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Chairman Harkin, Senator Chambliss, Members of the Committee and other guests, thank you for giving me the opportunity to tell you about the Knoxville Community School District's experience with the HealthierUS School Challenge. Knoxville's elementary schools, East, West, and Northstar each have received the HealthierUS School Challenge Gold Award. I am Connie Boldt, MS, the food service director for the Knoxville Community Schools in Knoxville, Iowa. Knoxville is located in south central Iowa with a population of approximately 10,000. The school district has 5 buildings and serves about 1,600 lunches daily.

The Knoxville Community School District, supported by the board of education and administration, promotes healthy lifestyles for students, staff and families. This includes good nutrition, regular physical activity and wellness education. The Knoxville district feels this is a part of the total learning environment and will contribute to academic achievement as well as positive lifestyles. Serving healthy meals that students will eat isn't the easiest thing to do. It requires money and time, but the benefits for classroom achievement and healthy lifestyles are more than enough reason to make the effort.

When mandated, the district developed a wellness policy by convening a committee with strong convictions to improve student's lifestyle. The policy developed by the wellness committee addressed many areas

- nutrition education
- physical education
- support for parents' efforts toward healthy lifestyles
- staff health and wellness
- National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs
- Competitive foods

Written into the wellness policy were specific requirements for all food in all grades Kindergarten through 12th, including a la carte, breakfast and lunch, sold by the Food Service Program. The wellness committees' requirements for school meals included, but were not limited to:

1. offer a variety of fruits and vegetables, with an emphasis on fresh and
2. serve whole grains whenever possible, with at least half being whole grain by 2008-2009.

Even though I was a member of the committee, as the Food Service Director, I was concerned that these requirements were challenging and too vague. I was also concerned about the overall cost to the program and how I was going to do this.

The wellness policy went into effect for the 2006-2007 school year. Implementation of the wellness requirements was phased in. We started by adding one fresh fruit or vegetable to every lunch menu. The fresh items were in addition to the current hot vegetable and canned fruit

or occasional fresh produce. We started with the most common fruits and vegetables, like apples, oranges, carrots, and lettuce. Popularity of the fresh foods increased over time, which was evident because I had to purchase more produce every week. We have now increased the variety and include more seasonal produce, such as melons, kiwi, green peppers, cucumbers, and celery. The addition of fresh fruits and vegetables was welcomed by our kids. In some cases, we had to identify foods for students. The staff often encourages them to try something that is new and whenever possible we try to follow up to get their feedback. For example, one elementary boy asked what a kiwi was. The foodservice employee, Carmilla, explained that it was a green fruit with black spots and brown fuzzy skin that will tickle when you eat it. Carmilla suggested the student try one section to see if he would like it. He tried it.

During our Schools Meals Initiative review in December 2006, our Department of Education consultant, Jane Hiekenen introduced me to the HealthierUS School Challenge. This certification program recognizes elementary schools that take a leadership role in helping students learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices. Given our district's commitment to health and nutrition, we decided to go for the gold certification. This would help ensure the health of our students. To achieve the gold standards a number of criteria must be met, including:

- School lunches that demonstrate healthy menu planning practices and principles of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*
- Nutrition education activities in at least two grades
- Physical activity opportunities at every grade level
- Student Average Daily Participation of 70% or greater
- Competitive foods could not be sold on the elementary campus during the school day

The HealthierUS School Challenge guidelines appeared to be the missing link to clarify our Wellness policy. So in early 2007, we started working toward the guidelines by testing whole-grain recipes that our bakery could make and investigating whole-grain products to purchase. First, we had to understand what 51% whole-grain meant. Jane came to our rescue. She supplied definitions and examples of recipe modifications that would increase whole grain. Secondly, we modified our current school made hot roll, bun, banana cake, sunshine bar, apple crisp, and brownie recipes to include more whole grain. These changes were well accepted. I have had no negative comments by the kids. During the past two years, we also found that we must handle the whole-grain product differently. These products do not have a long shelf life and quickly become stale. Thus, we have encountered more waste and increased costs if not monitored carefully. However, the cookies were a different story. They were just not acceptable. In fact, Mr. Crawford, the High School principal still jokes about the whole-grain cookies. Since we only need one whole-grain product daily, we opted to keep the original cookie recipes and find another sources for the menus. By the start of the 2007-2008 school year, we were able to offer at least one whole-grain product on every menu. In fact, our whole-grain hot roll is such a hit that we sell them by the dozen for weddings and family gatherings through our catering department.

Another learning experience was to read and interpret labels of products to purchase, such as pasta, breaded meat entrees, commercially baked sliced bread, flour, and rice. Since I purchase these items, it was my responsibility to investigate and find acceptable whole-grain

products. I am now the district's self-proclaimed chief label reader and spend many hours with the fine print. It is very detailed work and takes considerable time.

Starting in the Fall of 2007 we looked at increasing legume menu items. In other words, we serve more beans! We now offer baked beans, refried beans, kidney beans in chili, and commodity pinto beans in taco meat at least once a week. We had low expectations for student consumption, yet we were pleasantly surprised. We started with about 5% of the customers eating legumes. We now have about 15 to 20% choosing legumes. In addition, we have made other minor tweaks to our 6 week cycle menu to meet all HealthierUS School Challenge criteria.

While Food Service was working on foods served, the principals and elementary teachers worked on the physical and nutrition education requirements. I was pleased to learn that Knoxville Community Schools met the requirements without modifications. This was not just a food service project and everything had to fit together.

The final criterion to be met was 70% average daily participation. In October 2007, the Knoxville elementary average daily participation was over 81% for all elementary schools.

We did it! In July 2008 we learned we had achieved the Gold Award. Now the District is proud to publicize our accomplishment of implementing our Wellness policy that promotes quality meals, a healthy school environment, and positive lifestyles.

Even though we have a Gold Award, we continually look for new ways to incorporate foods that support the HealthierUS School Challenge into our menus, curriculum, and daily life activities of our students. However, increased food costs and the new 2009 criteria will make reapplying for the HealthierUS School Challenge more difficult in the future.

In fact, the implementation of the HealthierUS School Challenge criteria came with an increased cost to our school meals programs.

- Flour cost increased 12% for whole wheat and 53% for whole grain more than all purpose flour
- Whole-grain pasta costs 76% more than enriched pasta
- Brown rice costs 20% more than white rice
- Whole-grain, low-fat corn dog costs 22% more than the traditional corn dog
- Whole-grain, commercially-prepared bread costs 20% more than enriched white bread

In addition, not only has the cost of fruits and vegetables increased with more fresh items, the labor to prepare has also increased. I now figure about an additional 10 to 20 cents per serving for fruits and vegetables.

I do have one concern about the relevance of the average daily participation requirement for the HealthierUS School Challenge. If our goal is to serve healthy food to students, should it matter what portion of the student population is eating on a daily basis? It is much easier for schools with a higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price meals to meet the 70% participation rate than for school with less than 20% eligibility.

Finally, the banner in the hallway is great. The plaque in the school office is impressive. But Knoxville schools didn't pursue this for the plaque or banner we did it for the sake of the kids. I am proud of what the Knoxville elementary schools have accomplished.

But as I said before, serving healthy food is not without a cost. My budget is suffering!

Please help us implement this great opportunity to serve children nutritious foods in more schools throughout the nation by supplementing reimbursement. It costs more money to prepare and serve the meals than what Knoxville Schools receives in reimbursement. I support SNA's request for an additional 35 cents per meal for all lunches served and 20 cents for all breakfasts served. In addition, I think HealthierUS Challenge Schools should receive additional money to support their commitment to fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the Knoxville Community School District's experience with the HealthierUS School Challenge. It made a difference!