THE SCHOOL NUTRITION DIETARY ASSESSMENT STUDY III OVERVIEW



The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) have evolved rapidly in recent years, due to the School Meals Initiative, changing food intake patterns, and fiscal constraints. In light of this, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is undertaking a major study to assess the meals offered in the programs and the food actually consumed by students.

This study, called the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study (SNDA III), will be similar to SNDA I conducted in the early 1990s, which examined school menus and students' diets and SNDA II conducted in the late 1990s, which examined only school menus. Data obtained in this study will be used to estimate the nutrient content of the meals currently offered in the school lunch and breakfast programs. Information is also being obtained about meals consumed by students. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) is working with FNS to conduct this study.

WHY ARE WE DOING THE STUDY?

The information from this new study will be used in part for program performance measurement included in USDA's Strategic Plan. which is required under the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA). Strategic Goal 4, to "Improve the Nation's Nutrition and Health," includes a target for good performance that "[a]II elementary and secondary schools ...offer meal options to students that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines." Results will also be used in planning future technical assistance to schools and in designing nutrition education programs for school-age children.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY?

The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III has multiple objectives. They are to:

- Determine the foods included in and the average nutrient content of NSLP and SBP meals currently offered to students in public schools.
- Determine the nutrient content of foods currently selected and consumed by children in public schools participating in the NSLP/SBP.
- Examine foods offered in the schools and food consumed by students taking into account school and household characteristics.
- Determine primary food sources for various nutrients.
- Examine the variety of food choices offered to students on a daily basis.
- Determine changes in the nutrient composition of USDA reimbursable meals since School Year 1991-1992 when the first School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study was conducted.

HOW ARE SCHOOLS BEING CHOSEN FOR THE STUDY?

The study will gather data from a nationally representative sample of public elementary, middle, and high schools during the spring of the 2004-2005 school year. A total of 405 schools in approximately 135 school districts are expected to participate in the study.

Choosing schools to participate in the study is a two-stage process. In the first stage, School Food Authorities (SFAs) have been selected from the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia. These districts were chosen to be nationally representative of all public NSLP schools in the U.S. based on size, region, and types of menu planning systems used. During the second stage, for most districts, one elementary, one middle, and one high school will be selected within each district.

WHAT DATA ARE BEING COLLECTED?

Data will be collected from school officials, students, and parents of the students.

SFA directors and school food service managers will be asked to provide data on food service characteristics and meals Descriptive information about offered. district-level operations and meal service characteristics will be collected primarily from SFA directors during telephone interviews. Food service managers in sampled schools will compile and report data on USDA reimbursable meals. They will describe foods offered at all breakfasts and lunches during a specified five-day period the target week. In addition, they will identify the types of food offered on an a la carte basis for one day of the target week.

At 300 of the participating schools, a random sample of students will be selected and interviewed about their food consumption over a 24-hour period. Younger children will be assisted by parents in these interviews, and the parents will also supply important background information on household characteristics. A total of approximately 2400 students (and their parents) will be interviewed. (For statistical reasons, about a

quarter of these students will be interviewed about their food consumption over a second 24-hour period.)

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE?

Below is a schedule of project activities.

October to
November 2004

Contact state child
nutrition directors in
sampled states

October to
December 2004

Contact districts and
schools

January to June
2005

Collect data

Prepare analysis files
2005

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

Additional information on the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III may be obtained from MPR. Their address is P.O. Box 2393, Princeton, NJ 08543. Staff names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses appear below.

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