The School Meal System and School-Based Nutrition Education in Korea

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Summary Since the school meal was first served in Korea in 1953, there have been many changes, particularly during the last decade. Recently, the representative features of the school meal system became free school meals for all pupils in elementary school and a nutrition teacher system in schools. These policies were suggested to implement more and more the educational role of the school meal. The rate of schools serving school meals reached 100% as of 2013, and 99.6% students eat a school meal each school day. Nutrition teachers were assigned to schools from 2007, and 4,704 (47.9%) nutrition teachers of all nutrition employees were employed in schools as of 2013. At present, various nutrition education materials are being developed by local education offices and government agencies, and various education activities are being implemented spiritedly. The ultimate goal of school meals and school-based nutrition education are as follows: 1) improvement of the health of students; 2) promotion of the traditional Korean diet; and 3) extension of opportunities for a healthier dietary life.

Key Words school meal, nutrition education, Korea

The Latest Policies in School Meal System

The purpose of this article is to give an overview of the latest school meal system and School-based nutrition education in Korea. Since the school meal was first served in Korea in 1953, right after the Korean War, with the aid of United Nations Children's Fund, there have been many changes, particularly during the last decade (1). Recently, the representative features of the school meal system became free school meals for all pupils in elementary school and a nutrition teacher system in schools. These policies were suggested to implement more and more the educational role of the school meal. The supporting rule concerning free school meals was different by locality, but it was implemented in almost all elementary schools. However, this policy of free school meals is still a hot button between economic and educational logic.

Current Status of School Meal Service

The rate of schools serving school meals reached 100% as of 2013, and 99.6% students eat a school meal each school day. Management systems for serving school meals were classified into self-operation and contract management, with only 2.3% of schools contracting their school meal service with management companies as of 2013. Nutrition teachers were assigned to schools from 2007, and 4,704 (47.9%) nutrition teachers of all nutrition employees were employed in schools as of 2013 (2).

School-Based Nutrition Education in Korea

At present, no formal standard for nutrition education

in schools has been established, but various education activities are being implemented spiritedly. Nutrition education is being implemented mainly using discretionary or club activities class periods, and the facilities for experience-based learning is increasing in school, such as school gardens, nutrition education classrooms and jangdokdae (traditional Korean outdoor food storage) (Fig 1). In addition, Gimjang (Kimchi-making for winter) is becoming more popular in many schools for maintaining Korean traditional culture (Fig. 2).

The various nutrition education materials are being developed by local education offices and government agencies such as the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety and the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. They have been offering the developed education materials on their web site as well as supplying printed materials (3). The ultimate goal of school meals and school-based nutrition education are as follows: 1) improvement of the health of students; 2) promotion of the traditional Korean diet; and 3) extension of opportunities for a healthier dietary life.

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Fig. 1. Jangdokdae: traditional Korean outdoor food storage.

Fig. 2. Gimjang experience activity.