Introduction and Background

The School Meals Initiative

Since 1995, the **School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children (SMI)** has helped foodservice directors and staff offer healthier school meals, promote nutrition education, and create school nutrition environments that support healthy lifestyle behaviors. SMI underscores national responsibility to ensure that school meals address children's health and nutrition needs. It establishes a framework to plan and evaluate school meals using **nutrition standards**, the nutritional requirements based on Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs), appropriate calorie levels, and goals outlined in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans.*

USDA School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children Nutrition Standards

- Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA)

  1/4 RDA for appropriate age/grade group for breakfast for *protein, calcium, iron, vitamins A and C*

  1/3 RDA for appropriate age/grade group for lunch for *protein, calcium, iron, vitamins A and C*

- Recommended Energy Allowances *(calories)*

  Appropriate for age/grade group

- *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* [1,2]

  Eat a variety of foods

  Limit *total fat* to $\leq$ 30% of calories

  Limit *saturated fat* to < 10% of calories

  Choose a diet low in *cholesterol*

  Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits

  Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium

[1] The *Dietary Guidelines* recommends that after 2 years of age, children should gradually adopt a diet that, by about 5 years of age, contains no more than 30 percent of calories from fat.

[2] Refer to 7 CFR 210 and 220 to determine version of *Dietary Guidelines* used in the regulations.

Menu Planning Approaches—A Review

Schools can choose from five menu planning options to plan and offer meals that meet the nutrition standards.

Two food-based approaches:

- **Traditional Food-Based Menu Planning,** and
- **Enhanced Food-Based Menu Planning.**

Schools using food-based approaches may choose to analyze menus to determine compliance with nutrient standards; however, they are not required to do so. The State agency will conduct a nutrient analysis of the selected school during the SMI review.

Two nutrient-based approaches:

- **Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP)** and
- **Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (ANSMP).**

Schools using NSMP or ANSMP must conduct nutrient analyses to plan school meals that meet the nutrition standards for the appropriate age/grade group.

The fifth menu planning approach is called:

- **Alternate Menu Planning,** also known as "Any Reasonable Approach."

Within the guidelines established for developing alternate menu planning approaches, School Food Authorities (SFA) or State agencies (SA) may modify one of the established menu planning approaches, or they may develop their own menu planning approach. The alternate menu planning approach must be available in writing for review and monitoring purposes.

Guidance on the menu planning approaches is available in *A Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals* and *The Road to SMI Success: A Guide for Local School Foodservice Directors.*