



Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs

Smarter Lunchroom Best Practice Evaluation & Implementation Guide

	Objective A Increasing the number of Students that select Fruit	Objective B Increasing the number of Students that select Vegetables	Objective C Increasing the number of Students that select White Milk	Objective D Increasing the number of Students that select Targeted Entrée	Objective E Increasing the number of Students that select Reimbursable Meals
A	Display Fruit on all lunch lines in 2 locations. 1 location should be near the register ¹ .	Give Vegetables creative/descriptive names and display names next to or with Vegetables on the line	Place White Milk first in the lunchroom coolers, in front of sugar added beverages.	Make the Entrée with the greatest nutrient density the first or most prominent in the lunch line.	Place components of RM at snack window ³ . Add an RM “grab and go” ⁴ bag to the window.
B	Display whole Fruit in a bowl or basket instead of a stainless steel bin or tray.	Display the age targeted creative/descriptive names on posters or menu boards outside the cafeteria.	Place White Milk in every cooler in the lunchroom	Give the Entrée an age targeted creative/descriptive name and display it with the Targeted Entrée .	Move all “competitive snack foods” (chips, cookies, etc) behind the serving counter in the regular lunch line so they are available by request only.
C	Employ signs and verbal prompts to draw attention to and encourage kids to buy Fruit .	Create a student SNAC ² committee of responsible for the naming of and signage for Vegetables .	Make sure White Milk accounts for at least 1/3 of all the Milk displayed in lunchroom coolers.	Display the new and creative/descriptive name on a placard or menu board outside the cafeteria. (SNAC Committee)	Create a “healthy items” ⁵ only convenience line ⁶ stocked with all types of milk, fruits, veggies, grab & go sandwiches & the lowest fat/lowest sodium Entrée items.

¹Some schools may be required to place fruits with edible peels (i.e. apples) behind a sneeze guard. If so, consider wrapping or slicing them and placing them in baggies, before putting them in the optimal location.

²Student Nutrition Action Committee

³If you have one.

⁴As long as kids can choose not to take the grab and go bag, you can assemble an RM without sacrificing Offer vs. Serve.

⁵Don't include the snacks, desserts or competitive foods on this line.

⁶Existing snack lines or windows can often be converted to a “healthy choices” line

Every School can immediately implement and benefit from Smarter Lunchrooms Action Items in Row A for Objectives A, B & C.

The Smarter Lunchrooms Best Practices are the result of research conducted by the Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (The BEN Center). BEN Center research has uncovered several basic principles that support a variety of changes that can be made in school cafeterias to help “nudge” kids towards healthier selections and healthier eating behaviors at lunch. Most of these are of simple, low cost/no cost changes that really make a difference. They give schools a set of research-based tools that make the “Lunchroom Smarter”



and use the cafeteria environment itself to impact what kids choose and eat in school. To evaluate your cafeteria and begin implementing the changes as needed, start by asking these simple questions:

Smarter Lunchrooms Objective A: Increasing the number of Students who select **Fruit.**

Is the fruit convenient, well lit and available in at least two locations in the lunchroom?

(In our studies, moving and highlighting the fruit increased sales by up to 102%)

- Can you see the fruit clearly as you make your way down the lunch line?
- Is it convenient or easy for an average height student in your school to reach out and take it?
- Are there barriers* between the student and the fruit, such as a sneeze guard that interferes with visibility and access? If the answer is yes, find a way to get it out in the open.*
- Is it close to the register?*
- If not, look for the most visible and convenient, easy to reach spot near the register. You may have to move something in order to give fruit the best location.
- Find another highly visible spot (such as a salad bar or near the milk) and put fruit there as well.*
- Look at the lunch line from the perspective of the students in your school.
- Remember to consider the height and reach of the kids. You may have to bend over to look at the line from their point of view and imagine how far they can reach.
- If workers in your school serve fruit to students, put all the emphasis on visibility and display!
- Finally, add signs, a desk lamp or other illumination so that kids won't miss seeing the fruit!
- Put it in a nice basket or bowl, anything to get it out of the stainless steel serving pans.

**Some schools may be required to place fruits with edible peels (ie apples) behind a sneeze guard. If so, consider wrapping or cutting them up and placing them in baggies, before placing them in the optimal location. If that is not possible, additional lighting & signage may increase student awareness of the available fruits.*

Smarter Lunchrooms Objective B: Increasing the number of Students who select **Vegetables.**

Are vegetables creatively named and displayed more attractively than other options?

(In our studies, naming vegetables (and having the names displayed with the foods) increases selection from between 40% and 70%).

- Do the vegetables have inviting and age appropriate names? Younger children respond to fun, creative names like X-Ray Carrots, while older student respond to names that include descriptive or taste-enhancing words like spicy, fresh or wild.
- Let the kids come up with the names (that's what we do in our studies); hold a school wide contest! This involves kids in the cafeteria and "invests" them in the foods. Creating a SNAC committee is a great way to do this.
- Make sure the names are visible, written on a poster or name card next to the vegetables (*they can be hand written with dry erase markers on a laminated card*).
- Finally, make sure that the veggies are more prominently displayed and better lit than the other side dishes.

Smarter Lunchrooms Objective C: Increasing the number of Students who select **White Milk.**

Is White Milk displayed more prominently (in front of) than all sugar added beverages and in every refrigerated cooler in the lunchroom? Does white milk represent 1/3 of all milk visible in the cooler?

(In our studies, placing white milk first has resulted in an increase of up to 46% in milk sales).

- Is the white milk in all beverage coolers and the most visible and easiest to reach of the drinks for sale?



- Is white milk 1/3 of the total number of visible milk cartons? Take a quick count of *all* the milk containers you can see in the cooler. If you can see 60 milk cartons of milk, at least 20 should be white milk.
- If the answer to either is no, move the milk in front of the other options and increase the amount of white milk that is visibly displayed.
- The white milk should also be the first and easiest milk for kids to grab. As little effort as possible (limited bending and reaching) should be needed for kids to select white milk. Put it in front of the flavored milk.

Smarter Lunchrooms Objective D: Increasing the number of Students who select Targeted Entrees.

Is the entrée you want to promote the first or most prominent in the lunch line?

(In our studies, the first or highlighted item in line has an 11% advantage over the second option.)

- Basic concepts are the same as number one. Visibility is the key.
- Determined which entrée you wish to highlight (least caloric, most nutrient dense, lowest sodium, etc).
- Does it have it a name and is the name prominently displayed next to the item?
- Is the targeted entree easy to reach (if the students are serving themselves) and more visible than other items?
- If students are being served, give the entrees the star treatment in terms of display and promotion to make it more visible than other options. Do everything you can to make sure that this is the entrée the kids see first.

Smarter Lunchrooms Objective E: Increasing the number of Students who select Reimbursable Meals.

Are the healthy components of the Reimbursable Meal the most convenient and visible items in the lunchroom?

(In our studies, the number of student consumption of healthy items increased by 35% after the introduction of a "healthy choices only" convenience line)

- Visibility and convenience are again the key.
- Are all the components to make a reimbursable meal available at every location where students can buy any type of food?
- Is it easier for a student to purchase RM components than it is for them to buy competitive foods?
- Implementation of the choices in Objective A, B, C & D will give the RM components an advantage over other items in the lunchroom. Increasing the locations where students can select them is helpful.
- Take advantage of every point of interaction. RMs should be available at the snack window and any convenience line your school may have.
- Encourage staff to know what the components of the RM are and to employ suggestive selling (ie "Did you know that fruit is free with you lunch?") techniques to remind kids to take all that they are entitled to.

Final take away: Location, Visibility and Choice are everything.

People are more likely to choose the first thing they see. And we know from our research that **kids are more likely to actually eat foods that they choose** for themselves.

If you can implement these changes, or augment what you are all ready doing to fully answer yes to these questions, you **will** see a change in the foods your students are selecting AND eating.

Examples

Objective	Before	After
<p>1. Is the fruit convenient, well lit and available in at least two locations in the lunchroom?</p>		 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Note Variety, Display & Signs</i></p>
<p>2. Are vegetables & entrees creatively named?</p>	<p>Carrots →</p> <p>Bean Burrito →</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">X-Ray Vision Carrots <i>Doubled the consumption of carrots</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Big Bad Bean Burrito <i>Increased burrito consumption by more than 40%!</i></p>
<p>3. Is White Milk displayed most prominently? Does it represent 1/3 of all beverages available?</p>		
<p>4. Is the targeted entrée the first or most prominent on the lunch line?</p>		
<p>5. Increasing the number of Students who select Reimbursable Meals (<i>convenience</i>).</p>		



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42

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