

Illini Central School Board Update

October '24

Jennifer Harrison, Director of Food Services

1.) Meal Participation - Continues to increase year after year! I am proud to share that the number of students who are eating school breakfast in our school district is more now than ever before! However, at only 32% participation district wide, there are many students not taking advantage of our free school breakfast. Participation breakdown by building is: GS- 42%, HS-18%, MS- 34%.

This year my focus is on our HS and MS breakfast program and to expand on key areas by using different strategies and techniques for example:

- Encourage Breakfast After the Bell for our tardy students, and promote the Grab and Go option for our HS and MS students.
- Keep breakfast at the forefront. I keep it fresh and new and change it up by adding new items regularly targeting our middle and high school students.
 - I added two new grab n go entrees- strawberry banana or peach yogurt-based smoothies and a giant cereal bar- combined with one other item will qualify for a free reimbursable breakfast.
 - The new hot entrees added for these grades are Biscuit with Sausage Gravy, homemade Apple Cinnamon Cake, and a new brand of Breakfast Bagels
- Seek feedback from our students. If they like it, we keep it.
- Promote School Breakfast Week

What can we do collectively to help ensure that every student has the opportunity to eat a good breakfast every school morning?

- Consistently implement the Breakfast after the Bell Mandate at all grade levels.
- Promote Grab n Go for students on-the go
- Outreach Techniques- using school website, social media, posters, announcements,

The chart shows meal participation (claimed) for August and September over the last 3 years, post covid full service.

(*September 2024 reflects a decrease due to field trips - approximately 200 meals)

AUG	2022	2023	2024
Breakfast	1120	1734	2224
Lunch	3996	4952	5594

SEPT	2022	2023	2024
Breakfast	2749	3461	3699
Lunch	7963	8402	8217*

2.) A School Breakfast Expansion grant was awarded to the district in the amount of \$10,000 to purchase a new convection oven for the kitchen. This oven replaces one that is unrepairable. This project is anticipated to be completed by the end of October.

3.) LFS Funds - Local Foods for Schools funds. Our district is currently participating in the USDA's Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS). These are funds available to all schools that opt-in and operate under the NSLP and SBP

- **Program Goal:** To increase purchases from local producers, small businesses, and socially disadvantaged farmers/ producers in order to build a more resilient local food chain by expanding and strengthening local and regional markets.
- **District Benefit:** This program provides to us \$3,500.00 towards the purchase of unprocessed or minimally processed foods that are locally grown and are from local producers for the distribution to schools. Our district has utilized these funds by receiving chicken and pork from 4 Lees Farms located in Virginia, Illinois.

4.) Food Establishment Inspection - Our inspection on September 3, 2024 showed a 100% compliance with positive comments noted by the inspector. A copy of the latest detailed inspection is posted by the kitchen entrance.

I would also like to add that since the start of the school year, I have been approached by several visitors to the building who have complimented on how clean the kitchen is. One service technician said "it's the cleanest kitchen I have ever worked in." Thank you to my kitchen staff for taking pride in our school, it is noticed!

5.) USDA Commodity PAL Factor increase- The final Pal factor for school year 2024-25 was released by USDA in July and is \$0.45, which is an increase from the initial estimated PAL factor of \$0.36 used during the Annual Order Period in February 2024.

- **The PAL Factor** is multiplied by the lunch meal counts (NSLP, SBP, and Summer SSO) from the prior school year which would be 2022/23.
- **What does this mean for our district?** A significant increase of \$6,018.66 to our Pal dollar allotment to be used in ICS toward USDA commodities.

6.) National School Lunch Week is Oct. 14-18. The theme this year is "Lunch Pirates: Find Your Treasure". This week we are excited to introduce some new "treasures" to the menu :

The hunt to seek out their favorite treasured lunch will have our pirates starting off in South Asia choosing between the popular Mandarin Orange or General Tso chicken, then voyaging back to the US for a touch of southern flair with some down home Chicken and Dumplings, before heading off to the good ol' midwest of the US for a bowl of our famous homemade Chili or the irresistible Classic Corn Dog. Lastly, the pirates will end their hunt on the final day with the treasured Mexican favorite, the Fiestada Pizza - Ole'

- **New - the Homemade Chicken and Dumplings** - A hearty version of our chicken and Noodles, made with mini dumplings, chicken, mixed vegetables in a savory soup base
- **New - the Mandarin Chicken / General Tso Chicken/ Teriyaki Chicken** with Fried Brown Rice - Tested last spring with 5-Star raves, students at all grade levels voiced to make it a permanent part of our school menu. It is planned to be menued every couple of months.

Other new lunch items added recently are the Spicy Chicken Patty sandwich and Grilled Lemon Pepper Chicken sandwich.

7.) School Districts to Pay Delivery Fees of Government Commodities for SY24/25.

For the past 5 years ISBE has paid these fees. This year the cost has been passed to the school districts. Delivery rates have increased steadily to now \$7.04/case (+.34/case from last year). A rebate from ISBE for a portion of these fees is possible, once the school year is complete, but is not certain until the end of the year.

8.) The USDA 2024 Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) final Ruling: Known as *CNP Meal Pattern Guidelines for Americans* - Every few years the USDA updates school nutrition standards in order to continue to provide kids nutritious meals. In April 2024, USDA published the final rule. Parts of the new guidelines will be implemented beginning the 25/26 school year. I have highlighted a few of the changes below. More information can be found here [Final Rule](#)

- **Sugar** - Currently, there is no limit on added sugars in the school meal programs.

The Final rule is a two-phase approach for limiting added sugars in the school lunch and breakfast programs.

1) **Product-based limits:** Beginning in school year (SY) 2025-26,:

- a) **Breakfast cereals** - limited to no more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.
- b) **Yogurts** - limited to no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (or 2 grams per ounce).
- c) **Flavored milk** - limited to no more than 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces. For flavored milk sold outside of the meal for MS and HS students the limit is 15 grams of added sugars per 12 fluid ounces.

2) **Weekly dietary limits:** Added sugars to be less than 10% of total weekly calories in school lunch and breakfast, to be implemented by sy27/28.

- **Milk** - Currently, schools may also offer fat-free and/or low-fat (1%), flavored and unflavored, as part of a reimbursable school lunch and breakfast.

The Final rule allows for the current standard in milk, which allows all schools to offer fat-free and low-fat, flavored and unflavored, at school lunch and breakfast.

Added sugars in flavored milk would be limited to no more than 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces, al a carte milk for MS and HS students is limited to no more than 15 grams of added sugars per 12 fluid ounces.

- **Sodium** - The current sodium limits (Target 1 for breakfast and Target 1A for lunch) will remain the same until July 2027.

The Final rule allows for a gradual reduction of sodium over three years. By sy2028, schools will implement a 15% reduction for lunch and 10% reduction for breakfast from current sodium levels. Limitations apply to the average of a weekly menu, not per meal, per item, or per day.