rave reviews, or garbanzo beans in the fruit and vegetable bar.

"That way we don't have to do pork and beans so often" to meet requirements, she said.

Old favorites like tater tot casserole and fajitas have been revived. Brunkhorst said she is also in contact with other schools to share ideas and to poll students about food opinions.

School Nurse Angie Paisley said "I love it. I think it's wonderful" concerning the new program. She pointed to the whole grain taco on a student's plate.

At some schools parents have complained that the requirement for more fruits and vegetables leaves their children hungry.

Paisley said "If they eat a good breakfast they should have no problem." In addition, students may go back for extras or seconds of other foods, she added.

Students in junior and high school have the choice of the entree of the day, sandwiches and salads, to which they can add toppings.

School Secretary Sherri Wheeler, who takes lunch count, said of the 267 students in grades

7-12, about 158 on average eat at school. A lot of the high school students eat off campus.

“The counts are low but beginning to come back, she said. “Personally, I think the kids who love fruits and vegetables, they’re loving it (the new program). It can be an adjustment for the kids who didn’t have fruits and vegetables in their home food plan.”

A new computer was purchased to record the purchases students make for lunch. There was trouble with the software at first, so initial sales records are not available.

Dr. Schoeppey said “This week it finally matched the count with the kitchen.”

For instance, a younger child will give his or her number to the person recording the meals. The person then touches the computer screen at the place marked “elementary lunch.”

If a child goes back for another serving, the person takes the number and touches “\$1.00.”

Last Friday, Carrie Terryberry sat across from son Carson as he consumed a chicken taco and fruit. Although she said she hadn’t paid too much attention to the new program, she said Carson enjoyed it, as he has always liked fruit.