

## NutriStudents K-12® Helps Grow Participation by 40%

Crystal Vang, foodservice director of Minneapolis K-12 charter school Prairie Seeds Academy, was among the school foodservice directors who struggled with student participation in lunch after the implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2012. The school had just over 500 of its 790 students participating in lunch each day.

“The students complained about the food quality and limited choices of our lunches,” Vang said. “More and more kids quit eating lunch, and those who did wasted so much food. It was just thrown away because they didn’t like it.”

This occurred, despite her and her staff spending countless hours developing and refining menus and recipes, complying with reporting requirements, and generally following the USDA regulations.

Vang’s situation is a familiar to many foodservice directors. In fact, the USDA reports that more than 1 million students stopped purchasing school lunches when the new nutritional guidelines were enacted. Some districts opted out of the NSLP altogether. The School Nutrition Association reported that school cafeterias wasted nearly \$4 million in fruits and vegetables each day, as students threw out foods they were served under the guidelines.

But this is not the end of the story for Vang and Prairie Seeds. Working with NutriStudents K-12®, and its extensive choice of USDA-compliant menu weeks, the school successfully raised its lunch participation to about 700 students per day, even with seniors having an open lunch option.

“Kids really like the large variety of meals we offer now,” Vang said. “They are excited about breakfast and lunch. They like the ethnic choices of foods. Participation has increased a lot – much more than we expected.”

Vang loves that the NutriStudents K-12 system gives her and her staff resources and direction related to serving procedures and compliance with the federal guidelines, including help implementing offer versus serve, which resulted in less waste. The system has also saved her and her staff time.

“We had lots of challenges with our program previously, including the amount of time it took to plan menus, reporting requirements, following USDA regulations,” she said. “Menu planning, reporting, food safety issues, record keeping – it was really the equivalent of a full-time position to handle what this system is doing for us right now. Really, I’d say we save at least 40 hours a week with this program.”

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Prairie Seeds Academy

NutriStudents K-12®  
Menu Freedom. Tools for Success.