

# Forest Lake Area Schools Offer Students “Smarter Lunchrooms”

Since 2015, Forest Lake Area Schools has been working to improve sales and consumption of healthy school foods by implementing Smarter Lunchrooms practices and strategies. Smarter Lunchrooms is a non-profit organization that offers resources to schools looking to improve their school lunch offerings. Over 30,000 schools nationwide currently implement Smarter Lunchrooms research-based strategies that are designed to:

- increase participation in school meal programs,
- reduce food waste, and
- increase consumption of healthy foods.

In the 2015-16 school year, all Forest Lake Food Services employees participated in Smarter Lunchrooms training. After identifying strengths and weaknesses of their cafeteria environment, schools purchased fruit bowls, display items, posters, and other approved Smarter Lunchrooms enhancements for each cafeteria site. Forest Lake Schools continued their Smarter Lunchrooms improvements in the 2016-17 school year. In February 2017, Chef Marshall O’Brien trained 31 Food Services staff on techniques to safely and efficiently prepare and present fresh vegetables. In May 2017, vegetable taste testing was conducted at Forest View Elementary, Forest Lake Elementary, Central Montessori, and the Forest Lake Area Learning Center, serving 9th to 12th grade students. Students tested beets, sugar pea pods, purple cauliflower, watermelon radishes, mini sweet peppers, and yellow cherry tomatoes. The elementary students were especially eager to try the new foods.

Forest Lake Schools have been tracking their Food Services improvements through Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecards. Food Services staff complete a scorecard to obtain a point-in-time snapshot of lunchroom strategies in place. Schools that have several practices in place to promote healthy foods may

obtain a bronze, silver or gold Smarter Lunchroom score. The scorecard assesses:

- Promotion and Marketing of:
  - o Fruits,
  - o Salad Bar,
  - o White Milk,
  - o Vegetables, and
  - o Reimbursable meals
- Lunchroom atmosphere
- Student and school community involvement
- A la carte
- Signage and communication

All seven Washington County schools completed **Smarter Lunchroom Scorecards** at three time periods: May 2016, after all Food Services staff received training on Smarter Lunchrooms practices; September 2016, after Smarter Lunchroom purchases and enhancements were in place; and May 2017, after additional training and efforts in the 2016-17 school year. As shown in Table 1, all schools showed improvement over time.

*Schools made the most gains in the areas of promoting and marketing fruits, boosting reimbursable meals and student involvement.*

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*At the end of the 2016-17 school year, all participating Forest Lake Schools achieved a silver or gold Smarter Lunchrooms score. Forest Lake Schools completed the newest version of the Smarter Lunchroom scorecard in May 2018. Again, all participating Forest Lake Schools achieved a silver or gold Smarter Lunchrooms score.*

**Table 1 – Forest Lake Schools Smarter Lunchrooms Scores over time**

SCHOOL	Assessment 1 (May 2016)	Assessment 2 (September 2016)	Assessment 3 (May 2017)	Change from Assessment 1 to Assessment 3
CLC	45	65	81	36
Century Jr. High	80	96	96	16
Forest Lake Elem.	55	59	69	14
Forest View	43	57	63	20
Scandia	54	68	77	23
Senior High	53	75	78	25
Southwest Jr. High	56	64	67	11

**Award level:** ● Bronze – 30-50   ● Silver – 50-70   ● Gold – 70-100

