

## What Can You Do?

### *Suggestions for Improving Your Lunchroom*

#### **1. *Make vegetables cool for kids by giving them creative names!***

When “Vegetable Soup” suddenly turned into a “Rich Vegetable Medley Soup,” sales increased 28% and ratings of the soup, the lunchroom, and the chef increased. Three types of labels are proven effective: nostalgic labels, such as “Grandma’s Original Apple Pie,” regional labels, like, “Louisiana Spicy Cajun Stew,” and descriptive labels, such as “Creamy Macaroni and Cheese.”

#### **2. *Convenience is key! Place healthy items next to the cash register.***

Bottlenecks occur at cash registers leaving students too much time to think about something extra to buy. Replace desserts with fruits or healthy beverages like 100% juice or low-fat milk. If schools only have desserts in this prime location, students are more likely to take them.

#### **3. *Students don’t have long for lunch! Provide healthy grab-and-go options in the lunchroom.***

On average, students spend close to 5 minutes of the 30-minute lunch period waiting in line. Some studies show that students often skip lunch altogether. Positive decision cues, such as smartly packaged healthy “grab and go” options, may help time-pressed, hungry, and distracted students make better food choices. Sandwiches can be preordered in the morning and picked up at lunchtime to avoid waiting in line.

#### **4. *Light it up! Display foods in an appealing, well-lit way.***

Lighting can be used to highlight healthy foods! Certain cues, like presentation and visual appeal, can influence on-the-spot decision-making. Marketing research finds that items displayed more prominently, at eye level, or first in line tend to be chosen more often than other items. A carefully planned arrangement of food in cafeterias could influence students’ choices, and ultimately, their diet quality.

#### **5. *Use colorful posters and table tents to advertise.***

Visual, colorful advertising provides a great medium for eliciting attention from consumers. Table tents and posters promoting dietary information and healthy eating attract attention to healthy foods and prime students to select healthier options in the lunchroom.

#### **6. *Healthy breakfasts are just as important as lunch!***

Studies have shown that children who eat breakfast do better in school. Adding a

breakfast program providing healthy grab-and-go options such as yogurt, fruit, and whole grain cereal may improve nutrition and academic performance in schools.

**7. *Vary vending machine options!***

Many students participate in afterschool sports and other activities. Because of large amounts of energy expenditure, it is important for them to have a snack after school. Vending machines can offer healthy snacks for these students, providing pre-cut vegetables, bagels, fruits, yogurts, and health bars rather than chips and cookies.

**8. *Gradually move to whole grains.***

Try gradually switching to whole grain breads or crusts either by substituting for white bread or adding a whole grain option to the lunch menu. The Best-Practiced Team award-winning Lansing school meal program substituted one slice of white bread to a wheat option on their peanut butter and jelly sandwich. When the students liked and were accustomed to that change, the district changed both slices to wheat. Additionally, wraps are healthier and less caloric options compared to rolls. Therefore, in order to promote better health and nutrition, whole-wheat wrap options can be added to school lunchrooms.

**9. *Make vegetables and fruit the “default” sides.***

Students are more likely to pick the default side dish than request a different one. Make vegetables and fruit the default sides for lunchroom entrees. On a similar principle, include low fat milk with lunches. Have less- healthy drinks such as soda available only by request—students will be less likely to purchase them.

**10. *Prompt students at the cash register—ask if they would like a fruit or vegetable.***

Have cafeteria workers ask if students would like vegetables with their entrees. Verbal prompts can cue food choices and eating behaviors. 70 percent of students in a 2007 study at Yale University ate a serving of fruit at a meal when school cafeteria workers asked if they would like fruit or fruit juice. Only 40 percent of students ate a serving of fruit when not prompted.

**11. *Stay synced by keeping online menus current.***

Behavioral studies show individuals who made food choices before being confronted with distractions were more likely to follow through on their dietary objectives. Allowing students (or for younger children, their parents) to select healthy meal options ahead of time also may help reduce purchases of less nutritious foods in the cafeteria.