

The 35¢ lunch: A bargain

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Trying to please 2,300 students by serving them a low-cost luncheon of a single, fixed menu is quite a problem but it is being faced with courage and success each school day by a mother of three who is in charge of the town's school lunch program.

Mrs. Roberta Miller of Hillside Ave., with a staff of 26 housewives, prepare tempting lunches for seven schools each day the public schools are in session and the cost is only 35 cents per meal, per scholar.

It is all done with an assist from the state and federal governments which a year ago insisted that each public school student in the country must be able to procure a nutritional and satisfying meal at noon. And so they contribute 12 cents per meal, plus another nickle the town supplies, towards the actual cost of lunch, which is 52 cents.

Three schools in town have had their own cafeterias since the buildings were constructed Westford Academy serves 450, North Middle School, 550; and Robinson Elementary, 500 meals a day. Furnishing meals to four other elementary schools, without cafeteria and cooking facilities, however, became a special problem, and so just a year ago, the "Satellite" program was inaugurated.

A MODERN kitchen and preparation facility, installed in the recently constructed Robinson school, designed to package lunches and ship them to the older schools. And when the noon bell now rings, some 800 to 900 youngsters are able to have just the same hot meal that their counterparts have in the more modern school buildings. Each child has one hot combination dish and a cold package containing bread and dessert.

The kitchen crew has these lunches set to go each day at 10 a.m., and they are carried in a closed van for distribution according to orders placed by various principals. Nabnasset Elementary ordi-

narily takes 380 lunches, Frost, 150; Cameron, 140; and Sargent, 160. On top of this, 60 lunches go daily to two temporary schools housed in the former Congregational Church building in the Center and the Graniteville Methodist Church.

On arrival, dishes to be served hot are placed in ovens to be re-heated. They are removed 15 minutes prior to serving time to allow them to cool sufficiently to be handled comfortably by the youngsters. The lower grades are served first and the meal is eaten at each child's desk. A carton of milk goes with each meal. To eliminate dish-washing, the meals are arranged in disposable dishes which cost 5 cents per set.

Only the Academy students are enabled to have a la carte service with separate items being sold at greatly reduced prices, but even here three-quarters of the students take the complete meal.

The entire feeding program is put a break-even basis, with a revolving fund of \$2,500 as the kitty. The town, however, buys the paper goods and pays the salary of the director.

The menu for an entire week is prepared in advance by Mrs. Miller and published each Sunday in The Sun. All of the food for the Satellite program is prepared in the Robinson School kitchen under the supervision of Mrs. Pauline Oliver so that it is not only fresh, but tasty.

Two bakers make such good things as cakes, cookies, gingerbread and apple crisp as well as the puddings and the gelatines. Bread and rolls are purchased from commercial bakeries. High score butter comes through the federal government's subsidy program.

THE SCHOOL lunch program is big business. It works on a \$150,000 yearly budget and provides favorable employment conditions for many mothers whose children are still in school.

As with many families at

home, mother finds it difficult at times to supply a menu that will satisfy every member of the family. And so it is with the school system.

"Believe it or not," Mrs. Miller says, "Pizza is our most popular dish, followed by meat and gravy."

Each child has the privilege of bringing his own lunch should the menu not appeal. Proof that menus are well-planned, however, is indicated by the fact that about the same number of meals are

served daily, unless there is a period of undue sickness to drop the normal daily enrollment.

When asked if she has many complaints about the quality variety and quantity of the food served, Mrs. Miller answered:

"Who can please 2,300 persons in any one day with just one single meal?"

The day this story was written, the students had sliced ham with sweet potato and peas, bread and real butter,

pineapple upside down cake, with an individual serving of milk. All of this for the price of a single hot dog if brought at a roadside restaurant.

For those who remember taking a cold peanut butter and jelly sandwich to school in a tin lunch box, with a thermos jug which was always leaking) of cocoa which would be cold by lunch time, today's young students are getting just about the best the world supplies.