USD 500 Kansas City

USD 500 Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools annually hosts a "Taste of 500" food tasting fair. The event allows students to sample food items from a number of food service brokers, and then provide feedback on the taste and quality. Student representatives from grades 2-11 were invited to participate. Parents of students and district administrators were also in attendance to taste food products. The food items presented were evaluated using a simple scoring technique. Positive responses are considered for upcoming school menus.

"We consider it a privilege and honor to be the largest food chain in Wyandotte County serving, on average, 11,000 breakfast meals and approximately 16,225 lunch meals each school day," said Karla Robinson, director of Nutritional Services.

This school year, new nutrition guidelines set by the USDA required school meals to take on a new look. Some of the requirements phased in include boosting the offering of whole grain-rich foods, decreasing sodium, providing zero trans fat products, and ensuring that students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day.

KCKPS' Nutritional Services Department has been ahead of the process of instituting the new nutrition requirements for several years, according to Robinson. All schools already offered skim or low-fat milk, along with a variety of fruits and vegetables of many colors, plus additional whole grains. In addition to these USDA requirements, Robinson instituted a "Farm to School" program, incorporating fresh, farm-grown produce into school meals. And to accommodate middle and high school students who prefer vegetarian choices, she added menu items such as veggie burgers, hummus wraps and vegetarian soup.

"We try very hard to offer appealing and healthy choices that will meet as many of our students' dietary needs and desires as possible, within guidelines, budget and practicality," Robinson said. "We are already discussing and planning for next year with more improvements, and the implementation of new products and menu items, including more made-from-scratch items that will be appealing to our customers, the students of this district."

This school year, KCKPS also started a Breakfast in the Classroom program in 15 of its schools. The free program provides breakfast to students in their first hour classroom. While all KCKPS schools serve breakfast, studies have shown that not all students take advantage of it because they don't arrive in time to eat, or they don't always make the effort to get to the cafeteria before school. Taste of 500 will featured some of the new breakfast products used for Breakfast in the Classroom and trained chefs did cooking demos of possible new menu items for school meals.