



Controlling Junk Food and the Bottom Line Tip Sheet

Improving Cafeteria Strategies to Support Healthier Competitive Foods Standards

Tip Sheet 5 of 5: Marketing and promotion • Adding fruits and vegetables • Appeal of the cafeteria • Pricing strategies. Full set of tip sheets available online at iphionline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junk-food-and-the-bottom-line.

Implementation of the new Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards provides an opportunity to offer healthier competitive foods--snacks and à la carte foods and beverages--in schools. This tip sheet, *Improving Cafeteria Strategies to Support Healthier Competitive Foods Standards*, is one of five tip sheets that share strategies, best practices, and tips from middle schools and high schools in eight districts across the country that participated in the *Controlling Junk Food and the Bottom Line* study in 2012. These districts have improved nutrition standards for competitive foods without experiencing significant financial losses. This document focuses on comprehensive strategies that districts and schools employed to maintain revenues. This document focuses on marketing and promotion, adding fruits and vegetables, making an appealing cafeteria, and pricing strategies.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Improving Cafeteria Strategies to Support Healthier Competitive Foods Standards

Marketing and promotion

School districts employed varied strategies to encourage healthy eating. New London Public Schools in Connecticut created display boards advertising healthy items and profiled these items in the morning announcements. In a 2014 update, New London's new Food Service Director Samantha Wilson reported hanging posters picturing healthy foods around the school, sending email messages to all the teachers about fresh fruits, and listing unique fresh fruits available each day on the display boards in the cafeterias. Corvallis School District 509J in Oregon also promoted healthy foods on the morning announcements, chose snack foods with the most attractive packaging, and served the most current products. Marshall County Schools in Alabama reported advertising healthy foods on the side of existing vending machines. Miami-Dade County Public Schools hung posters all around the cafeteria of TV and movie stars and famous sports players drinking milk. These districts heavily marketed the school meal; please refer to Tip Sheet 1 to learn more about strategies for increasing consumption of school meals. Miami-Dade County Public Schools also incentivized students who ate breakfast in the cafeteria on days of taste testing by providing coupons to use in their classrooms for rewards decided upon by their teachers. In a 2014 update, Miami-Dade Food Service Director Penny Parham advised that incentives must be given to students very quickly--within two days-- after any kind of healthy eating contest, to keep up student interest.

A proposed federal rule for Local School Wellness Policy Implementation (announced by the USDA in February 2014) would require schools to confine advertising to foods and beverages that meet Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards, which could make strategies for promoting healthier items easier for schools.

"The things that we would put to the front were easy access to the students. We try to make those the things that are fresh, like fruits or vegetables, prepackaged carrots and vegetables, like that. We do lots of premade salads and have those right up front, too, so if the kids are in a hurry and they run in there, that's what catches their eyes. So make sure that they're colorful and presentable."

Sharon Gibson, Food Service Director,
Corvallis School District 509J, Oregon

The Boston Public Schools Health and Wellness Department created a toolkit to assist schools with promotion and education efforts. The toolkit is distributed to department staff and includes posters that schools can use to promote healthy eating. Boston Public Schools also reported holding a weekly event where a locally grown vegetable is promoted in schools. According to Field Coordinator Abhijit Potdar, marketing locally grown fruits and vegetables connected students to healthier items. In Miami-Dade County, a cafeteria manager explained that she posted messages to students about special items throughout the week and the health benefits of those items. Similarly, in Bismarck Public Schools in North Dakota, District Dietitian Joan Knoll created displays for the cafeterias focused on the health benefits of the lunches being served. Corvallis School District 509J reported a multipronged approach to the fruit and vegetable of the month program that included posters to advertise the fruit or vegetable, various preparations of the fruit or vegetable in the cafeteria throughout the month, and information for students to take home. For example, students see what a pumpkin looks like before and after it's prepared and then can request their parents buy it when they see it in the store.

Adding more fruits and vegetables

Adding more fruits and vegetables to the menu offerings presented opportunities for districts to be creative. Marshall County Schools added prepackaged salads and grab-and-go main courses so students could pick up a healthy item and expedite the line. Middle school principal Alison Burdick, from New London, Connecticut, explained that salad bars are effective in getting more students to eat lunch at school, increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, and reducing waste because students take only the vegetables they really like. In Bismarck Public Schools, Food Service Director Doug Joersz reported that cafeteria workers' "beautiful" displays of fruits and vegetables helped to make them more appealing to students. Participation in the federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program was cited as an important opportunity by several districts. Miami-Dade County Public Schools, in a 2014 update, reported adding edible gardens and culinary programs after school, emphasizing that experiential learning has greatly increased students' exposure to fruits and vegetables. Bismarck Public Schools also placed à la carte items at the end of the lunch line, so that students were more likely to get the school meal and their tray would be full by the time they got to à la carte items. Many districts reported that taste testing new fruits and vegetables was as an important cafeteria strategy.

Farm to School programs were some of the most commonly cited resources by districts and schools for adding fruits and vegetables. Partnerships with local farmers benefit both the students and the community by using local, in-season produce. In Corvallis, Food Service Director Sharon Gibson said that the Farm to School program was exciting for the town because students were eating produce grown by neighbors and friends. She noted the Farm to School program gets students interested in creating school gardens so they can grow their own fruits and vegetables.

Appeal of the cafeteria

Some schools determined that they could enhance students' dining experience, and therefore their acceptance of the more nutritious offerings, by reconfiguring or redesigning cafeterias. Bismarck Public Schools sought to make their cafeterias more like a modern restaurant that would appeal to students, making it a space where students go to recharge during the day, and in the process obtain a healthy meal. Other school districts talked about how they designed lunch lines to promote selection of healthier foods, including ideas like putting salad bars at the beginning of the food service line. Miami Dade County Public Schools designed the cafeteria so that students access the seating area by walking through the cafeteria line first, enticing them with fresh healthy foods as soon as they enter to eat lunch. The New London Public Schools painted cafeterias in colors that appealed to students.

Pricing strategies

Districts in the study used pricing strategies to provide a financial incentive for selecting healthy options and to ensure that healthier à la carte foods could compete with less nutritious foods and beverages sold off campus. In order to increase the sales of healthy beverages and foods, two of eight districts lowered the price of bottles of water when they took away sodas. Marshall County Schools in Alabama ensured that water cost less than in stores. Further, many of the districts ensured that fresh fruit is priced lower than other snacks and is placed in a prominent position in the lunch line. The Boston Public Schools sought grant funding to subsidize the costs of healthier items and surveyed the students in the high schools to find out what price point would work best.

"You want to make the healthy choice the easy choice and pricing is a big part of it."

Shamil Mohammed, Interim Food Service Director, Boston Public Schools

Modeling

School staff can be a critical element in a school's transition to healthier foods. Bismarck Public Schools in North Dakota picked up on this as they encouraged teachers and school staff to model healthy behaviors during the school day. Principal Russ Riehl, of Simle Middle School in Bismarck, noted that it was important for students to see teachers and staff members participating because it reinforced the message students are receiving about healthy eating.

In a 2014 update, Principal Alison Burdick from New London reported that her middle school had implemented a worksite wellness program for employees to get healthy and lose weight in a socially supported environment. Almost half the staff participated in the program over two rounds of competition, where a total of 1,000 pounds were lost. The cafeteria staff won the most recent competition. Principal Burdick noted that the number of salads sold to staff at her school has helped increase the number of salads made in the cafeteria, which has contributed to increased revenue.

Kristin Driscoll, health engagement coordinator at Edward M. Kennedy Academy in Boston, shared that teachers and administrators modeling healthy eating habits was an effective way to expose students to foods they might be less familiar with. Exposure to unfamiliar new foods can help encourage students to try those foods. Driscoll mentioned frequent work with students to increase their exposure to new options, which sometimes included Driscoll talking with students about the healthy foods in her own lunch.

Conclusion

Changing the layout of the cafeteria, strategic pricing structures, adding fruits and vegetables, and creative advertising are all examples of ways schools can help students make healthy choices and maintain the bottom line. The examples in this tip sheet may be replicable as schools across the country move to stronger competitive food standards. In a 2014 update, New London Public Schools' Food Service Director Samantha Wilson reported substantial changes in students' attitudes and behaviors since healthier nutrition standards took effect: *"[Cafeteria workers] don't need to tell kids to take a fresh fruit and veggie--they just take them and we are seeing the kids eat. There is not as much push-back as in the past. It's about exposure, exposure, exposure."*

For more ideas, please visit iphionline.org/center-for-policy-and-partnerships/controlling-junk-food-and-the-bottom-line for four more tip sheets.

Resources

USDA: United State Department of Agriculture

Smart Snacks in School Nutrition Standards <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/allfoods.htm>

HealthierUS Schools Challenge <http://www.fns.usda.gov/hussc/healthierus-school-challenge>

School Nutrition Environment and Wellness Resources <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/local-wellness-policy-resources/school-nutrition-environment-and-wellness-resources-0>

CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Competitive Foods Resource Center <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/standards.htm>

State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health

<http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/statepubhealthactions-prevCD.htm>

School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6005.pdf>

School Health Index <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHI/>

Action for Healthy Kids

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

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Healthy Schools Builder <https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/>

Swap Your Snack https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/swap_your_snack/

Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs, Cornell University

Smarter Lunchrooms Movement <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>

IOM: Institute of Medicine

Stallings, V. A., & Yaktine, A. L., eds. (2007). *Nutrition standards for foods in schools: Leading the way toward healthier youth*. National Academies Press. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2007/Nutrition-Standards-for-Foods-in-Schools-Leading-the-Way-toward-Healthier-Youth.aspx>

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