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The Imperial Republican

Although the Department of Agriculture has decided to allow for more grains and meat in school meals, local officials say they won't see any changes in the Chase County Schools program.

The new school meal requirements stem from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2012. This legislation gave the USDA the authority to set nutritional standards for all food regularly sold in schools, including cafeterias, school stores and vending machines.

CCS Superintendent Dr. Brad Schoeppey said the recent changes may allow more meat and grains in the required school lunches, "But they didn't raise the amount of calories you can have. If you added more meat and grains, you would have to give up something else" to maintain the calorie limit.

Cafeteria Manager Cindy Brunkhorst said the changes don't affect CCS "Because they didn't change the calories and until they do that everything is the same."

The new requirements took effect at the beginning of this school year, when school lunches had to include more whole grains, more types and amounts of fruits and vegetables, and less fat.

U.S. Congressman Adrian Smith said the changes are a step in the right direction, "However, parents and local officials will need additional flexibility to implement the school lunch program to effectively meet their budgets and the nutritional requirements of their students. These decisions need to be made at the local level."

Smith said the school lunch legislation failed to adequately consider budget limitations faced by school lunch providers and provided no credit to schools already taking steps to offer students healthier choices.

In a letter Smith sent to the USDA in September, he asked the department "to review the current guidelines; to consider abandoning the bureaucratic and burdensome approach to school meal planning; for local officials to be given more flexibility in implementing the guidelines; and for the USDA to conduct a thorough evaluation of cost and participation rates across the country."