

Students adjusting to more healthy school lunches

By Sarah Handel, NPR

This fall, the more than 38 million kids who get their lunches through the National School Lunch Program are seeing big changes on their trays.

Generally, “it’s more fruits, more vegetables, more whole grains, low-fat, no-fat dairy,” Jessica Donze Black of the Pew Trust’s Kids’ Safe and Healthful Foods Project told Talk of the Nation host Neal Conan on Thursday. “The things we know kids need more of.”

Federal guidelines governing what and how much kids are served are being phased in gradually over three years, starting this year. But the new kinds of food – more salad, less 26-ingredient mystery burgers and fried spuds – coupled with the perception that costs are up and calories are down, is making for a bit of a rocky transition.

Chef Ann Cooper, also known as the Renegade Lunch Lady, is the food director for the Boulder Valley School District in Colorado. Cooper started out in food service as a “white-tablecloth sort of semi-celebrity chef,” but now she celebrates her work as a lunch lady, she tells Conan.

She was changing up school menus before the law required healthier choices. Her menus are full of “all kinds of great things ... [such as] chicken pot pie ... ribs, and ... chicken quesadillas,” and everything’s made from scratch.

Cooper says it wasn’t always easy to get kids excited about healthier foods. First, in Berkeley, California and then in Boulder, “I said, ‘We’re getting rid of all the trans-fats and high-fructose corn syrup and no more chocolate milk, no French

fries, no tater tots, no chicken nuggets.'” There was pushback initially, she says, but eventually the kids came around.

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