

Good eats: Newmarket school gets bronze award

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NEWMARKET — Turkey hot dogs, oven-roasted chicken and homemade pizza are standard fare in the Newmarket Elementary School cafeteria, one of four schools in the state to win an award in the HealthierUS School Challenge.

The program, under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has two key components — healthier meals for students and physical education. Schools had to commit to both for four years in order to receive the award. Newmarket won a bronze.

"I thought we were very close to meeting the requirements already," said food services director Linda Hopey. "Evelyn Hart (nutrition specialist) at New England Dairy and Food Council thought we should try for it. She said a lot of the components were already there, thanks to the efforts of (school nurse) Diane Beach and (physical education teacher) Nancy Miller."

While some other schools are scrambling to catch up with the new USDA requirements, according to Hopey, the Newmarket school district is ahead of the game.

"We went to whole grains about four years ago, long before it was mandated," Hopey said. "We aren't playing catch-up; we're used to it."

There are a few new guidelines that the school has to meet. Hopey talked about setting up the menus every week, making sure that all the requirements are met — legumes, leafy green vegetables, minimums for fruits and vegetables, as well as calorie count.

Hopey credits her predecessor, Linda Dodds, with getting the innovations started. Hopey took over as director last September.

"Linda had a pretty good start for us here," Hopey said. "She was heading in the right direction."

The willingness of students to try new foods impresses her.

"A lot of it is repetition," Hopey said. "They keep eating it, so they get used to it, such as the whole grains. ...; I've had kids choose the split pea soup over the French toast sticks, which amazed me."

She's added turkey hot dogs to the menu, so students have a choice between pork and turkey. And in November she plans to add a soup and sandwich offering. Students will pick out their sandwiches in the morning, a slip will be sent to the cafeteria, and their custom sandwiches will be waiting for them at lunch. The program is already in place at the middle/high school and is quite successful, Hopey said.

According to the HealthierUS School Challenge Web site (www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html), NES "works hard to make changes to their school nutrition environment in order to (1) improve the quality of the foods served, (2) provide students with nutrition education, and (3) provide students with physical education and opportunities for physical activity."

First-year principal Tom Higginbotham said he was proud when told of the bronze award for NES.

"It's a huge reflection of the work Linda has done," Higginbotham said. "I've worked with other people in other districts in that job, and I see Linda has the skills and the passion to make it work. Some are happy with the status quo, or just following the new guidelines. But Linda is not ordinary in her thinking. She's innovative and passionate. She makes things happen."

NES will receive \$500, which according to Hopey could cover the cost of produce for one week for the district. The school's lunch program, like many schools, is not taxpayer funded. Most of the revenue comes from lunch

dues.

Other New Hampshire schools that have won the award include Lincoln Street School and Main Street School in Exeter (Bronze award); Dr. Norman W. Crisp Elementary School in Nashua (Silver award) and John Stark Regional High School in Weare (Bronze award).

FAVS VS. FLOPS

NEWMARKET - Second-graders at Newmarket Elementary School took a break from lunch to talk about what they like and don't like in the cafeteria:

Amy Benson

Favorite lunch:

Pizza

Least favorite:

Tuna salad

Nick Blacker

Favorite lunch: Mozzarella sticks, "I really like the cheese."

Least favorite: Fish

Lexus Golden

Favorite lunch:

Pizza

Least favorite:

Tuna fish

Morgan Marvin-Cline

Favorite lunch:

Pizza

Least favorite:

Tuna fish

Jackson O'Connor

Favorite lunch:

Pizza

Least favorite: Mozzarella sticks

Elijah York

Favorite lunch: Chicken patty

Least favorite:

Hot dogs