



“I love getting salad bar! I add different stuff every time! I think tomorrow I will add tomatoes and cucumbers in mine!” Jordan, age 7.



The 21st Century School Cafeteria: NYC and Healthy School Lunches

By Andrea Ventura

When I think of school lunch I imagine the lunch lady at my elementary school throwing mystery meat inside a stale roll and calling it a sloppy joe. I think of overcooked, mushy vegetables, and red delicious apples being my only fruit option. The children of New York City will never know what students of the past went through, as they are privileged to have the biggest, and possibly the best, school lunch program in the whole country. The best part is that every student is welcome to take advantage of all the wonderful programs that are offered.

Healthy Breakfast

It is a lot easier for children to focus in school after eating a healthy breakfast. To ensure every child has a delicious start to every morning, the NYC school district offers free breakfast to every single student. There are several options too: a full breakfast is offered early before classes begin; grab and go items, such as muffins and fruit, are available in designated areas throughout schools to be brought into the classroom; and the Breakfast in the Classroom program make it easy for any student to get a good start to their day.

Lunch Options

On the district website there are forms that can be downloaded to apply for free or reduced cost lunches. For all those who do not qualify, lunch costs \$1.75. There are several menu options, including a hot and cold menu, a vegetarian menu, and even a special pureed menu for students with disabilities. Every Thursday is called “New York Thursday,” and everything served is locally sourced right in New York State. In addition to the various hot and cold availabilities, there are staple offerings daily, such as PB&J sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, and fresh fruit. On Mondays and Fridays the “Grab and Go” item offered is hummus with pretzels.

Health Conscious Schools

The NYC school district is so committed to offer every child a healthy school lunch that they have implemented many healthy options into the breakfast and lunch menus. While all public schools in the country are bound by the USDA Nutrition Standards for School Meals, the NYC school district exceeds the standards at every level. One of the most popular options, which is currently offered in over 1,000 of NYC’s schools, is a daily salad bar. The popularity of salad bar is based on the fact that the children are in control of the healthy options they put on their lunch tray. NYC takes health consciousness even further by implementing a list of ingredients banned from being added to any food items. Banned ingredients include preservatives such as BHT, BHA, and sodium nitrite; flavor enhancers such as MSG; artificial colors or flavors; and artificial sweeteners. The amount of thought that goes into feeding the children of NYC is tremendous.

More information about school food in NYC can be found at: <http://www.schoolfoodnyc.org/>