

## National School Lunch Week Promotes Healthy School Meals

Beauregard Parish will recognize National School Lunch Week on October 15-19, 2018, to celebrate the benefits of the National School Lunch Program feeding over 30 million school children each day. The week is sponsored annually by the School Nutrition Association. This year the theme is: School Lunch – Lots 2 Love.

National School Lunch Week emphasizes the healthy foods that are offered daily in school cafeterias across the country. School nutrition guidelines require that fruits and vegetables are served with more whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat dairy.

“School lunches are healthier than ever, with more nutritious foods that help provide the fuel that students need to sustain them through the school day,” said Terrie Smith, School Food Services Director. “National School Lunch Week is a time for us to educate our students and community about the benefits of our school lunch program.”

A typical workday for School Food Service technicians begins at 6:00 a.m.. They cook breakfast and begin lunch items, serve breakfast, clean up, and continue cooking and preparations for serving lunch. Each day, the eleven cafeterias in Beauregard Parish schools serve 1,500 breakfasts and 3,200 lunches.

There has been a trend in the food-service sector to move school lunches toward pre-packaged meals, explained Smith. However, in Beauregard Parish, School Food Service staff still prepares meals in house.

“Most of our daily menu items are cooked from scratch each day,” said Smith. “Our cafeteria staff takes pride in what they prepare and serve to our students and staff each day.”

USDA research shows that students who participate in school lunch programs have better nutritional intake than those who do not. Eating healthy meals at school correlates with higher test scores and lower absenteeism, according to some reports.

“Studies show that healthy eating habits are foundational to helping students prepare to take on the rigors of the school day,” explained Smith. “Students who eat well-balanced breakfasts and lunches are more productive in class because they are better able to concentrate on their work.”

The federally-funded National School Lunch Program provides nutritionally balanced, healthy meals to students each school day. The program, which has been serving the nation’s children for over 50 years, requires schools to meet federal nutritional standards that promote better general health for students. Students who are educated about better eating habits and who practice those habits are more likely to continue well-balanced eating habits into their futures.

“The School Food Service program in Beauregard Parish is a vital part of the school day,” concluded Smith. “The program strives to meet both the nutritional and educational needs of our students by serving healthy breakfasts and lunches.”

