



Dairy Vending Pilot, Swiss Valley Farms, Quad Cities (Iowa/Illinois)

- 17 middle and high schools, average enrollment = 1,090, range = 462 to 2,344
- 18,546 total students
- 24 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available

Words of wisdom

“Cafeteria staff asked, ‘Are the students going to buy the items?’ Then after it got started, some staff could not believe what we were selling.”

—School Foodservice Manager

“Very positive and lots of thank yous for bringing it into the school.”

—Student feedback

Key changes and results

Reported by Kevin Stiles, Vice President of Marketing and Industry Coordination, Midwest Dairy Association

- Dairy vending machines selling milk, cheese, and yogurt were installed in 17 middle and high schools at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year.
- Machines were stocked and maintained by school foodservice staff, who also collected sales data.
- Machine placements varied, but most were in or near cafeterias. Times that machines were available to students also varied, but they were consistently available prior to school and during lunch periods.

- Promotions and sampling sessions increased student interest and customer awareness. Examples include product sampling during student lunch periods; Press Your Luck, in which purchasers of select milk bottles with a sticker on the bottom received a prize; and Lotto Free Vend, a promotion in which machines were set to dispense a free product at every twenty-fifth sale.
- Total milk sales increased 5.1 percent by volume per school over the previous year when dairy vending machines were not in the schools.
- Although more dairy units were sold through high school vending than through junior high school vending, more product moved through junior high than high schools on a per student basis.
- In terms of total sales, milk accounted for 60 percent, followed by cheeses at 24 percent and yogurt at 16 percent.
- Junior high students were more interested than high school students in vending machine purchases of yogurt (24 percent versus 10 percent of sales) and cheese (31 percent versus 18 percent of sales).
- Availability of 16-ounce units (versus 8-ounce units in the cafeteria line) increased the total amount of milk sold.
- Yogurt and cheese sales from vending added to total sales, rather than displacing sales that would have occurred from the lunch line.
- Nearly half (49 percent) of all the milk purchased through the vending pilot was reduced-fat varieties (non-fat white, 2% white, 1% chocolate, and 2% strawberry).
- Feedback from the school administration, parents, and the community indicated that the healthier vending choices were appreciated. Twelve of the 19 schools kept the machines, and several of the other schools are now exploring options for maintaining dairy vending machines in their schools.
- Over the 2003-2004 school year, the dairy involved with the pilot noted an “explosion” in milk vending in Iowa, with more than 80 milk and/or dairy vending machines placed in schools, and more additions expected for 2004-2005.

Keys to success

- **PLACEMENT:** Vending machines were placed in high-traffic areas with a variety of products and frequent rotation of items.
- **PROMOTION:** Marketing efforts added excitement and helped to sustain sales with signs, contests, games, and product sampling.
- **STAFF:** Enthusiastic and knowledgeable foodservice staffs at the individual schools were essential to the project's success.

Description

The Midwest Dairy Association and Dairy Management Inc., partnered with Davenport, Iowa-based Swiss Valley Farms to place state-of-the-art vending machines in 17 Quad Cities schools (middle and high schools in Bettendorf, Davenport, Pleasant Valley, Eldridge, and Iowa City, Iowa along with Rock Island, Illinois). The black-and-white spotted vending machines, which serve milk and dairy products exclusively, were installed in schools at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year.

An earlier milk-only vending test completed in 2001 demonstrated that students would choose milk over other beverages such as juice and soda if it were readily available in attractive, easy-to-open containers, and in additional flavors. This test went a step further to see if cheese and yogurt could have marketing success if included alongside milk.

The test was designed to achieve three related goals:

1. To understand better the challenges faced in instituting a viable vending program under "real world" conditions.
2. To assess students' response to greater product availability via vending (milk, cheese, and yogurt).
3. To determine if school foodservice could successfully manage a dairy vending effort.

The test showed that school foodservice can meet the challenge and be successful in vending dairy as a positive alternative to other vended products, with the required labor, time, and commitment. Training, good location with all-day access, and promotion are essential to assure a profitable operation. School foodservice, if committed, can implement dairy vending. The following Web site contains information on a variety of milk vending machines:
www.nutritionexplorations.org/pdf/sfs/VendingFlyer.pdf.

Most schools will need a “learning curve” to become proficient in operating a vending business. Issues include offering the right product mix, ordering according to established sales patterns, stocking the right amount of product to optimize sales without excess out-of-date products, and properly executing promotions and sampling. Because cheese and yogurt products have a longer shelf life than milk, these products allow for more flexibility in ordering.

Future plans

- Continue to work with schools to supply dairy vending machines.

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East Middle School, Great Falls, Montana

- 912 students in central Montana
- 43 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available
- Limit student access to competitive foods

Words of wisdom

“We can do anything! If we have a goal, we can meet it.”

—*Cassie G., Student, 7th grade*

“When young people speak, adults listen, and it was our student leaders who pulled our school and community together on this project. Led by the voice of our students, help and contributions from the community were major factors in making this project successful.”

—*Jenny Rygg, Teacher, Project Nutrition Leader*

Key changes and results

Reported by Jenny Rygg, Teacher and Project Nutrition Leader, and student leaders

- Students at East Middle School have provided the motivation and leadership for improving their school nutrition environment. As part of a school-wide Project Nutrition, the students and their faculty advisor (a music teacher) have marketed nutrient-rich choices through a student store and also helped to influence changes in school vending and foodservice.
- With the help of a Montana Team Nutrition *Nutrition \$ENSE* project mini-grant of \$500, the student-run store added healthier snacks and drinks.
- In addition to school supplies, the school store now sells 16 healthier snacks and drinks before and after school every day, including bagels, fruit muffins, trail mix,

pretzels, granola bars, breakfast squares, crackers, beef jerky, string cheese, pudding, fruit cups, and yogurt. The snacks are sold at lower prices than vending machine items, but at equal or higher prices than foodservice items offered at breakfast and lunch. For example, beef jerky in the vending machine is 65 cents, but in the school store it is only 50 cents. Similarly, string cheese is only 30 cents in the school store, the same price as the string cheese the foodservice sells in the cafeteria.

- The students developed daily nutrition announcements and other advertising for the snacks, such as announcing store selections over the school-wide PA system. Sales have continued to increase steadily. Beef jerky is the most popular item with students; string cheese is the biggest seller with teachers.
- Because of the students' leadership and the increasing consumer demand, the cafeteria à la carte line now offers healthier snacks during lunch as well, including trail mix, baked chips, cheese, beef jerky, granola bars, and yogurt. According to school foodservice staff, there was no change in à la carte profits when they switched to healthier options.
- The students also approached the school's vending company about offering more nutritious options in their machines. After discovering that some of the healthier snacks in the vending machines sold just as well as candy and chips, the company traded one of their candy machines for a "healthy choices" snack machine, with nuts, crackers, snack mix, and other nutrient-rich items.
- Again, because of student influence, four of the school's vending machines—all of them except the "healthy choices" machine—were turned off during the school day.
- The students have helped create a significant change in overall attitudes toward the healthier food choices at East Middle School. Although some students were skeptical at first, they became interested, respectful, responsive and, most importantly, customers!

Keys to success

- **CUSTOMER FOCUS:** Surveying students about preferences to find out what nutritious snacks they liked most. These are the best-selling items in the store.
- **LIMITING ACCESS:** Turning off most of the vending machines for the entire school day, including the store hours before school, after school, and during lunch
- **PRICING:** Selling the healthier school store items for less than those of the vending machine for similar, but less nutritious items
- **MARKETING:** Advertising the new snack selections over the school PA system

Description

East Middle School has initiated a quest, dubbed Project Nutrition, by students, staff, and community members to improve healthy food and drink choices that students make in school. The project started with an action plan developed by students who attended a teen health workshop offered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The faculty advisor, a music teacher, actively supported the project.

Community support for the project included a public nutrition forum with student leaders, the mayor of Great Falls, school foodservice supervisors, the City/County Health Department, and Assistant Superintendent Dick Kuntz. This forum was featured on the evening news and in the *Great Falls Tribune* newspaper.

The teens, with help from their faculty advisor, applied for and received a \$500 *Nutrition \$ENSE* grant from the Montana Team Nutrition Program. They also received an anonymous \$400 donation and a refrigerator and napkin dispenser donated by local businesses.

Students involved in the store learned business skills, leadership, and teamwork. They had numerous media interviews and are now giving presentations about their project to other schools and at statewide conferences.

Future plans

- A poster contest to advertise the tasty, nutritious choices available in the store, with a \$20 gift certificate to a bookstore as the prize.
- Upgrade the student store to expand selection, including remodeling to fit a new freezer and microwave.
- A joint project involving the student store, teachers, and funding from the PTA that rewards students with coupons for 50 cents off healthy snacks in the store. Students earn the coupons for positive behaviors and study habits in the classroom.
- Switching times for recess and lunch so that lunch is after recess.
- Continuing the project in another school after East Middle School closes at the end of the 2004-2005 school year.

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Nate and Jessica - School Store - Great Falls, MT

Appliances in the EMS student store like the glass front refrigerator, microwave, freezer, and hot water urn are important new additions to the school store. Without them, the store would not be able to sell string cheese, pudding, frozen yogurt, warm bagels, or hot chocolate.



Kingsley Middle School, Kingsley, Michigan

- 460 total students in northern Michigan
- 40 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available

Words of wisdom

“We worked with twelve schools this year, including Kingsley Middle School, using *Changing the Scene*. All of them were amazed at the overall awareness that was raised by using the School Improvement Checklist in the kit. Bringing the foodservice staff, teachers, administrators, students, and parents together helped them recognize the challenges they faced – and how they could work together to improve their school’s environment.”

—Ann Guyer, RD, Michigan State University Extension

Key changes and results

Reported by Ann Guyer, RD, Associate Program Leader Michigan State University Extension

- Removed soft drink machine before the start of the 2002-2003 school year; during the school year, only one student asked where the machine was.
- Purchased a milk vending machine with a grant from United Dairy Industries of Michigan-Michigan Team Nutrition.
- Held a school-wide calcium campaign to kick off the installation of the new vending machine, which generated coverage from television and print media.
- Used the vending machine as a teaching tool and learning experience for special education classes.

- Used an outside facilitator from the Michigan State University Team Nutrition program and USDA's *Changing the Scene* kit to promote a healthy school nutrition and physical activity environment. The physical education teacher also used parts of the kit in health classes.
- The school has focused on the importance of physical education (it received a Governor's Council Award for exemplary physical education programs) and physical activity (it raised \$14,000 for the American Heart Association through the Hoops for Heart program).

Keys to success

- **RESOURCES:** Using USDA's *Changing the Scene* with the help of an outside facilitator
- **TEAMWORK:** Supportive Nutrition Action Team led by the school's physical education teacher

Description

Students were instrumental in the success of a milk vending project at Kingsley Middle School. The soft drink machine was removed from the building before the start of the 2002-2003 school year. With a grant of \$3,000 from United Dairy Industries of Michigan-Michigan Team Nutrition, a milk vending machine was purchased through a half-price offer. A school-wide calcium nutrition campaign was conducted to introduce the vending machine. This kick-off event included milk mustache photos and sampling stations for other "bone building snacks" such as smoothies (made by the principal!), yogurt, and cheese. Dairy nutrition information was also available. The kick-off was featured on local television stations and in the newspaper.

Management of the milk vending machine has become a learning experience for the special education class at the school. They work with the school foodservice department rotating the stock and re-stocking the machine—which sells out every day!

The Nutrition Action Team at Kingsley responsible for the milk vending machine project was led by a physical education teacher, Jolie King. Team members

included other teachers, along with a student, an administrator, and the foodservice director. The team wrapped up their grant project by identifying the next steps toward improving the school nutrition environment.

Future plans

- Continue meetings of the Nutrition Action Team – with the addition of more parents.
- Focus on the importance of breakfast during the 2003-2004 school year.
- Continue operation of the milk vending machine.

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SUCCESS STORY





South Windsor Schools, South Windsor, Connecticut

- 5,500 students (seven schools K-12) in a suburban area of Hartford, Connecticut
- 4.3 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available

Words of wisdom

“Quality brings quantity. Don’t be afraid to buy the best, prepare it with pizzazz and offer it with great service. The rewards will astound you! I believe in creativity and thinking outside the box. We do a lot of that and are really successful in our efforts.”

—*Mary Ann Lopez, SFNS, Director of Food Service*

Key changes and results

Reported by Mary Ann Lopez, SFNS, Director of Food Service

Vision, a strategic planning process, and creative marketing efforts have been essential to the numerous improvements in South Windsor School nutrition environments:

- Milk machines were successfully introduced into middle and high school cafeterias for the 2002-2003 school year. Machines vend flavored milks, waters, and 100% juices, as well as bottled smoothies. They are open all day, including for afterschool activities. The company responsible for stocking them says it “can hardly keep them filled.”
- Milk in 10-ounce plastic bottles was introduced to grades 6 through 12 in September 2003. Middle school milk purchases increased by 2000 bottles compared to September 2002 sales, and this change helped to increase meal calories to acceptable levels and to increase calcium intake as well. There is less waste of milk in the bottles.

- Snack items, especially those in the high school, have been reviewed for nutritive value. Those low in nutrients have either been eliminated or priced to reduce sales. For example, the price of doughnuts was raised to 90 cents; while smaller bagels are sold for 60 cents and larger bagels for 75 cents. Unsold breakfast bagels are sold at lunch along with soft pretzels. The sale of cookies is limited to certain days each week, and all fried chips have been replaced with baked products.
- Beginning in September 2003, cookies and brownies were no longer served daily to send the message that they are not everyday foods. Frozen dessert choices have been limited to frozen yogurt and ice cream in age-appropriate portion sizes. **All** chips sold at the secondary school level are now baked versions.
- In reimbursable lunches, daily produce choices have been expanded to include two to three vegetables and at least five fruits, both fresh and canned. Fresh produce is purchased from local farmers whenever possible.
- The overall fat content of the menus has also been reduced by limiting the number of times that high-fat items are served. Chicken fries have been eliminated and many breaded and fried meats are now offered in lower-fat, baked versions. More salads and lighter toppings for pizza are being introduced and promoted.
- The sales of healthier à la carte items have also been strong. For example, doughnut sales have dwindled while bagel sales are “very hot.”
- The South Windsor School District has been able to make gradual improvements in the school nutrition environment and maintain a financially sound program at the same time. In the early 1980’s when Mrs. Lopez started, the program participation rate was 32 percent. They now serve reimbursable meals to about 60 percent of district students—and almost 100 percent of district students participate in the foodservice’s total offerings.
- During October 2003, Nutrition Services offered a series of employee workshops on wellness and the links between obesity and diseases. These classes helped to focus the department on healthy lifestyles and the importance of role modeling.

Keys to success

- **MARKETING, MARKETING, MARKETING**
- **PLANNING:** Creating a strategic plan for the foodservice department
- **CUSTOMER FOCUS:** Meeting unique needs of individual schools
- **COLLABORATION:** Working with athletic coaches and physical education (PE) departments

Description

Innovative marketing has been the main key to success in South Windsor schools. With a fiscally strong program, the foodservice director was able to make gradual changes in the school nutrition environment without worrying about loss of income. The marketing efforts have also created strong relationships with important school and community groups such as teachers, parents, and school board members. Here are just a few ways that the foodservice program markets nutrition and school meals:

- Giant, colorful menus in the elementary schools allow students and visitors to see what is served. Elementary schools have four daily menu choices; secondary schools have 10 to 15 choices. The menus sent home to families resemble restaurant menus, instead of the traditional school calendar menus.
- Special coupons (in the shape of a large yellow school bus) offer \$1 off their first meal to all first graders; a free-meal coupon is given to transfer students (this helps provide a meal if the child has no funds or needs assistance).
- A new catering program (with a retired chef as manager) received rave reviews and increased revenues. This program has expanded catering to the town council and police, senior programs, teacher training sessions, and board of education meetings.

Strong relationships between cafeteria managers and their schools help facilitate changes in nutrition environments. Managers are encouraged to create unique programs for their schools, from visits of USDA's Power Panther costumed character to Halloween haunted houses. In December 2002, kitchen managers identified the need for school breakfast as part of strategic planning. They then worked with principals to start breakfast programs in two schools. For the 2003-2004 school year, all five elementary schools are offering breakfast with small but steadily increasing interest.

Connecting with the physical education department and athletic coaches has helped create links between nutrition and physical activity in South Windsor schools. In March 2003, child nutrition and physical education joined together for a CT at PLAY program that encourages Connecticut children to eat healthfully and be active.

Future plans

- Introduce a fresh serving line—with salads, wraps, and sandwich choices—as part of a redesign in elementary school kitchens.

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Tolland Public Schools, Tolland, Connecticut

- 3,100 total students, northeast of Hartford
- 3 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available

Words of wisdom

“If you distribute a notice asking parents to provide a ‘healthy’ snack for their child, more often than not, they send in something that is considered junk food. Therefore, a caring teacher has the responsibility of being a strong role model for children, by eating nourishing snacks in front of them. Teachers should also bring in healthy snacks for kids to sample and set up incentive programs in the classroom to reward children for healthful eating. Children will take the nutritional message home and this way, teachers can educate the parents through the children.”

—*Carol Goodrow, Teacher, elementary school*

Key changes and results

Reported by Carol Goodrow, Teacher, elementary school

Teacher Carol Goodrow turned her passion for nutrition and physical activity into a successful program for her Parker Memorial Elementary School special education resource room. Her Healthy Snackers Ultra-Marathon generated enthusiasm among students and parents. To get the program up and running, the classroom chose their favorite snack time (morning) and brainstormed a list of 50 nutritious snack items. Large wall charts of the healthy snacks were posted in the classroom; students received rewards (name on chart and small toy trinkets) for being the first person to bring an item and recognition (stickers) for bringing any healthy snack food to school. The program was designed to encourage classroom teamwork, to get children invested in healthier eating, and to teach the value of snacks from all food groups.

More information and photos of the program can be found online at www.kidsrunning.com/columns/whatkidsneed2.html.

This focus on healthful eating and physical activity was extended into other activities, including an end-of-the-year classroom family fun run (Run Spot Run) and a school-wide visit from elite athlete Mr. Eddy Hellebuyck, the first runner from the USA to cross the finish line at the 2003 Boston Marathon. Ms. Goodrow worked with the school foodservice director to serve a brown bag lunch, suggested by Mr. Hellebuyck, for the whole school during the athlete's daylong visit. Lunch participation was at record levels as children and their parents enjoyed a bean burrito with salsa, corn or fresh veggies, assorted fresh fruits, and low-fat milk. Using healthy doses of fun and student involvement, these programs provided positive nutrition experiences in both the classroom and cafeteria. The success of "Eddy's lunch menu" also opened the door for future collaborations with the school foodservice program.

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Waiakea High School, Hilo, Hawai'i

- 1,290 students, on the Big Island of Hawai'i
- 26 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make more healthful foods and beverages available

Words of wisdom

“When you make learning fun, students are eager, enthusiastic, and willing to do ANYTHING! Build partnerships in the community, they are a crucial part of your success. Planning and commitment are the keys to a successful program. Keep smiling, even when things don't work out the way you plan, since we are ALWAYS LEARNING!”

—*Sheri Kojima, Marketing Instructor/DECA Advisor*

Key changes and results

Reported by Sheri Kojima, Marketing Instructor/DECA Advisor

As part of Waiakea High School's Start.Living.Healthy program, students in a marketing class developed a program to offer healthier food and beverage choices.

- A local company donated a machine to vend flavored and low-fat milks, bottled water, passion-orange guava fruit juice, and 100% orange juice. As the owner of the machine, the student store was responsible for marketing and selling the products and for managing its finances and product stock. Information about the dairy's involvement is at www.lanimoo.com/emooschool/projectthealthy.html.
- Through a partnership with a local food company, the class negotiated lower prices on food options to be sold in the student-managed store. Products included healthier items such as cereal cups, low-fat frozen meals, breakfast bars, and lower fat, lower calorie microwavable meals.

- Students created flyers, school-wide PA announcements, school newspaper articles and ads, banners, and commercials to market the water and milk products sold in their vending machine. The commercials have aired on local television and radio stations.
- Since the introduction of the milk/juice/water machine, sales in the student store have gradually increased and now equal one to two cases per day.
- Students are more aware of the importance of health as a result of this program. As part of the marketing class, students developed skills in teamwork, market research, planning, purchasing, and pricing through their management of the student store.

Keys to success

- **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT:** Energetic and enthusiastic students enrolled in the high school marketing class
- **COMMUNITY SUPPORT:** Support from local businesses and school administration
- **STRATEGIC PLANNING:** Long hours of planning and long-term commitment

Description

Since 1999, the Healthy Hawai'i Initiative has promoted health awareness through radio, television, and print media with the Start.Living.Healthy campaign. Students in Waiakea High's marketing class developed the school-based Start.Living. Healthy program, which was led by students, advised by a teacher, and supported by community business partnerships.

In June 2000 the marketing class worked with a local businessman to develop a campaign to raise awareness of the long-term effects of poor eating habits. A local dairy company donated a vending machine that could dispense milk, water, and juice. In October 2001 the program expanded to include healthier foods, when Sheri Kojima, the marketing class teacher, and the food company negotiated prices on food items to be sold in the student-run store.

The students focused their efforts on marketing their products. As part of the class, the students were responsible for the maintenance of the vending machine, thereby developing their skills in purchasing, pricing, financing, and promoting

products. Their promotional efforts featured flyers, school-wide PA announcements, bulletins, advertisements, school newspaper articles, and banners.

With the financial support of a local businessman, the students produced television commercials and radio announcements. They recorded a song, *Who Let the Cows Out, Moo, Moo, Moo, Moo-Moo*, which was broadcast on local radio to promote milk consumption. A commercial was created to promote the purchase and consumption of water. The project received substantial attention from State and local newspapers that highlighted the students' efforts to offer healthier alternatives to soft drinks.

The marketing class developed two additional campaigns to promote healthy lifestyle choices:

- An annual Dare to Drink Milk tug-of-war competition encourages teamwork, strong bones, and physical strength. Participants receive free milk and the name of the winning class is engraved on Waiakea High School's Perpetual Cow trophy.
- *EAT LUNCH and WIN BIG* promotes eating school lunch. Students who eat the lunch in the school cafeteria are eligible to participate in a raffle, and the winners receive gift certificates for local shopping centers and supermarkets. The business community has actively supported the program with prize donations.

Future plans

- Promote the project to statewide media to highlight the program and encourage other schools to participate in health projects.
- Continue selling milk, juice, and water on campus.

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SUCCESS STORY

Waiakea High School, Hilo, Hawai'i





Westlake Middle School, Adams 12 Five Star School District, Thornton, Colorado

- 1,153 students in a northern suburb of Denver
- 14.8 percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school meals

Approaches

- Adopt marketing techniques to promote healthful choices
- Make healthful foods and beverages available

Words of wisdom

“Involve students in making changes and decisions. When students know they can make a difference in terms of menu and à la carte choices, they are more likely to support school foodservice and give honest feedback. Also, we need to stay away from promoting the idea of good foods versus bad foods. Our role, and responsibility, is to teach appropriate portion sizes and sensible choices. Bottom line: We need to help students understand that all foods can be enjoyed in moderation.”

—*Melissa Jackson, MS, RD, Field Supervisor for Nutrition Services*

Key changes and results

Reported by Melissa Jackson, MS, RD, Field Supervisor for Nutrition Services

- In fall 2003, Nutrition Services implemented “eat smart” à la carte options at Westlake Middle School, replacing many of their usual items with more sensible snacks.
- Nutrition Services is promoting USDA's *Eat Smart. Play Hard.*[™] campaign (www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard) with logos on menus, posters, and newsletter articles, which are coordinated with the “eat smart” snacks.
- The nutrition program has implemented a new policy requiring the purchase of an entrée before any snack or drink can be purchased.

- An attractive fruit and vegetable bar is offered daily. Produce is pre-portioned for food safety and to keep the line moving at a reasonable speed.
- Nutrition Services worked with the vending machine company to ensure that vending machine options are similar to the à la carte “eat smart” snacks.
- Initial figures since implementing “eat smart” options and the policy requiring the purchase of an entrée before snacks and beverages indicate that à la carte sales increased by 13.7 percent since the previous year, an increase of 11 cents per child. There was an 8-percent increase in reimbursable meal participation. In the second year, there was a 10.2 percent increase in a la carte sales and a 13.9 percent increase in average daily reimbursable meals served.
- Reaction from students, parents, teachers, and staff is very positive.

Keys to success

- **MARKET RESEARCH:** Conducting extensive research before making changes, collecting data, and documenting staff observations
- **EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION:** Finding many partners to support and guide changes

Description

Observational studies by the Nutrition Services staff, combined with support in the school community, led to a pilot project at the Westlake Middle School in the Adams 12 Five-Star School District. If the à la carte and vending changes are successful in Westlake—and all indicators suggest that they will be—the program will be extended to all district elementary and middle schools in 2004-2005

During the 2002-2003 school year, Nutrition Services staff observed à la carte purchasing patterns. They discovered that kids were not buying nutritious lunches from à la carte lines. Sample lunches included a fruit drink and four brownies, a bag of chips and a fruit drink, or a fruit drink by itself. Recognizing the epidemic of childhood overweight, the nutrition staff decided to make several changes in their food offerings.

The first step was to conduct focus groups with 6th and 7th graders in spring 2002. The goal of the focus groups was to determine types of “eat smart” snacks that would be acceptable to students. Armed with ideas from the focus groups, Nutrition Services also decided to implement a policy change: An entrée must be purchased before students can purchase a snack or drink. An entrée can be a school lunch meal, or it can be an à la carte choice such as a pretzel with cheese sauce, a burrito, a slice of pizza, chicken nuggets, or a sandwich. At least three entrée choices are available every day on à la carte lines.

A fruit and vegetable bar is served daily as part of the reimbursable school meal and the à la carte line. All vegetables and fruits are pre-cupped and pre-portioned to keep food safe, increase line speed, use fewer servers, and provide more cashiers. Salads and fresh relishes are daily vegetable features. Featured fruits include fresh fruit, canned fruit, and a variety of 100% fruit juices.

From the outset, Nutrition Services decided not to set strict, specific nutrition criteria for à la carte choices. They chose to use an “eat smart” approach, offering sensible foods with appropriate portion sizes, and applying general “good judgment” about snack choices.

The pilot program was made possible with the support of multiple partners:

- Nutrition Services Director (Carol Miller, RD) who said, “Let’s do it!”
- Students who actively participated in focus groups and helped to identify nutritious snack products that taste good
- Parents who participated in a children’s nutrition interest committee and were concerned about the kinds of foods being offered at Westlake
- Kitchen staff who modeled health by wearing pedometers and promoted fitness by giving away bikes in an Eat Smart. Play Hard.™ essay contest
- A vice principal who supported more sensible food choices at school and agreed to the use of Westlake as a pilot site for the “eat smart” snacks
- A vending company that identified vending machine snacks similar to the approved snacks offered on Westlake à la carte lines

Future plans

- Maintain financial stability and implement “eat smart” changes in all district schools.
- Conduct more student focus groups to determine additional nutritious snacks.

For more information, contact:

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