

Research Brief

Cafeteria Food

Question: What are viable healthy food options?

Summary of Findings: Currently, high school students account for 60% of food sold in cafeterias. School lunches should provide 33% of the students' energy intake, however, according to some research, it was found that it tends to only provide 19% because of the sale of "competitive" foods. Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that girls ages 14-18 eat low amounts of fruits and vegetables and more than two-thirds of females in this age group exceed the daily intake amounts of fat and saturated fats. 56%-85% of adolescents consume soda daily and that percentage seems to be higher for boys. The rate of overweight and obese children under the age of 18 in the U.S. is at 15%, which has tripled over the past 20 years.

By 2006-2007, schools receiving monies for students who are on free and reduced meals, must have a local wellness plan in place. Its purpose is to promote and implement a feasible plan for students to be empowered to make appropriate choices for living a healthy lifestyle. In order to do this, schools must work with all of their stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, food services personnel, and community representatives.

Most high schools sell "competitive" foods (i.e. candy bars, cookies, high calorie sodas, fries, chips, etc.) in vending machines, student stores, and a la carte lines. According to the literature, the profit from these sales can help food services make their budgets and help schools support programs such as field trips, sports, etc. A survey conducted by the U.S.D.A. found that when competitive foods are sold along with non-competitive foods, that good nutrition is compromised and it lowers the appeal of more healthy and nutritious fare. In one survey of seven schools that had switched to selling only foods that followed the U.S.D.A. guidelines, four found that the sales slightly exceeded that of the "competitive" foods sales and three stated the money earned was the same as it had been previously.

Many schools across the nation are trying new programs in providing healthy eating opportunities for their students. Aramark worked with several middle and high schools in Philadelphia, PA to develop concepts in healthy dining. They surveyed the students and found that 93% of high school students wanted to be with their friends at lunch and that they were interested in "choice and self-expression." The eating areas were redesigned with paint in neon colors, music playing in the background, casual seating and an expression wall. Healthy food choices, with names that would be similar to those found in fast-food restaurants were introduced (i.e. Chicken Grande Burrito, Santa Fe Turkey Sandwich, Grilled on the Green, and Veggie Nice Rice). Stonyfield Farm, an organic yogurt company, has been working to get organic food into schools. They have

been successful in getting foods like Newman’s Own Pretzels, Stretch Island Organic Fruit Leather, Silk Soy Milk, and Stonyfield Yogurt into vending machines in some inner-city schools, where the students have little to no access to these types of food choices and have found they are selling well. Some schools have been offering organic food in the cafeteria and one of these schools found that by cutting out desserts, they actually made two cents more per meal. According to the National 5 A Day for Better Health Program, a joint project sponsored by the CDC and National Cancer Institute, school based interventions can make a difference in the amount of fruits and vegetables that students consume. In the

Results of Trying Alternative Cafeteria Options in Schools program, the students did the promotion and education on the importance of making more nutritious choices and found that when they worked with their peers, there was a substantive impact.

Food for thought

- Involve all stakeholders, especially students, in developing, implementing, and evaluating a plan. Designate at least one person who will be in the contact person and is in a position to make recommended changes.
- Establish goals.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the current program.
- Honor the change process.
- Provide nutrition education as an important part of the curriculum and model good nutrition on campus.
- Have students sample foods and provide feedback.
- Survey students to get their opinions and ideas about their wants and needs.
- Reduce dessert size and number of vending machines that sell “competitive” foods.
- Establish standards for “competitive” foods. Keep the healthiest foods in vending machines at eye level and less healthy at the bottom.
- Eliminate the availability of poor nutritional foods.
- Sell healthy nutritional choices at reasonable prices.
- Do not sell foods that are considered to be of poor nutritional quality for fundraisers. Instead sell things like fruit, nuts, gift wrap, and magazines.
- Use non-food things for rewards and acknowledgement of achievements.
- Use students to engage in the promotion, marketing and education of their peers.

Online Resources:

- About team nutrition
A description of the three focus areas for this team is given.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/about.html>

- Action for healthy kids-Arizona
This is a description of 8 pilot schools, of which 4 are middle and high schools, that are developing healthy breakfast and lunch programs.
http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/state_profile.php?state=AZ
- Action for healthy kids-Idaho
One can access a list of 150 recommended healthy snack foods that the program in this state has identified.
http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/state_profile.php?state=ID
- Adolescent involvement in nutrition programs
A description of the results from the Trying Alternative Cafeteria Options in School study conducted from 2000-2002 are presented.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0887/is_3_24/ai_n13648424
- Aramark school support services: Using research and creativity, 12 Spot and U.B.U. lounge rose to the challenge of getting teens, ‘tweens excited about lunch
This article includes a description of the cafeteria settings and healthy menus set up by Aramark in middle and high schools based on the results of surveys given to students.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3190/is_19_39/ai_n13729099#continue
- Child Nutrition Act-reauthorization 2004
A summary of this act, including a brief description of the school mandated wellness program.
<http://edworkforce.house.gov/issues/108th/education/childnutrition/billsummaryfinal.htm>
- Competitive foods compared to school lunch foods
Results of a study conducted to ascertain the percentage of nutrient consumption by adolescents who were on the free lunch program comparing competitive and non-competitive foods is presented.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0887/is_3_24/ai_n13648423
- Executive summary-Making it happen!
This is an overview of the Making It Happen! Program sponsored by the CDC and U.S.D.A.
http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/c_execsum.pdf
- Health movement has school cafeterias in a food fight

An article that describes the policy in Chicago's high schools about the sale of healthy foods.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-08-21-junk-food-cover_x.htm

- Impact of competitive foods on the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program
This article provides descriptions of different issues dealing with competitive foods.
<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/>
- Join the team-USDA food and nutrition service
The tenants for this program and contact information are included in this piece.
<http://teamnnutrition.usda.gov/team.html>
- Local wellness policy
A specific description of this policy is provided.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/108-265.pdf>
- Md. school cafeterias in a bind over junk food
The dilemma that schools face over the profit made from the sale of competitive foods is described.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A26233-2005Apr4?language=printer>
- Menu planning guidelines
U.S.D.A.'s specific guidelines for daily nutritional allowances, specific serving portions, food preparation and menu marketing are laid out in this piece.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/menu/menu.planning.NSLP.htm>
- National school lunch program
Home page for guidelines, rules, eligibility, and the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/>
- National school lunch program-Fact sheet
This is an overview of the guidelines for the National School Lunch Program.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/AboutLunch/NSLPFactSheet.pdf>
- Nutrition and physical activity-Nutrition topics
Resource list with active links to a variety of topics dealing with nutrition is available on this site.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/nutrition.htm>

- School cafeterias starting to go organic
A description of some of the school programs where organic food is being sold.
<http://www.organicconsumers.org/school/lunch091404.cfm>
- School lunch daze
A description of the reasons lunch at schools is important for students is the crux of this article.
<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/9889903/site/newsweek/>
- School meals initiative for healthy children
A very brief description of this initiative is provided in this article.
<http://seo.dc.gov/seo/cwp/view,a,1224,q,554172.asp>
- Small school-based effectiveness trials on fruit and vegetable consumption
A brief description of results of a sampling from the National Five a Day for Better Health Program is provided.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0887/is_3_24/ai_n13648425
- Some schools start 'dieting' ahead of U.S. rules
This articles gives an overview of the required school plans to begin in the '06-'07 school year.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/05/16wellness.h24.html?querystring=nutrition&print=1>
- The greening of school cafeterias
This article describes a program that is serving fresh fruits and vegetables in schools in Compton, CA.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FDE/is_3_24/ai_n14890210
- USDA goes to the source to test latest menu creations
This is a brief description of a program in a California school who taste tested and provided honest feedback on healthy foods.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2000/05/31/38food.h19.html?print=1>
- USDA's school meal initiative for healthy children
An overview of the U.S.D.A.'s new regulations for healthy food choices for students.
<http://www.vrg.org/journal/schoollunch.htm#but>
- What's for lunch? Schools adding healthier menu items

<http://www.educationpartnerships.org/>



A brief description of Project LEAN, done at several high schools in California.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2000/06/21/41lunch.h19.html?querystring=nutrition>

Periodical

- Satcher, D. (2005, September). Healthy and ready to learn. Educational Leadership 63, 1, 26-31.

Submitted Date: 11-14-05

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