March 2020 Newsletter

March can sometimes be the busiest month of the year, with Spring Break coming up, and the final quarter of the school year upon us. Daylight Savings Time will take effect on March 8, Spring Break is March 16-20, and all college basketball fans are looking for the March Madness tip-off starting with Selection Sunday on the 15th all the way through the championship game on April 6. Don't forget we're all Irish on St. Patrick's Day on the 17th, and the first day of Spring is March 19th!

National School Breakfast Week 2020

March 2nd through the 6th was National School Breakfast Week, a time to get excited about all the benefits of eating breakfast at school every day! Studies have shown a correlation between good nutrition first thing in the morning and an improvement in student alertness, test scores, and behavior throughout the day.

Muskogee Public Schools is proud to provide a free, nutritious, and delicious breakfast for every student, every school day. Our talented CNS staff presents a great selection of student favorites each morning, like Chicken & Waffles, Scrambled Eggs with Sausage, Pancake on a Stick, Hot Ham & Cheese Croissants, Rougher Muffin made with egg, Canadian bacon and cheese, and one of our elementary students’ newest favorites, homemade Breakfast Pizza. Whole grain cereals are offered daily, along with fruit, milk and juice.

Our cafeterias celebrated Dr. Seuss' Birthday on March 2 by serving our traditional Green Eggs & Ham for breakfast. Check MPS’ social media accounts and web pages for photos and info about Dr. Seuss’ breakfast, along with other fun events that were held throughout the week!

Technique of the Month

This month, let's talk about getting kids interested in healthy eating.

Kids and Healthy Eating

Getting kids interested in cooking and healthy eating sometimes feels like a losing battle. You don't need to hold your own MasterChef Junior sessions to whet their appetite for the culinary arts, so let's explore some simple techniques to get those creative minds and hands working together and improve their diets at the same time!

Spring Break week is an opportunity to introduce your kids to cooking and preparing meals and snacks, and learning to make good choices when selecting foods. For those of you staying home during Spring Break, share the kitchen work with your kids. Let them select and wash fruits and vegetables, and do some simple, age-appropriate food preparation like using a peeler on potatoes or carrots, slicing fruits or vegetables, or building a sandwich. Use this time to explain where these foods come from, and let them do some tasting along the way.
If you are not comfortable having your child use a sharp metal knife, there are some good plastic knives on the market that are safer to handle, and won't cut through their fingers like a steel edge. Look for a knife marketed as a “lettuce knife” or you can get everything from an inexpensive knife set and cutting board all the way up to a complete kitchen tool set for smaller hands from Amazon or other online sources.

Traveling as a family is also a great opportunity to share your knowledge of healthy meal choices. Your kids do notice what you eat, and will often copy your food choices, so take every opportunity to be a poster child for healthy eating!

Pack some nutritious snacks such as sandwiches made with whole wheat breads, trail mix, baby carrots and grape tomatoes, graham crackers, fresh fruits, cheese sticks, whole grain crackers, oatmeal or granola bars, and baked chips to take in the car or on the plane.

Try to make some lighter choices when you stop at a restaurant. Choose higher protein, lower fat items like an Egg McMuffin, scrambled egg platter, oatmeal with fruit, or Chicken & Waffles for breakfast. Ask if you can get a side salad instead of fries when you get a sandwich or burger at lunch, and choose grilled, roasted or baked items instead of deep fried foods at dinner.

Vacation time is often the time to splurge, and there are lots of fun foods available everywhere. Just walk through your favorite theme park and catch the aroma of fresh, hot funnel cakes and churros, homemade candies, ice cream and gelato, and deep fried deliciousness of all kinds.

This is a great chance to teach your children about making food choices without making them feel guilty. Approach it from the point of “there are no good foods or bad foods, only foods!” An emphasis on categorizing some foods as “bad” often leads to feelings of guilt and shame for enjoying them. Take the viewpoint that foods are meant to be used as fuel to power your body, so an occasional higher fat or calorie treat isn't going to be too bad for them, as long as they balance it with choices lower in fat, sugars, sodium, or carbs. For instance, let them enjoy corn dogs and curly fries or a box of hot mini-donuts, but guide them towards a more healthy meal of lean protein, a salad or veggies, whole grain breads or baked potato, and a fruit cup for dinner.

**Recipes of the Month**

This month, we're going all over the place with our recipes. I've included 3 for kids (*Note: Steps marked with an asterisk* might need some grown-up help), and a couple of St. Patrick’s Day favorites.

**Lunch on a Stick**

Yield: 8 to 10 “sticks”

½ lb. deli meat - ham, turkey, or salami, cut into strips*
4 sticks String Cheese, cut into 1” pieces*
2 or 3 large leaves red or green lettuce
4 slices bread, cut into 1” pieces*
8-10 cherry tomatoes
Mayonnaise, Ranch dressing, or mustard for dipping
Toothpicks as needed

Roll up sliced deli meat and cut it into 1” wide strips. Cut the string cheese into 1” pieces. Tear the lettuce into bite-sized pieces.
Thread the toothpicks with the bread, meat, cheese, lettuce, and cherry tomatoes as desired. Make patterns or alternate the colors on different picks for fun. Serve with mayo, Ranch dressing, or mustard for dipping.

Alternate ideas for Lunch on a Stick:
- Use fresh mozzarella mini-sized balls in place of string cheese
- Use fresh mozzarella, cherry tomatoes, strip of salami and basil leaves for an Italian version
- Add grapes and strawberries to cheese and lettuce for a fruit & cheese pick
- Use any fresh vegetable, such as cucumber, bell pepper, fresh squash cut into cubes
- Substitute cubed cheese like cheddar, Swiss, Monterey Jack, or gouda

**Family-Sized Cobb Salad**
Yield: 6 to 8 servings

1 head Romaine lettuce, washed and chopped into 1” pieces*  
**OR** 1 large bag cut Romaine salad mix  
2 pints cherry tomatoes, washed and cut into quarters*  
4 hard cooked eggs, peeled and cut into pieces*  
12 ounces chicken breast, cooked and diced*  
4 ounces crumbled Blue cheese or Monterey/Pepper Jack cheese, cut into ½” cubes*  
8 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled*  
Optional: 2 medium avocados, cut into ½” dice*, sprinkled with lemon juice

On a platter or large plate, lay out the chopped Romaine. Top with strips of crumbled, cooked bacon, chopped hard-cooked eggs, cubed chicken, cherry tomato pieces, avocados, and cheese. Serve with your favorite dressing. You can toss the salad, but leaving in rows makes a prettier salad.

**Easy Crockpot Fruity Dessert Bake**
Yield: 12 servings

2 (21-oz.) cans of your favorite fruit pie filling (cherry, apple, blueberry, etc.)  
1 box (15.25 oz) yellow cake mix  
1 stick (½ cup) butter or margarine, melted in microwave*  
Pinch of cinnamon and nutmeg  
Nonstick pan spray to coat

Give your 3 to 5 quart sized crockpot a generous spray of nonstick cooking spray, Open the cans of pie filling and pour into the bottom of the crockpot.

Pour dry cake mix into a bowl and add the cinnamon and nutmeg, stirring to blend. Drizzle in the melted butter or margarine, and stir the mixture well with a fork or wooden spoon. The cake mix will still appear to be crumbly, but that's what you want!

Spread the cake mixture evenly on top of the pie filling, making sure to cover all the way to the edge. Cover, and turn the crockpot on LOW setting for 4 hours, or HIGH setting for 2 hours. Serve warm or cooled. This is delicious served warm with some vanilla ice cream!!
NOTE: You can add ½ cup finely chopped pecans* to cake mix crumble mixture, if desired.
Now let's switch gears to St. Patrick's Day offerings. What can be more traditional than a dish of corned beef and cabbage, and I've also included one of my favorite “green” desserts, a chocolate mint parfait.

**Corned Beef and Cabbage**
Serves 6

3 to 3 ½ lb. corned beef brisket with spice packet  
1 large onion, peeled and quartered  
4 large carrots, peeled and cut into 1” pieces  
12 small red potatoes, washed  
1 large head cabbage, cored and cut into 12 wedges  
Ground black pepper to taste

Soak corned beef in a bowl of cool water for 30 minutes to remove excess salt. Place corned beef into a dutch oven or heavy stockpot and cover with cold water. Add spice packet to water. Cover tightly and bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer. Simmer beef for about 50 minutes per lb., or until tender, making sure to check liquid and adding if needed.

Add potatoes, onion, and carrot pieces to pot. Cover and cook until vegetables are nearly tender. Uncover and add cabbage wedges. Sprinkle vegetables with black pepper to taste (optional). Cover and cook for approximately 15 more minutes, or until cabbage can be easily pierced with a sharp knife. Remove pot from heat, and allow to stand, covered, another 15 minutes.

Remove vegetables to a serving platter. Remove corned beef to cutting board, and slice against the grain with a carving knife. Arrange on platter, and serve.

Here's an easy version made in your slow cooker. This takes a lot of time to finish, so allow 8 hours cooking time before serving!

**Slow Cooker Corned Beef and Cabbage**
Serves 8

3 ½ to 4 lb. corned beef brisket with spice packet, soaked & drained  
1 large onion, peeled and cut into bite sized pieces  
4 large carrots, peeled and cut into ½” sticks  
10 medium red potatoes, halved  
5 cups water  
½ head cabbage, coarsely chopped

Place onion, carrots and potatoes in bottom of a slow cooker. Place corned beef brisket on top of vegetables and add water. Sprinkle on the spice packet, cover, and turn cooker to HIGH.

Cook brisket on high for 7 hours. Stir in chopped cabbage and continue to cook another hour. Slice corned beef thinly across the grain and serve with vegetables.

**Minty Green Parfait**
Makes 8

1 ½ cups chopped Oreo cookies, plus extra whole cookies for garnish  
8 Andes chocolate mints, chopped, plus 8 extra for garnish  
2 - 3.9 oz. packages chocolate flavor instant pudding  
4 cups cold milk  
2 cups thawed Cool Whip topping or whipped cream  
½ to 1 tsp. Mint flavoring  
Green food coloring
Combine chopped Oreos and Andes. Set aside.

Prepare chocolate pudding mix as instructed on box. Let stand 5 minutes.

Fold mint flavoring and green food coloring as desired into Cool Whip. Set aside.

In 8 small glass bowls or goblets, layer chocolate pudding, Cool Whip, and top with Oreo-Andes crumble. Repeat layers. Garnish with an Oreo cookie and unwrapped Andes mint. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend.

Note: if you want to be daring, you can substitute some green Creme de Menthe for the mint flavoring and green food color!