

# Eating right is easy as ABC at schools

Friday is pizza day in the cafeteria at St. John Regional School in Frederick, where for years students loved the taste of the school-made pie.

When a switch was made to healthier dough a year ago, Principal Karen Smith said children immediately voiced their concerns.

“It wasn’t the usual pizza,” she remembered, “and they all asked, ‘Where’s our normal pizza?’ ”

Good nutrition does not always come easy for children. If most had their way, school lunches would mainly consist of hamburgers and French fries topped off with a hot fudge sundae and a soda, but in today’s increasingly health-conscious world, however, greasy standbys are being balanced out by more healthy fare.

St. John has long taken part in the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s Nutrition Program, a menu that is determined by five main food groups – protein, grain, vegetable, fruit and dairy – represented in each day’s lunch offerings. When purchasing lunch, students must choose at least three of the items.

St. John students are encouraged to eat their main lunch before delving into snacks, Mrs. Smith said.

The program is funded by the Maryland and federal governments, but the archdiocese provides in-kind services such as office space and funds where there is a deficit. Under the direction of the Maryland State Department of Education and Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of archdiocesan schools, the program often provides school meals to the less fortunate.

Most of the 27 participating schools are within the Baltimore City limits.

At some schools, meals include breakfast, lunch and an after-school snack.

Jay Parker, the director of the archdiocese’s Child Nutrition Office, said the meat,

bread, fruit, vegetables and milk served at the 27 participating archdiocesan schools are in compliance with the national school lunch menu.

Schools throughout the archdiocese, like St. John, have moved to eliminate sodas from the buildings. Ms. Smith said there is a juice machine at St. John – available only to seventh- and eighth-graders – that also dispenses water bottles.

A school can only go so far in establishing nutritional guidelines, as the choices for a child to eat healthy are often determined by the example set at home.

“We can’t dictate what they eat,” Mr. Parker said. “It has to come from the families.”