NEW MEAL PRICES

	Current	New
Breakfast/ brunch	$.75	$1.00
K-6 lunch	$1.45	$1.75
7-12 lunch	$1.75	$2.20
A la carte	$.75	$.90
Adult	$2.25	$3.00
Milk	$.30	$.40

The estimated increase in revenue is expected to generate $42,000 yearly.

Students, parents will also see changes in meal offerings

Increases in lunch prices, ranging from 10 to 45 cents, may seem hefty but school officials say they have no choice.

Because District 20 is part of the National School Lunch program, and receives federal funds, the school must offer the same level of support for paid student lunches as it does for food served to students who get free- or reduced-priced meals.

As a result, District school board members raised prices (see chart) at their meeting Monday night.

Before the action, food services director Joni Jacobsen said the government doesn't want schools to rely totally on federal reimbursements to fund free- and reduced-priced meals.

The magic meal price federal officials would like to see schools work toward, for reimbursable lunches, is $2.51. New lunch prices for Gothenburg students are still below that cost.

However $2.77 is what each meal should cost with the labor involved, federal officials say.

Superintendent Dr. Mike Teahon said the district will increase prices gradually to meet the requirement.

Prices below SWC schools

Teahon told board members that local meal prices are dramatically below what other schools in the Southwest Conference charge.

District 20 high-school meals are 55 cents below the SWC average and 40 cents below the next lowest school, middle school meals are 51 cents below the average and elementary prices are 67 cents below the average and 50 cents below the lowest school price.

Adult meals and breakfast are also substantially lower.

“And none of these schools offer more than two entree choices for lunch,” Teahon pointed out.

Locally, four entrees and a fruit and salad bar are provided daily.

He noted that the lunch program has operated in the red for the past four years.

Increases in lunch program expenses this year will be around $37,000, Teahon said, with the lion’s share paying for food (about $20,000) and milk (about $11,000).

As a result, the district will have to transfer about $20,000 to the lunch fund before the end the fiscal year.

“Hindsight being what it is, we probably should have bumped prices more this past year,” Teahon said.

Meal pattern changes

As part of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, Jacobsen and the food service staff must also change portion sizes and tweak other parts of the school lunch program.

What likely will be most visible to students and the public will be changes in the deli line, she said.

Meat and meat alternate offerings, such as cheese or beans, must be limited each week so sandwiches offered in the line will have to be premade.

In the past, students could make their own sandwich and use about as much meat as they wanted.

Also, Jacobsen said components of a mandated healthy meal, such as a fruit or vegetable, must be plated with an entree for students K-1 whether they are eaten or not.

More whole grains must also be available.

More planning required

The changes, which Jacobsen described as more detail oriented, will involve more staff hours and more planning and measuring.

She said food service personnel will have to keep a watchful eye on student trays to ensure that correct components and portions are plated.

“But there are always going to be choices when it comes to fruit and vegetables,” Jacobsen

explained. “They are always encouraged to eat those.”

Board members were concerned that students are offered enough to eat.

It may cost more, she said, if they take a second meal or a la carte item but unlimited fruit and vegetables are available.

Jacobsen said she thinks the changes will be good for kids because they promote good eating habits.

“Lots of fruit, veggies and grains,” Jacobsen said.

During an interview before the meeting, she recalled a high schooler who chose a tray of lasagna and french bread and carried a carton of milk in a coat pocket.

To make sure he had enough food to fill him up for the day, Jacobsen said he made a beeline for the deli bar and loaded it up with salad and fruit.

“He decided what he needed to do to be full,” she said.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636