

# **USDA's *Healthier US School Challenge*** ***Recognizing Nutrition Excellence in Schools***

## ***Healthier US School Challenge***

The goal of the HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSCC) is to improve the health of the Nation's children by promoting healthier school environments. To help meet the goal, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS- <http://www.fns.usda.gov/>) identifies schools that have made changes to:

- ▶ Improve the quality of the foods served
- ▶ Provide students with Nutrition Education
- ▶ Provide students with physical education and opportunities for physical activity.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) believes that schools should be taking a leadership role in helping students learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices. Many schools have already made changes to their school nutrition environments, improved the quality of the foods served, and now provide students with more nutritious, healthy choices. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) wants to encourage schools to achieve such results, and has established the Healthier US School Challenge to encourage schools to go further and to recognize those who chose to do so.

## ***Healthier US Schools***

Healthier US Schools can be certified as Bronze, Silver, Gold or Gold with Distinction schools, according to standards established by FNS. The objective is to recognize schools that take specific steps to improve their programs and to encourage other schools to follow their lead. Ultimately, FNS would like to see all schools take the challenge!

**Click the following link for National Award Winners in Mississippi:**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/huscc/healthierus-school-challenge-mississippi-award-winners>

USDA's *HealthierUS* School Challenge website provides the application packet and other information to assist applicants.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/huscc/healthierus-school-challenge>

## **How Does It Work?**

Schools must meet a basic set of criteria. To become certified, a school must:

- ▶ Be enrolled as a Team Nutrition School.
- ▶ Participate in the School Breakfast Program *and* National School Lunch Program.
- ▶ Provide students with nutrition education, physical education (PE) and opportunities for physical activity (PA).
- ▶ Maintain required levels of Average Daily Participation (ADP) in School Breakfast Program:
  - no required ADP for Bronze level
  - elementary and middle schools: 20% for Silver and 35% for Gold and Gold of

- Distinction
  - high schools: 15% for Silver and 25% for Gold and Gold of Distinction
- ▶ Maintain required levels of Average Daily Participation (ADP) in National School Lunch Program:
  - No required ADP for Bronze level
  - Elementary and middle schools: 60% for Silver and 75% for Gold and Gold of Distinction
  - High schools: 45% for Silver and 65% for Gold and Gold of Distinction
- ▶ Meet or exceed HUSSC menu criteria established for nutrition standards for meals and competitive foods and beverages
- ▶ Meet criteria in "Other Criteria for Excellence" category by selecting from 14 options relating to program outreach, physical activity, nutrition education, and school and community involvement in wellness efforts. The number of options a school must accomplish varies by award level, ranging from two at the bronze level to eight at the Gold Award of Distinction level.

### **Application**

FNS has developed application packets that detail criteria that must be met for the four award level designations. The application packets request specific information to verify a school's adherence to the criteria. The school's completed application packet must be evaluated by a local review panel, and endorsed by the school's leadership, including its principal.

[USDA FNS website for the HealthierUS School Challenge Application.](#)

[Mississippi Recipes for Success \(MRS\)](#) was created by the Office of Child Nutrition to help schools with meeting the *HealthierUS* School Challenge.

### **Take the Challenge!**

- ▶ Review the criteria and instructions, and other resources, to assist you in completing your application
- ▶ Download the application packet
- ▶ Convene a review panel
- ▶ Complete the review
- ▶ Obtain the required approvals and signatures
- ▶ Submit the completed application packet to Office of Child Nutrition, MDE as explained under Submission Procedure
- ▶ Certification as a Healthier US School is for 4 years, from the date of approval. The Office of Child Nutrition is here to help throughout the entire application process!
- ▶ Contact Peggy James, [peggy.c.james@gmail.com](mailto:peggy.c.james@gmail.com) phone – (601)520-4858 or April Catchings, [acatchings@mde.k12.ms.us](mailto:acatchings@mde.k12.ms.us) phone - (601)576-4981 for more information.
- ▶ Peggy James is the official **“Field Contact Person”** for the Office of Child Nutrition. She is available to work directly with a School District wishing to apply.

## **Submission Procedure**

The school's completed application packet should be sent to: Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Child Nutrition, P.O. Box 771, Jackson, MS 39205-0771. Child Nutrition will evaluate and forward the application packet to the USDA FNS Regional Office.

## **Recognition**

FNS will review all completed applications and award schools that successfully meet the Challenge with an appropriate recognition plaque. In addition, the recognized schools will be listed on the Team Nutrition Web site, may be chosen to be a part of special FNS media events and may receive other awards that promote and support the principles of the Challenge.

Ultimately, FNS would like to see all schools receive a HUSSC award at any one of the four levels of superior performance: Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Gold Award of Distinction.

**Schools awarded will receive monetary incentives from the Funding Table below:**

<b>Award Level</b>	<b>Federal Funds</b>	<b>State Funds</b>	<b>Total Award</b>
Bronze	\$500	\$1,500	\$2,000
Silver	\$1,000	\$3,000	\$4,000
Gold	\$1,500	\$4,500	\$6,000
Gold Distinction	\$2,000	\$6,000	\$8,000

*Plus an award plaque signed by a USDA official, a banner to display in their school, and their name listed on the Team Nutrition Web site.*

*Mississippi State Legislature fully endorsed the Healthier US School Challenge with the passage of House Bill No. 1078*