

Full Study Title: The Modifying Eating and Lifestyles at School (MEALS) Study

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Protocol Summary

1. Description and Specific Aims

Project Modifying Eating and Lifestyles at School (MEALS) was a school-based study developed by the nonprofit organization Project Bread (www.ProjectBread.org) and the Harvard School of Public Health. Project Bread hired a professional chef to work with several schools in a low-income, urban school district in Massachusetts to enhance the palatability and nutrient profile of the school meals. Four schools were randomly assigned to receive the professional chef. Additionally, two schools in that district and four schools in a second school district were randomly assigned to receive a behavioral psychology intervention to influence the selection and consumption of the healthier foods offered. Selection and consumption were assessed at baseline, up to 3 months post-implementation (short-term implementation for chef-enhanced meals), up to 4 months post-implementation (long-term implementation for behavioral psychology) and/or up to 7 months post-implementation (long-term implementation for chef-enhanced meals).

Primary Aim 1: to examine the impact of introducing healthier, chef-enhanced foods with increased palatability on selection and consumption among elementary and middle school students. It is hypothesized that there will be an increase in the selection and consumption of entrees, fruits, and vegetables in schools where healthier, chef-enhanced foods are served.

Aim 2: to examine the impact of physical modifications to the placement and displays of foods in the cafeteria on selection/consumption among elementary and middle school students. It is hypothesized that there will be an increase in selection and consumption of entrees, milk, fruits, and vegetables when modifications are made.

2. Eligibility

Inclusion Criteria: Students in grades 1-8 attending a participating school and receiving a school meal on a study day

Exclusion Criteria: Bringing a lunch from home on a study day or not eating lunch in the cafeteria on a study day

3. Analysis plans

Primary Outcomes:

1. Change in the selection of meal components (Selection of entrees, milk, fruits, and vegetables) [Time Frame: baseline, up to 3 months post-implementation, and up to 7 months post-implementation]
2. Change in the consumption of meal components (consumption of entrees, milk, fruits, and vegetables) [Time Frame: baseline, up to 3 months post-implementation, and up to 7 months post-implementation]

Secondary Outcomes

1. Time to eat (Estimated amount of time spent eating foods) [Time Frame: up to 24 months]
2. Hunger (Self-reported hunger at the end of the meal) [Time Frame: up to 12 months]