

Research Rundown

Article

New School Meal Regulations Increase Fruit Consumption and Do Not Increase Total Plate Waste

What did this study examine?

This study examined the changes over time of the food component selection and consumption from students participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) from spring 2012 to spring 2014. The purpose of this study was to analyze the concerns associated with the new school lunch policies implemented in the 2012-2013 school year. These policies included:

- ▶ Increase in whole grains
- ▶ Require different types of vegetables to be served each week
- ▶ Consider fruits and vegetables two different categories
- ▶ Reduction in sodium
- ▶ New calorie limits by age group
- ▶ Increase produce serving sizes

How was student plate waste and consumption over time analyzed?

Photos and weights of trays before and after each meal were recorded per student. This was done on 36 different days over the course of three years. The data for each year was analyzed to compare the changes that occurred from one year, to the next.

Key Findings:

Selection

- The percentage of students selecting a fruit significantly increased after the new standards took effect, from **54%** to **66%** over the course of the study period.
- The percentage of students selecting an entrée as one of the three required components increased from **91%** to **98%** over the course of the study period.

Consumption

- The percentage of student vegetable consumption increased significantly from **45%** to **64%** over the course of the study period.
- The percentage of entrees consumed increased significantly from **71%** to **84%** over the course of the study period.

According to the study results, vegetable waste significantly decreased and there was no evidence of an increase in the percentage of fruit waste. Overall, this study suggests that the new standards have led to a decrease in school lunch plate waste despite changes in whole grain, sodium, and produce regulations.

Put it into practice!

- Promote fruit and vegetable consumption by offering a variety of produce options. This study also showed that students enjoy variety and are more likely to consume these foods when provided with various choices.
- Go above and beyond current requirements by serving ALL whole grain-rich items and limiting the prevalence of flavored milk in your menus.
- Aim to limit foods in the cafeteria that may compete with the healthy meals that you are serving. Try serving "Smart Snacks" to ensure that your a la carte snack and vending options also meet nutrition standards.
- Embrace any changes to the meal pattern and make it your mission to follow the regulations as closely as possible, so you know that you are serving the healthiest meals to your students!

Reference:

Schwartz MB, Henderson KE, Read M, Danna N, Ickovics JR. New school meal regulations increase fruit consumption and do not increase total plate waste. Child Obes. 2015 Jun;11(3):242-7. doi: 10.1089/chi.2015.0019. Epub 2015 Mar 3. PMID: 25734372; PMCID: PMC4484709.



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