

## Q&A – Food service chief serves up ideas at Acton, Acton-Boxborough Schools



By Margaret Smith/[msmith@wickedlocal.com](mailto:msmith@wickedlocal.com)

GateHouse News Service

Posted Sep 06, 2012 @ 12:03 PM



Acton, Mass. — As food service director for the five Acton public schools – as well as R.J. Grey Junior High School, and Acton-Boxborough Regional High School -- Kirsten Nelson seeks a balance many parents know well – making meals nutritious but also appetizing to young palates.

Achieving this goal also means keeping up with changing information about nutrition and health. As the 2012-2013 school year begins, Nelson reflected on her role – as well as food for thought.

### **Please tell me about your role as food service director.**

The role of the food service director is to plan the menus, serve a quality lunch that both the students and faculty enjoy.

I oversee seven kitchens and work with 45 wonderful staff members. We are the busiest restaurant in town. We serve approximately 3,000 lunches a day.

The mission of the food service department is to serve high quality, nutritious lunches in a comfortable, welcoming environment in the elementary, junior high school, and high school -- while keeping in mind the individual preferences of each school's student body and in line with the Dietary guidelines for Healthy Americans [as outlined by the federal Department of Health and Human Services.]

### **There are some changes in the food service department for the 2012-2013 school year. Can you please share what those are?**

I am sure you have all heard about the changes the entire country is undergoing this year. We have always offered a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

We will be adding more of a variety to our assortment of fruits and vegetables.

You will notice more dark green vegetables, orange and red vegetables on our menus. Students now are required to take a fruit or a vegetable with their lunch.

We now have a daily minimum and weekly maximum of protein and grains. The grains we offer are whole grain.

We added gluten free options for students last year that we will continue to offer again this year. We are no longer offering juice as an option for lunch. Juice will only be available on breakfast for lunch days.

We are proud to purchase local produce from Lanni Orchards and Bolton Orchards.

**You have 'celebrity' guest servers come in from time to time. Please tell me more about that, and who are some of the celebrities?**

The celebrity guest server program started a few years ago. We have had guest servers that are principals, youth officers, a School Committee member, a teacher, a custodian and the superintendent of schools. This is a fun day for the students. We have a contest in advance to see if students can guess who the guest server will be.

If anyone reading this article has a contact with a celebrity like David Ortiz or Lady Gaga please contact the food service department. We would love to hear from you for our next guest server program.

**What is the most challenging part of your role, and what is the most rewarding?**

Each year brings new challenges. Last year, we implemented the point-of-sale at all of our schools [a mechanism for payment of meals online]. We set up accounts for all of the students. It was a busy year!

This year our challenge is keeping up with the new regulations while still being able to offer choices the students will enjoy.

The most rewarding part of my job is to be a part of a school district that realizes how important it is to feed a well-balanced meal to our students to help them learn. A student who is well fed is ready to learn!

I enjoy going out to the schools at lunchtime to see the students and the staff. I also enjoy going into classrooms to meet with students and plan menus with them.

We are very fortunate in our department to have such a caring, hard working, dedicated staff that truly cares about each and every student that we prepare a meal for. We look forward to serving your children a nutritious lunch this year.

**NAME** Kirsten Nelson

**OCCUPATION** food service director, Acton and Acton-Boxborough Schools

**FAVORITE QUOTE** "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

**CONTACT** [knelson@abschools.org](mailto:knelson@abschools.org)

**DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA** for someone we can profile for our Q&A series? Send your idea to <mailto:beacon@wickedlocal.com>.