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Lexington School District 3 Wins Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Award from USDA and Action for Healthy Kids

Batesburg-Leesville, SC, May 31, 2024—Lexington School District 3 received a Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Award for improving the nutritional quality of their school meals. Awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) in collaboration with Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), Lexington School District 3 received the Small and/or Rural SFA Lunch Trailblazer Award for their work over the past year. The SFA has significantly reduced sodium levels in school lunches by implementing several strategies, including sourcing lower sodium products, finding substitutions for canned vegetables, promoting fresh, locally sourced vegetables, and using natural flavor substitutes. These efforts have reduced the average daily sodium intake per meal across four schools from 1067.03mg to 1012.97mg, demonstrating a strong commitment to enhancing meal nutritional quality for students. Lunch Trailblazer Award winners improved the nutrition quality of school lunches by meeting weekly sodium guidelines and implementing student engagement and/or nutrition education.

“We congratulate Lexington School District 3 and their Child Nutrition team on this important achievement,” said Rob Bisceglie, Executive Officer & President for Action for Healthy Kids. “The HMI Recognition Awards are an opportunity to showcase innovative school nutrition practices that provide children with access to nutritious school meals,” he added.

“One of America’s best opportunities to improve child health is by supporting schools in providing tasty and nutritious meals,” said Cindy Long, administrator of USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service. “This Recognition Award highlights the remarkable achievements Lexington School District 3 has made in offering nutritious meals that students enjoy, and we look forward to them sharing their best practices to help other schools follow in their footsteps.” Long added that each school day, USDA school meal programs reach around 30 million children from all communities and backgrounds across the country.

“We are incredibly honored to receive the Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Award,” said Todd A. Bedenbaugh, Chief Operations Officer for Lexington School District 3. “This award is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our staff who are committed to providing our students with nutritious, delicious meals every day. It means a great deal to us to see our efforts recognized on a national level, and it inspires us to continue innovating and improving our meal programs. Our students’ health and

well-being are at the forefront of everything we do, and we are proud to contribute to their success both in and out of the classroom."

As an award recipient, Lexington School District 3 will receive national and local recognition and travel stipends to attend a national Healthy Meals Summit in Las Vegas, NV. The HMI Recognition Awards are open to all school districts, and more information can be found at www.healthymealsincentives.org/recognition-awards/.

AFHK is recognizing school districts that have made improvements to the nutritional quality of their school meals as part of a cooperative agreement to develop and implement the USDA FNS's Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative. The Recognition Awards spotlight innovative practices, student and community engagement activities, and strategies schools have used to provide meals that are consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Healthy school meals are an essential part of the school environment and a proven tool for improving a child's health, growth, development, and educational outcomes. AFHK and USDA are committed to working together to strengthen school meals and investment in a bright future for our children.

About USDA's Food and Nutrition Service

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service works to end hunger and improve food and nutrition security through a suite of 16 nutrition assistance programs, such as the school breakfast and lunch programs, WIC and SNAP. Together, these programs serve 1 in 4 Americans over the course of a year, promoting consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable food essential to optimal health and well-being. FNS also provides science-based nutrition recommendations through the co-development of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. FNS's report, "Leveraging the White House Conference to Promote and Elevate Nutrition Security: The Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service," highlights ways the agency will support the Biden-Harris Administration's National Strategy, released in conjunction with the historic White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in September 2022. To learn more about FNS, visit www.fns.usda.gov and follow [@USDANutrition](https://twitter.com/USDANutrition).

About Action for Healthy Kids

Action for Healthy Kids is dedicated to improving children's health and well-being by bringing together and mobilizing educators, families, and other key stakeholders to help children lead healthy lives. Through its core programming and family-school partnerships, Action for Healthy Kids has impacted more than 20 million children in 55,000 schools nationwide to address systemic challenges in underserved communities. In 2023, AFHK joined in a cooperative agreement with USDA Food and Nutrition to help implement the Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative, designed to improve the nutritional quality of school meals through food systems transformation, school food authority recognition, and technical assistance. To learn more about its growing network of volunteers and champions, visit: actionforhealthykids.org.