Remarks by Dr. Janey Thornton, Deputy Under Secretary, USDA
At the HealthierUS School Challenge and Golden Wellness Awards Ceremony
Lee High School, October 22, 2012

- I’m so glad to be here today to recognize and celebrate the many schools here in Fairfax County that have met our rigorous requirements for the HealthierUS School Challenge and also to learn more about your Golden Wellness Award—a program that, from what I’ve read, could and should be replicated in school districts across the country.

- Achieving a HealthierUS School Challenge is quite an accomplishment and all of you deserve to be commended for making it happen. And to meet the Challenge in 160 of your 196 schools at one time is amazing. Of the more than 101,000 public schools across the country only 4,411 have reached one of the HUSSC mild stones and 160 of those are right here in Fairfax County—wow!

- It takes tremendous dedication on the part of teachers, principals, food and nutrition professionals, parents and local leadership to put child nutrition first.

- To reach the HUSSC, schools must meet some rigorous criteria:
  - Team Nutrition School
  - Nutrition Education must be a part of the curriculum
  - Students must have the opportunity for physical education and physical activity
  - For awards above the Bronze level, schools must meet certain participation criteria.
  - Schools must have a Wellness Policy; and of course
  - Foods offered both in the cafeteria and throughout the school must meet certain nutritional criteria.
    - So now in cafeterias there’re even a greater variety of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains—much like our new meal pattern.

- One of the things we’ve been talking about a lot at USDA is how influential the school environment can be and how we need to support schools in making the school day healthier.
• The HealthierUS School Challenge has been a wonderful way for schools to promote good nutrition and join us in the fight against obesity.

• By helping the County’s schools meet HUSSC standards, you are making a very real contribution to the wellbeing of an entire community.

• And we all know that one of the best ways we can ensure a healthy future for children is to get them started with healthy foods and physical activity while they’re still young and that’s exactly what you’re doing here in Fairfax County.

• I’ll have to say, when I heard of the number of schools receiving the awards from Fairfax County, I was not overly surprised. Your School Food and Nutrition Program, under the leadership of Penny McConnell, is one of THE top in the nation and has received awards and recognitions both within and outside of the profession for years. You are always ahead of the game and your menus reflected nutrition standards based on sound scientific evidence even before those same changes were initiated at the federal level.

• You’ve involved students in food selections and have had chefs in the classrooms before it was the “in” thing to do and your Kids Cooking programs and school gardens have been the envy of many districts nationwide.

• This recognition of excellence goes beyond the US as we often use Fairfax County Schools as a showcase for many of our international guests who visit in our nation and want to see some of our model programs. So congratulations for the great job you’ve been doing for years!

• I also want to give a special thank you to the Food and Nutrition Services Leadership Team and Wellness Task Force in Fairfax County. As I mentioned earlier, your leadership is certainly a model for other school districts across the country.

• Again, I’m so glad I could be here today to recognize you for going above and beyond when it comes to encouraging children to eat right and get moving. —so once again, congratulations and thanks for all each of you do to help kids succeed today to ensure success tomorrow.