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**TO:** School Food Service Directors/Managers  
**FROM:** Frances N. O'Donnell, Coordinator  
**SUBJECT:** Healthier US School Challenge

Issues of overweight and obesity continue to rise. Statistics now show that we are living in a society in which children may in fact be living shorter lives than their parents. With such an alarming reality facing the country, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) wanted to step in and try their best to take that initial step to an overall goal of eliminating overweight and obesity as well as encouraging students to learn how to make healthy lifestyle choices. They have developed a plan of action entitled *Healthier US School Challenge*. This initiative uses the National School Lunch Program to encourage schools in becoming active participants in this ultimate achievement. This strategy relays four key points for creating a healthier America; Be Physically Active Each Day, Eat a Nutritious Diet, Get Preventive Screenings and Make Healthy Choices.

According to the new *Healthier US School Challenge*, a school can be certified as either Silver or Gold recipient. This is a recognition for those schools that go above and beyond what is expected of their lunch program. There is a basic set of criteria that certified schools must possess, which include: "being an elementary school, being enrolled as a Team Nutrition School, offering reimbursable lunches that demonstrate healthy menu planning practices and principles of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* which meet USDA nutrition standards, providing nutrition education to students, providing students the opportunity for physical activity, maintaining an Average Daily

Participation of 70 percent or higher of school enrollment for reimbursable lunches and lastly, adhering to guidelines established by Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for foods served/sold in schools outside the National School Lunch Program”. Schools are encouraged to either continue with their current operation if it qualifies, or make the necessary modifications to achieve such a prestigious recognition.

In order to be approved for this initiative school representatives must first fill out a self-assessment tool sheet that can be found on USDA’s website (listed below), which needs to be reviewed and signed by the required members of your review panel. It is then forwarded to the New York State Education Department Child Nutrition Program for a second official review and approval. After a signature from this State agency has been obtained, it will be sent to USDA’s Regional Office in Boston. If awarded recognition, this certification is good for two years and will bring significant attention to your school.

Interested? Then Take the Challenge! Go for the Silver! Go for the Gold! For more details regarding the *Healthier US School Challenge* you can either visit the Team Nutrition Web site at [www.fns.usda.gov/tn](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn) or contact your State Education Department Child Nutrition Program Administration representative at (518) 473-8781. The USDA website can also be reached through the New York State Education Child Nutrition’s website. Good Luck!