

Dear Colleague

I just wanted to give you an up-date on the nutrient-based standards following a swathe of media coverage this week about whether the standards can be met and what this means with respect to choice within secondary schools.

Firstly, let me reassure you the standards can and have been met and you can find example menus on our website:

www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/stacker2.asp?ContentId=643.

We are continuing to add compliant menus to the website, all the time, as our pilots run their course. And in LACA's recent survey of its own membership, 35% were confident that they would be compliant with the nutrient-based standards in secondary schools by September and a further 49% thought they might be compliant.

We know the standards are challenging and thus we are delighted that so many caterers and local authorities are making such good progress. For those who still need support, we stand ready and willing to assist, wherever possible.

One of the things that was widely reported this week was that the only way to meet the standard for iron was by putting spinach and liver on every menu. Whilst many of us might find this a dish of delight, we know it may not be the average teenager's lunch of choice. So again, let me reassure you the menus on our website are offal free!

Whilst I am dispelling myths, let me try to bust a few others:

- ✘ **Myth: The nutrient based standards restrict choice** – Not true. There is plenty of choice available in menus that meet the nutrient-based standards. Even meal deal menus generally offer a range of different meal deals. But by making only healthier choices available, it means children are much more likely to eat a balanced lunch as well as bringing variety into their diet.
- ✘ **Myth: The nutrient-based standards will increase costs** – Not true. Our pilots showed that most cost increases came with the introduction of food based standards – as caterers introduced better ingredients and more cooking from scratch. Analysing the menus and recipes does require nutritional software or expertise but this work can be done together across a number of schools with similar provision and the School Lunch Grant can be used to support the costs.
For more information see:
http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/stacker_detail.asp?ContentId=668 for more information
- ✘ **Myth: The nutrient-based standards will mean job losses** – Not true. The support that has been given to schools to improve food should mean that they can increase take up. Increased take up should ensure that jobs are retained. Schools and caterers have a virtually guaranteed customer base – provided they market it well - and initiatives such as the Million Meals campaign can help. Many high street caterers would envy having such a captive audience.

- ✘ **Myth: This is all the caterers fault** – Not true. Caterers cannot help pupils to eat better without support from schools and parents. Schools have a vital role to play in helping to engage pupils, teachers and parents.
- ✘ **Myth: The food-based standards alone should be enough** – Not true. Food-based standards are good for making sure that pupils get daily servings of fruit and vegetables, or not too much deep-fried food. But nutrient-based standards provide a much better way to limit the total amount of fat, sugar and salt in the food on offer and can ensure that there is enough iron and calcium in an average lunch to meet pupils' needs.
- ✘ **Myth: Nutrient-based standards mean that we have to give children liver and spinach to make sure they get enough iron** – Absolutely not true! Every caterer knows that few children like liver, so we do not see it on the menu, but a spinach and ricotta pasta dish could be (and goes down a treat). Good sources of iron include red meat, eggs, canned fish, dark green vegetables - like broccoli and green beans - nuts, seeds, dried fruit, and treacle (as in treacle sponge pudding!).
- ✘ **Myth: Nutrient based standards are too difficult to implement.** – Not true. Caterers are likely to need professional support from a nutritionist or dietitian to help evaluate their menus for compliance with the nutrient-based standards. But, it is common practice in modern life to take advice from experts.
- ✘ **Myth: Nutrient based standards mean that we will lose customers and drive children onto the high street** – Not true. It is not the menu that turns children away – it is the environment, queues and whether or not the food is tasty and nicely presented. All these lie in the control of the school and the caterer.

Over the next few weeks we will continue working to clarify any existing confusion about the standards. If you would like more information do go to our website where you will find a wealth of data about the standards and how they can be met. If you think there are other myths we need to bust do let me know. Please feel free to share these myth-busters with colleagues – maybe you can use them in a school newsletter?

Most of all, we want to help you reassure parents and pupils that school food is of high quality and good value for money.

Yours sincerely,

Judy Hargadon

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