



Smarter Lunchrooms

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Anyone who's been a parent for more than ten minutes knows that controlling the eating behavior of young kids is tough when they're alone and impossible when they're with their friends. It's like organizing a picnic for squirrels.

Welcome to school lunchtime. If every school lunchroom had a farm-size garden, an extra million-dollar budget, and Chef Boyardee on staff, it still won't really be able control the way kids eat each week. When it comes to lunch, we can educate, bribe, or restrict what we give kids, but we can't tell them what to eat. And as we know, it's not nutrition until it's eaten.

What we can do, however, is make it more convenient, appealing, or normal to pick up an apple instead of a cookie. This is the Smarter Lunchroom, the type of lunchroom that can get kids to choose and eat their healthier lunch and to love it—because no one told them what to do.¹

Whether we live and breathe school lunch or are indifferent to it, we all have an indelible stereotype of school lunch based on when we were in ninth grade. With that in mind, here's a brief history of lunchtime.

School Lunch 101

A lot of seemingly unrelated things--pajamas, clip-on neckties, Silly Putty, Twinkies, and Nylons--were either invented or made popular as a result of World War II.² This includes the hot school lunch. Back in the early 1940s, over a third of the draftees were classified as “4F”--not fit for service--because of malnutrition.³ They were too skinny, too weak, or had too many nutrition-related health problems.

In 1946, right after the world had again been made safe for baseball and apple pie, the Federal School Lunch program got started. Its purpose was to help ensure that all schoolchildren had at least one balanced, healthy, hot meal each school day. Since then it’s gone through a number of growing pains as it has evolved. Here’s one interpretation of how it all went down.⁴

The Mess Hall Era (1940s to 1960s). The Mess Hall Era had the same take-it-or-leave it flexibility of Henry Ford’s black Model T: You could have anything you wanted as long as it was the one meal on the menu for the day. Monday might have been Salisbury steak, tater tots, and carrots and Tuesday might be chili, corn, and cinnamon rolls. School lunchrooms were a cross between eating on a World War II submarine and the Alcatraz prison chow line. At the time, the food was novel, hot, and got eaten. But whereas all the normal Beaver Cleaver kids ate the school lunch, the cool kids started to bring theirs from home.

The Food Court Era (1970s to 1980s). To bring in more kids and more dollars into the cashier line, innovative lunchrooms started offering more hot lunch options--two or three entrées or side dishes--and they began trucking in the tasty stuff: cheeseburgers, pizza, French fries, chocolate shakes, tacos, and brownies. The progressive schools even had actual express carts and kiosks from the big chains like Pizza Hut and Subway. At this point it seemed that most people ate at school, including the cool kids--who bought⁵ the tasty stuff but not the fish sticks and lima beans.

The NutriLunch Era (1990s to today). Food Pyramids, Dietary Guidelines, and helicopter parenting all converged to focus on filling kids up with the right foods. As some of the indulgences left the cafeteria, some kids found less of a reason to eat there, and the lunch lines started thinning out. The cool kids started leaving campus for lunch, bringing in a Mountain Dew and FunYuns, or having Domino’s pizza delivered to a side door.⁶

Most of the big reports, guidelines, and dietary standards that are set for schools are pretty much “nutrition by committee.”⁷ They’re good in theory, but they wrongly focus on what kids *ought to do* and ignore what kids *will do*.⁸ They can make schools serve tofu and kale, but they can’t make kids eat it. Kids will eat what they want. Kids can leave campus, bring Cheetos, skip lunch, or order pizza--but they don’t have to eat tofu and kale if they don’t want to.

It's temptingly hopeful to think that the best way to get kids to eat healthier is to make sure the only school foods they can buy aren't full of salt, sugar, and fat. But kids learn from their role models--us. *We* like variety and indulgence--salt, sugar, and fat--and so do they. Take that away, and they'll look for lunch elsewhere, just as we would, if our boss did that where *we* work.

Take chocolate milk. It's a battle zone. Some critics hate it for what it *is*--it's milk with added sugar and flavoring. Some supporters love it for what it's *not*--a soft drink, an expensive vitamin water, a high-calorie sports drink, or an overpriced water in an environmentally unfriendly bottle. Some say it's less perfect than white milk; others say at least it's more nutritious than just about everything else. Both are right.

When Chocolate Milk Attacks

A few weeks after we started the Smarter Lunchroom Movement in February 2009, we were asked to visit a school that had proudly hired a new food service director (a.k.a. head lunch lady) with a dreamy combination of two skills. She was a registered dietician who had also graduated from an elite culinary school. What could be more perfect? But by the time we arrived, three weeks later, it was clear this wasn't the model of success the school had expected.

Everybody's first week on the job is crazy. It doesn't matter whether you're in a tollbooth, a warehouse, or the White House; you feel pretty much in the dark. But if you're standing in the dark and lighting a match to get your bearings, it's good to let your eyes adjust before charging full speed in the direction you think is right. When we arrived, the new food service director looked as if she hadn't slept in the three weeks since she'd started. Here's what had happened.

She spent her first week boldly eliminating chocolate milk from her lunchroom because of its sugar content. She spent her second week besieged by irate students, teachers, and parents who wanted it back. All sales went down, and many kids stopped eating school lunch altogether--they either skipped it or brought a sad sack lunch from home. To stop the milk hemorrhage, she brought chocolate milk back on two days a week. The complaints continued. The town newspaper even wrote a front-page feature on her. Not the nice kind.

Kids love chocolate milk. If you tell them, "No chocolate milk," many will become indignant. You're the evil adult -- the Man -- telling them what they can and cannot do. So the key is to *not* take chocolate milk away, but give them a choice--make them decide just *how badly they want it*. For example, kids might like chocolate milk, but they also like hanging out with their friends more than waiting in line.

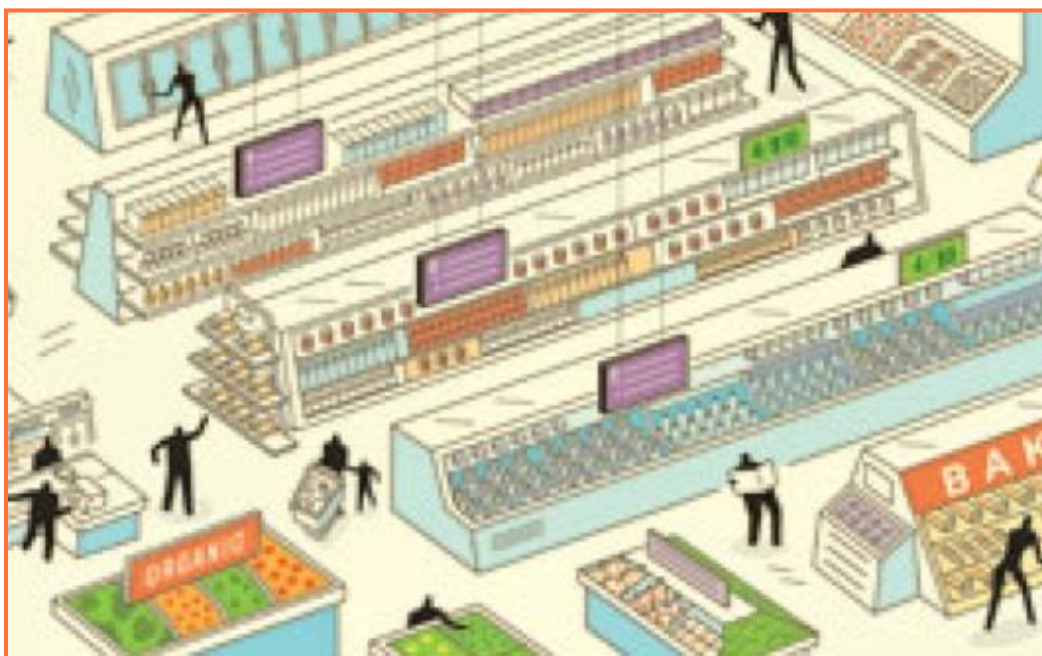
Here's what we suggested: Offer them chocolate milk every day, but put it in an inconvenient cooler behind the white milk. If they want chocolate milk they can get out of main lunch line, walk around back, wait in a twenty-second bottleneck, and finally get their chocolate milk. We never tell them they can't have

it--that backfires. We just make them think twice about whether they want it bad enough.

In our experience with other schools, some kids will wait, but a lot won't—the ones who want to hang out with their friends more than they want chocolate milk. But here's what's important. *Nobody* complains, because they know they can still have chocolate milk if they want it bad enough. There's no one to blame; it was their choice. When we make chocolate milk less convenient, even simply putting white milk in the front of the cooler and chocolate in back, white milk sales increase by 30 to 40 percent.⁹ No complaints. No front-page stories creating movie-ready bad guys out of friendly local dietitians.

A Chocolate Milk Redesign

50-50 White-Chocolate milk with White milk in front cooler and Chocolate milk in a cooler in back with a waiting line



More Fruit by Design

In the spring of 2009 we got a call from the New York Department of Public Health with a “quick question.” They were giving \$3000 pilot grants to a school district near Lake Placid, New York—the heart of the Adirondacks Mountains--to see if they could increase the amount of fruit kids ate by 5 percent. Their question: “How much do these schools need to drop the price of 50¢ apples in order to sell 5 percent more of them?”

Our guess was that price had nothing to do with it. You could double the price or halve the price and sales wouldn't change. Kids who want an apple will buy one, and kids who don't . . . won't. But thinking there was probably something different that could be done--other than changing the price--we loaded up two

Jeeps and took a late-night seven-hour drive to the Adirondacks to see what was really going wrong in the fruit world. After a short night of sleep in a log cabin inn, we divided into two teams and began doing recon in the different lunchrooms in the school district.

First, we saw that cutting the price of fruit wouldn't do jack--no kid knew the price of anything on the lunch line. Kids pay for lunches with debit cards, PIN numbers, fingerprint scans, or eyeball scans that subtract the price of their lunch from a magical debit account that their parents charge up with money every month or so. Nobody was counting out nickels to pay for an apple or pear. It was paid with these magical, invisible funds.¹⁰ Cutting the price seemed silly since the kids weren't focused on the price to begin with.

Then we looked at the fruit itself. Imagine all the different ways you could display fruit to kids. Now think of the worst way you could do it. In school after school, anemic-looking fruit had been tossed into those big steamer pans (appetizingly called "chaffers") and pushed under acrylic "sneeze shields." You pretty much had to contort and stretch your body like a Cirque du Soleil performer to retrieve your apple from an unappetizing metal pan that looked like a family-size hospital bedpan. Given how inconvenient and unappetizing the fruit looked, taking 20 cents off the price would have been a joke. The cafeteria would simply have made less money and sold no more fruit.

When we met the next day with five of these food service directors, we said, "Don't lower the price. Just make two changes. Put the fruit in a nice bowl and set it out under a well-lit part of the line." We said it didn't matter what the bowl looked like. It could be from Target, TJ Maxx, Goodwill, or a lunch lady's basement. It just couldn't look like a family-size hospital bedpan behind a sneeze-shield.

This seemed pretty simple. Three of the schools jumped on board, and they pledged to make this change and track their fruit sales. Three months later, they reported that sales hadn't increased by only 5 percent. Instead, they had popped up 103 percent and stayed there for the entire semester.

These were pretty simple directions: *Put the fruit in a nice bowl and put it out under a well-lit part of the line.* Yet when we checked in with the fourth school, they told us they had bought a nice bowl, but then got a little bit mixed up. Instead of putting the bowl of fruit in a well-lit part of the line, they had instead taken an old desk light and simply put it up on the lunch line and shined it on the fruit – an apple spotlight dance. Sales shot up by 186 percent.¹¹

The last school never made the changes, and they had what they thought were good excuses: It wouldn't work, they were too busy, they weren't certain what type of bowl to buy, they didn't have the spare cash or slush fund to buy a bowl, they couldn't bring one from home, they weren't sure whether the bowl met health standards, they wanted to make sure the shape of the bowl didn't offend anyone's religion, and so on. They had lots of reasons why they couldn't

“put the fruit in a nice bowl and put the bowl out under a well-lit part of the line.” And they didn’t sell any more fruit.

Telling a food service director not to serve cookies is one way to change the lunchroom—but it has its problems. The food service directors are the queens or kings of their domain. They often have twenty years of expertise in designing menus, finding the perfect suppliers, tweaking recipes, predicting sales volume, managing leftovers, and keeping food safe. They’re often resistant to changing the food they serve, but they’ll often change their lunchroom to help kids pick up an apple instead of a cookie—especially if it’s a change that can be done quickly and inexpensively.¹²

Put it in a nice bowl under a well-lit part of the line? It works. If the food was attractively presented, it looked yummier. Furthermore, if it was in their faces, it was on their plates. Nowhere is this more vividly illustrated than with a salad bar.

The Salad Bar Solution

Vegetables are a battleground where the will of a child fights the will of a parent. A similar battle is waged in United States lunchrooms, where thirty-two million kids eat school lunches every day. But here it’s a battle between pizza-loving kids and salad-serving lunch ladies. At most schools it’s a losing battle for the salad bar. The USDA even called us and asked if we had any insights on how to get middle and high school kids to pile it on their plate. How could we turn this around?

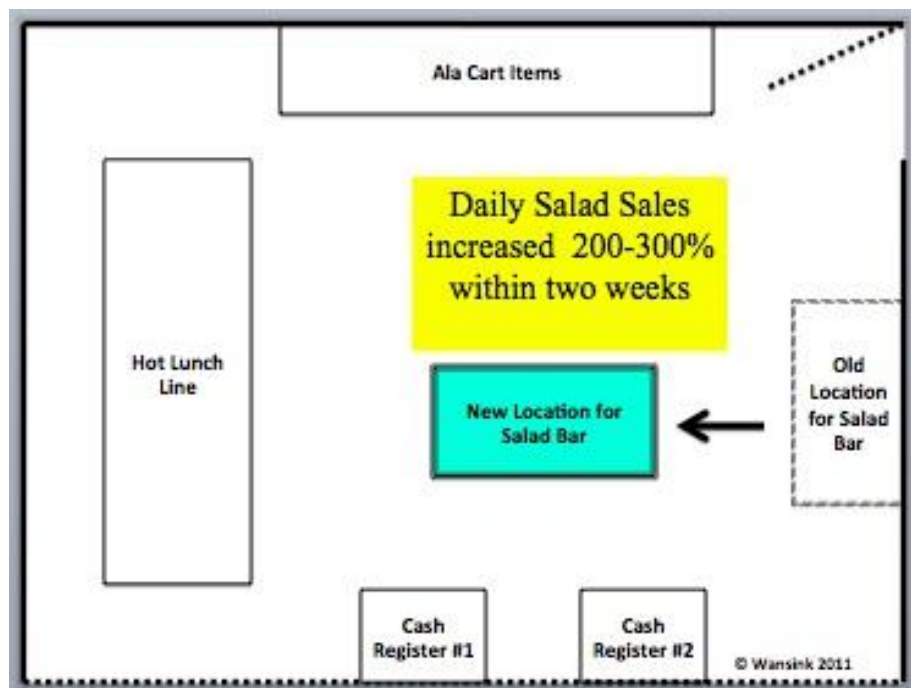
We typically think that if we want kids to eat salad, we either have to educate them or entice them. When education doesn’t work, we try to entice them by cutting the price or adding those miniature corn-on-the-cobs that look like something Malibu Barbie would eat. The problem with these approaches is that “educating” students requires a plan, a time slot, and a teacher, and “enticing” them costs money to subsidize or to buy the extra Barbie corn.

If we were to ask kids why they didn’t eat salads, their knee-jerk answers would be predictable—too icky or boring compared to pizza. That’s what they’d say—but they’d be wrong. Here’s the real answer: The big reason they don’t buy salad is simply that they don’t think about it. Just like us, they have their lunchtime habits—and they don’t include salad bars. But if something made them think about salad—even for a second—it might lead a high schooler to pick up the tongs.

Within a month of making our pilgrimage to Lake Placid to help schools increase fruit sales, we stumbled across the chance we needed to follow up on the USDA question about salad bars. We got a call from an award-winning food service director, Chris Wallace, who called asking if she would increase salad bar sales in a middle school if she were to cut the price. Because of the bigger-picture USDA synergy, we hustled out to her district.

Here's the layout of the lunchroom. The salad bar is pushed against one wall and virtually ignored. It's as easy to walk by and ignore as a wall flier for last Tuesday's blood drive. The sixty-second solution was to wheel the salad bar ten feet out from the wall and turn it sideways. This way kids couldn't walk by it; they had to walk *around* it to get to the cash registers. For the first couple of weeks kids would pick up their standard lunch, bump into the salad bar, pause, walk around it, and pay for their food. After a while, however, these pauses got a little bit longer. Eventually, some students broke from their remote control lunch pattern to try the salad. It didn't happen every day, but it was frequent enough that within a couple weeks the salad bar sales increased 200 to 300 percent.¹³

Salad Bar Redesign



When the salad was in their face, it was on their mind. They might say *no* nine days in a row, but every once in a while a *yes* will squeak by. No price cuts, no expensive additions, no complaints, and no salad leftovers to throw into the mulch pile.

What You Can Do . . .

From Smarter Lunchrooms to Smarter Kitchens

Every home has its own food service director. It's probably you.

You don't have to ask anyone to dust off a fruit bowl and hang it in a macrame plant holder inside your kitchen door. Just put it on a convenient part of the counter within a short arms-reach of where people walk every day. In one of our studies, the average time fruit lasted in a fruit bowl was eight days. The average time it lasted in the refrigerator? Twenty-three days.

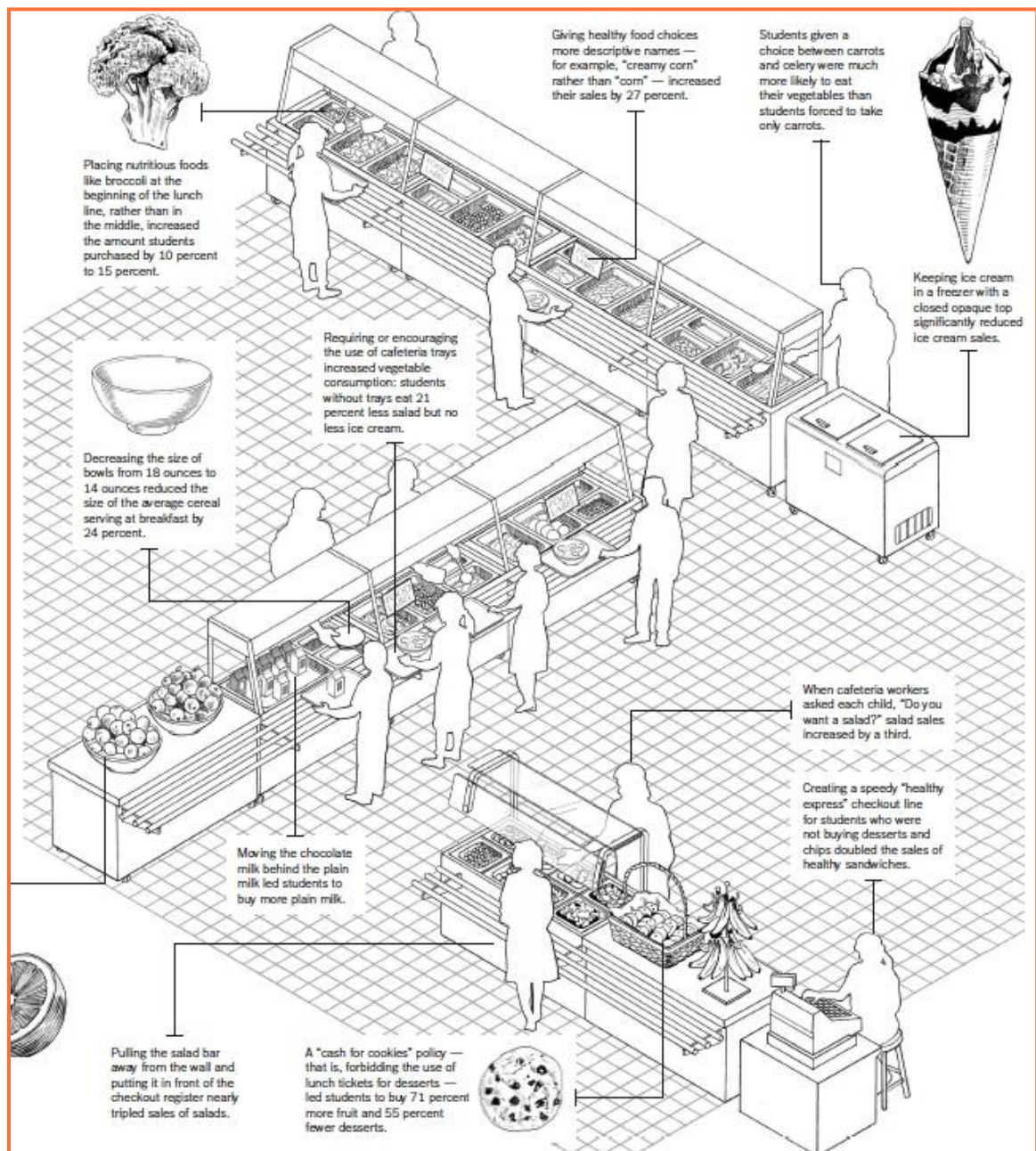
If you want to keep fruit in the fridge, put it on the middle shelf whole, or cut it up and put it in plastic bags. Elementary school kids are 35 percent more likely to take fruit that's been cut up compared to whole fruit. One solution for people with more cash than time is to buy a fruit sectioner for the counter. One push = eight pieces.

Lunch Line Redesign, MTV-Style

We've discovered more than 100 changes that lunchrooms can make to nudge students to eat better. For instance, if you show a kid three consecutive pans of vegetables--green beans, corn, and carrots--they'll take 11 percent more of whatever vegetable is in the first pan. It doesn't matter what it is. They're hungry, and what's first looks best. To help schools visualize how they could go through their lunchrooms and make a bunch of low-cost/no cost changes, my friend David Just and I wrote an infographic editorial for the *New York Times*.¹⁴ One teacher said she even printed this out for her students and had them color it in class. High school math class just isn't what it used to be.

Lunch Line Redesign

Distill the NY Times article below into its most visual elements



Shortly after the op-ed was published, a television producer wanted to film us doing a before-and-after Smarter Lunchroom Makeover of a middle school. Why a middle school? Apparently elementary students act too random in front of TV cameras (remember that picnic for squirrels?), and most high schoolers aren't photogenic enough for television--too many strange clothes, weird hair colors, piercings, and uninterested looks. The TV people wanted us to find a middle school that would do a total lunchroom makeover for less than \$50--and film it all MTV-style.¹⁵

After finding the perfect middle school and watching students eat lunches for a week, we isolated ten changes we could easily make for less than \$50 total that would probably help them eat better without even realizing it--things like changing the location of the fruit, giving fun names to healthy foods, moving the cookies behind the counter, putting the vegetables first, and so on. The food service director and producer were cool with the changes, so we got to work.¹⁶ Twenty-five kids were hand-picked to be secretly filmed by three hidden cameras. We hid cameras in a ceiling tile, a hat, and even in our fake water bottle. Everything was set--and then came the catch. We were asked, with the cameras rolling, to predict the sales for each food item.

After lunch was over, the smoke cleared, and the dishes washed, we were able to calculate just what had happened. The makeover was a nutritional victory--kids took a lot more salads, fruit sales doubled, white milk sales went up 38 percent, sugary drinks sales dropped by 17 percent, and they ran out of the healthy bean burritos--renamed Big Bad Bean Burritos--for the first time ever. These kids ate an average of 18 percent fewer calories, and they ate better than they typically did.¹⁷

What didn't work was putting the cookies behind the counter. We thought this would decrease sales by 30 percent, but it did nothing. Even worse, we predicted that moving vegetables to the front of the line would increase sales by 11 percent, but it instead dropped by 30 percent.¹⁸ What happened?

A little bit of sleuthing showed that cookies were the cafeteria's big "destination food." They were five inches of hot, freshly baked gooey goodness--the main reason some kids ate school lunch. Wild horses couldn't have pulled these kids away from the cookies without pulling them away from eating lunch there altogether.

The vegetables were a different story. As I mentioned, our lab studies showed that lunchgoers were 11 percent more likely to take whatever vegetable they saw first compared to whatever they saw third. Well, that's true when three vegetables are in the *middle* of the serving line, but here we put them in the *front* of the line. Nobody scoops up a plate of green beans and then looks for the entrée that goes with it. People pick out the entrée and *then* the vegetable. They didn't want to take a veggie until they knew what they were having for a main course.

When the interview got to this point, the producer asked, “You’ve been doing eating research for twenty-five years. Sales didn’t increase by 11 percent, they dropped by 30. Why were you so far off?” I said, “Well, if we always knew what we were doing, we wouldn’t call it research.” (He seemed amused enough by this answer to not report these missed predictions in his story.)

Still, nailing five out of seven predictions was pretty decent. Our prediction report card wasn’t straight As, but it was better than the report cards I got in high school. Most important, we were able to show in real-TV-time how only \$38 and two hours of tweaking made a bigger difference than hefty expert commission reports.

Lunchroom Makeover			
Report Card			
	Our Best Guess	Actual Change	
Put the fruit in a bowl	+ 100%	+102%	A
Put the white milk in front	+40%	+34%	A
Rename the bean burrito to the Big Bad Bean Burrito	+ 30%	+ 40%	A
Ask, “Do you want salad with that?”	+ 40%	+ 48%	A
Put a smaller serving spoon in the potato salad	-15%	-12%	A
Put the cookies at the back of the line	-30%	-1%	D
Put the vegetables at the front of the line	+11%	-38%	F

Where should a school start? Start with the Smarter Lunchroom Movement Checklist below and choose three easy changes to get the ball rolling. When we sit down with the food service directors and managers, we specifically tell them what they’re doing exceptionally well. We then mention that these are some other ideas they can consider, but we ask them to pick no more than three. Some schools want to try everything, but while ambition may soar in the heat of the moment, when it comes to implementation, making more than three changes can seem so overwhelming that often nothing gets changed. Focus on three and save the rest for later.

The Smarter Lunchroom Starter List

When we do Smarter Lunchroom makeovers, it's easy to find ten or more easy changes a lunchroom can make overnight or over a weekend for less than \$50. Yet for most, even making a couple small changes can have a dramatic impact. Here are easy changes we've designed to get you started:

To Increase Fruit Sales . . .

- Display fruit in two locations, one near the register
- Display whole fruits in a nice bowl or basket
- Employ signs and suggestive selling to draw attention to the fruit

To Increase Vegetable Sales . . .

- Give them creative/descriptive names¹⁹
- Display the names on menu boards and at point-of-purchase

To increase White Milk Sales . . .

- Place white milk first in the cooler
- Place white milk in every cooler
- Make sure fat-free (skim) white milk accounts for at least 1/3 of all milk displayed

To Increase Healthy Entrée Sales . . .

- Make the healthy entrée the first or most prominent in the lunch line.
- Give the targeted entrée a creative or descriptive name
- Feature it on a menu board outside the cafeteria

To Increase the Number of Complete Healthy Meals Sold . . .

- Place key meal items at the snack window²
- Move chips and cookies behind the serving counter and offer them by request only
- Create a healthy-items-only "grab and go" convenience line²⁰

What's Your Lunchroom Score?

Some people have a hard time believing that simply moving a fruit bowl or the white milk can change what kids eat overnight. But when they do it and see that it works, they become huge converts and want to know what to do next. It's good to get advice, but once we get rolling, people--just like school lunch directors--pretty much know what will work best for them and what won't.

To help schools figure out how smart of a lunchroom they are and what they can do next, we've designed a do-it-yourself Scorecard that lunch ladies, parents, or students can use. All it takes is the Scorecard on page 000, a pencil, and a lunchroom--you can even skip the pencil and download the free App (Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard).

Each lunchroom can get as many as 100 points, because there are 100 tasks or changes that help kids choose better and eat better. The more changes your school makes, the higher the score. Most schools first score around 20 to 30, but can quickly move up to 50 within a couple weeks if they really focus.

These are all research-based changes we have found help kids make smarter choices. We're still discovering new changes, so every school year there are a few new ones we rotate in and a few less effective ones we rotate out, but a school that got a 75 last year will probably get about a 75 this year if they haven't made any changes or if they haven't backslidened.

School lunch ladies -- food service managers -- like this because many are naturally competitive and because it specifically strokes them for what they've done right, and it specifically gives them a menu of the other things they could do to become an even smarter lunchroom. There are already 20,000 schools using the part of the program, and our "70-70 by 2020" goal is to get at least 70 percent of all American schools to have a score of 70 or higher by the year 2020.

These changes are the common ones that will benefit all schools. Since 2009, we've worked directly or indirectly with over 20,000 schools, and every time we go into a new school we find unique changes that will have a huge impact in that school but won't be broadly applicable. The 100 most common changes can all be found in the Scorecard, but some of the others are more unique to your school.

So how do you discover those mysterious, subtle changes that may perfectly fit the needs of your school? After you make some of the more basic changes and feel good about how things are going and are ready for the next challenge, go stand with the kids in the front of the lunch line and ask yourself, "WWMcD?"

Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard – 70/70 by 2020

How smart is your school's lunchroom? There's a 100-point Scorecard that quickly shows how it measures up with more than 20,000 schools across the country.

By 2020, our goal is that 70 percent of all US schools will have a 70 percent or higher. Anyone can copy the Scorecard at the end of the chapter, download it, or do it online (SmarterLunchrooms.org), or get the App (Smarter Lunchroom Score).²¹ It shows what's going well and how to easily improve. Spread the low-cost/no cost good news.

WWMcD – What Would McDonald's Do?

You can love Big Macs or hate them . . . but it's hard to argue that McDonald's isn't great at serving lunch.²² They make Happy Meals and happy diners. But what do they know that a school lunch director doesn't? Oh, sure, they're backed up by \$750 million in advertising, lots of spare cash, a Mom-friendly drive-thru, and laser-precision quality control. But how well would these smarty-pants managers do if they were thrown into a school lunchroom and given only \$50 to improve it? WWMcD?

I wanted to find out, so I enlisted a handful of former fast food managers and employees to join me for lunch at three different schools. I wanted their impression of what they would do if I were to put *them* in charge of these forlorn lunchrooms and gave them only \$50--not millions--to play with. What would they do to get more kids to eat lunch and to enjoy it more?

After less than five minutes of watching kids order and eat, they started firing off ideas. What's important is that *nobody* said a word about changing the food. One said he would put one of those Italian-style menu boards outside the cafeteria and write down the names of the three or four healthier items with Day-Glo marker colors. This way kids could make pre-committed decisions and the non-lunch goers could see what they were missing. Another said she would close the main door to the lunchroom and funnel everyone (even those with sack lunches) through the serving area so they would at least see what was offered. Another said she would make the serving area more attractive by playing low-level popular music and putting some backlighting on the wall. A fourth person said they would move the fruit by the cashier and have her ask, "Do you want a pear or apple with that?" The last said he would move the condiments line to outside of the main serving area so it didn't look so congested and unappealing, and it scared kids away.

These were their very first comments at the very first school. Again, *nobody* said they needed a \$750 million-dollar advertising budget or a bigger food budget. Nobody said it was a lost cause, threw up their hands, and pouted.

What Would McDonald's Do?

Take a visit to a high school cafeteria and then to the nearest McDonald's. After taking former fast food managers into three schools, we asked them what they did differently. Most changes could be made over the weekend for little or no cost.

	High School Cafeteria	The Nearest McDonald's
You first see . . .	Blank walls, except for a fire drill instruction sign	Posters of new foods and daily specials
Once inside, you're greeted by . . .	A gray, 32-gallon garbage pail at the head of the food line	A brightly lit menu board and ordering station
Ordering a full meal consist of . . .	Separately ordering 3 to 5 foods from the different USDA food groups	Saying something like, "I'll have the #2 Combo"
If you order only one item . . .	No suggestive selling. Neither cashier asked, "Do you want fruit or a salad with that?"	The cashier asks, "Do you want fries with that?"

Looking at a school lunchroom and asking, "What would McDonald's do," may seem too crass or too contrary to how we believe our kids should eat. But who knows better how to give people what they want?²³ We need to have a new model to think of how things *could* be. Nobody makes more diners happy each day than McDonald's. It's not about what they serve. It's about how they serve it.

Smarter Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries

Each freezing February I ask my Lab researchers to volunteer three days in a local soup kitchen or food pantry. Some love it, but others are really uncomfortable. Nothing makes your day-to-day problems look more anemic than comparing them with those of a soft-eyed, homeless mother of a three-year-old.

People in soup kitchens eat surprisingly similar to high schoolers: They gravitate to the starch--potatoes, pasta, and bread--and away from vegetables. They take too much of the processed food and not enough of the healthy foods that are available.

But we've found the same slim by design techniques that work in school lunchrooms also work for soup kitchens, and the ones that work for grocery stores work for food pantries. If you're a food pantry supervisor, volunteer, or donor, you can learn how to help make your local soup kitchen and food pantry smarter at SmarterSoupKitchens.org. And don't forget to serve a day or two every so often--especially if your day-to-day problems are feeling extra burdensome.²⁴

The Lunchtime Report Card

The only worse school day than Vaccination Day is Report Card Day. It's the day to face the music. While Tiger Moms are obsessed with this day, some other parents don't care as much, and kids mostly care in relation to their parents. Report cards are a way of checking in and reminding both kids and parents how the year is going—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

What if it there were lunchtime report cards?²⁵ What if every Friday, parents got an email telling them what their little angels bought for lunch that week? It would tell which of their kids bought cookies and Gatorade and which one bought apples and white milk. As with real report cards, you can imagine that some parents couldn't care less, and others would lose sleep over it. Some parents might care more about what the kids are eating, and others might care more about how much they're spending. But would it change what kids order?

Each Friday for a month, we sent parents the list of all the foods their kids (K-12) bought for school lunch. What happens when families get these report cards is kind of funny. The bottom line is that little Valerie and little Teddy mysteriously start buying cookies one-third less often and start buying fruit 50 percent more often.

You might think kids changed what they bought because their parents had heart-to-heart nutrition talks with them, but that's not always the case. It seems that simply knowing that someone is aware of what they're doing--and maybe cares--gradually bumps these kids back into line. After all, Big Mother is watching.²⁶

While you can ask your children’s school to start a Lunchtime Report Card program, you don’t have to wait. All you need to do is ask, “Sooooo . . . how was lunch today?”

What You Can Do . . .

Talking Tater Tots with Teens

If you don’t want to wait for your school to adopt Lunchtime Report Cards, here’s what you can do yourself.

- Find out if your school tracks--at least in a rough form—what each child purchases each day. Some schools can automatically e-mail¹ you weekly records of what your kids order. If they can’t do this, enough requests like yours might move them in that direction.
- Ask your kids what they had for lunch and snacks that day. Although they might fudge a little on what they remember to report, it might prompt them to eat better the next day, knowing they’re going to get quizzed on it.

Designing a Smarter Lunchroom Tray

Late one winter afternoon, we had a 4:30 conference call with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. They had been collaborating with an innovative food service director who was preparing to buy new trays for her school district in St. Paul, Minnesota and who had contacted them asking if there "healthy cafeteria trays." After twenty minutes of preamble, their question to us was, “Can you develop a Mindless Eating lunchroom tray that could help kids eat better?” They were familiar with the book *Mindless Eating* and wondered if the principles could be used to get kids to mindlessly eat better.

Coincidentally, we had started down this road a year earlier, but the unfortunate reality of lunch trays is that they’ve been dying off and being replaced with disposable trays. There are two reasons: First, some school lunchrooms can’t wash trays because they have “heat and serve” kitchens. Second, some disposable tray companies are really, really good at persuading schools to buy disposable trays. But the right reusable tray--one that caused kids to eat better--might tip the balance back and lead some schools to return to real trays rather than disposables. This call was the excuse we needed to get back on task.

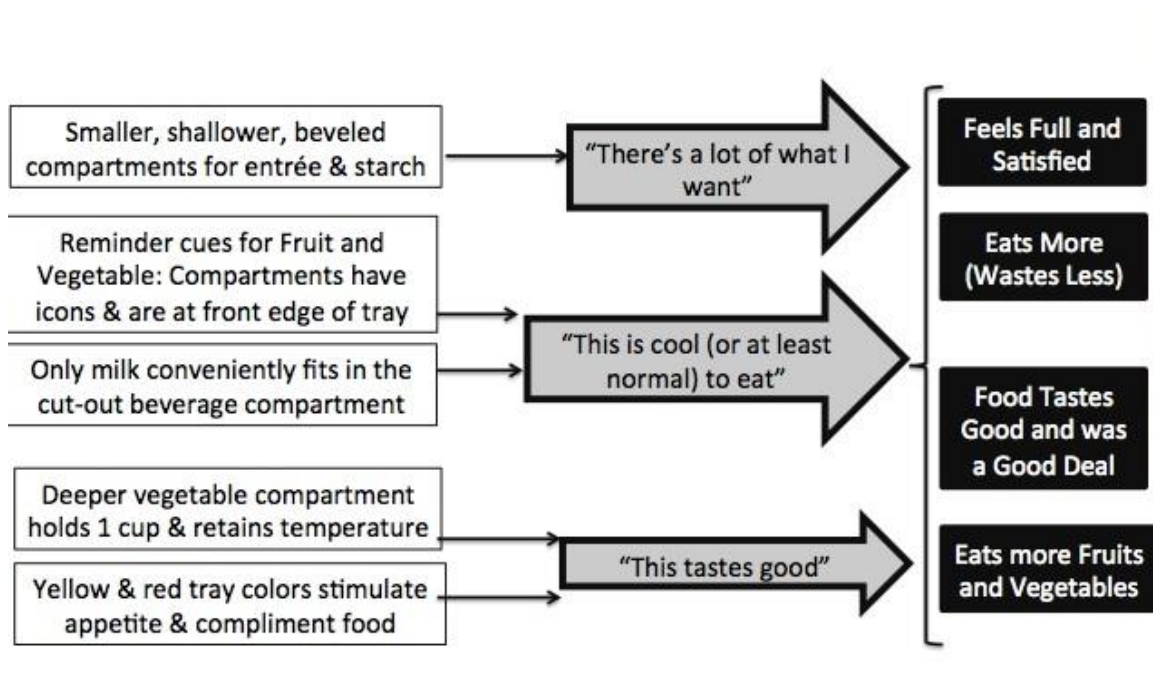
When we ask kids what they want from school lunches, they say 1) bigger portions of foods they like, 2) foods that are fun or “cool,” and 3) foods that taste good. So the ideal tray would magically make the entrée and the desserts look huge and satisfying; it would make the vegetable and fruit look enticing, and it would keep the vegetable hot, the fruit cold, and everything look better.

All this is subjective. How much you eat, how full you feel, and how much you like it are partly psychological. Similarly, eating the same amount of food on a smaller plate makes us think we're more full than when we eat it on a larger plate -- it's psychological.²⁷ Foods that are more easily seen and closer to us look more normal and natural to eat.^{28, 29,30}

So we created a new tray that 1) makes the entrée and starch look larger (and more satisfying) while it makes the vegetables and fruit appear smaller (and less intimidating), 2) allows a full cup of vegetables to be served and stay hot, 3) makes milk, fruit, and vegetables seem like a normal thing everyone eats, and 4) reduces the energy cost of cleaning.³¹

If a small plate makes food look bigger, why not make shallower and smaller compartments for the main courses and the starches to make them look huge? Because kids like what's cool, textured icons of a fruit or vegetables could be printed in the fruit and vegetable compartment.³² It's like the divided grocery cart that made people think it was normal to take more fruits and vegetables. Next, build the tray in a way that it would look normal to have *both* a fruit and vegetable – they wouldn't have to take both, but the tray would be a daily reminder of the norm they're deviating from. These two compartments could also be moved to the front edge of the tray, flanking the entrée. This makes them look central to the meal and a normal thing to eat that shouldn't be overlooked.

How a Different Lunch Tray Could Influence Lunch

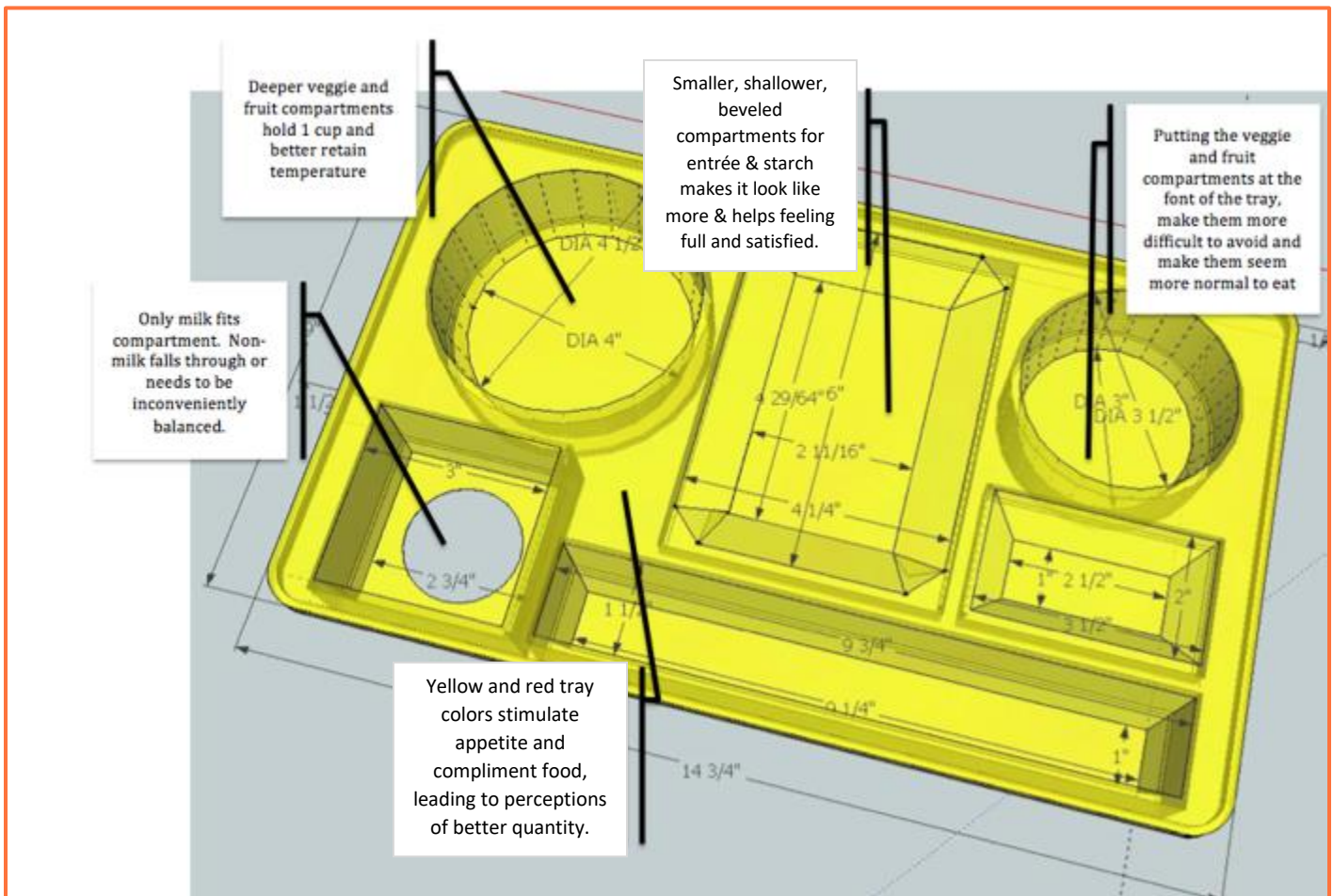


To make milk seem like the norm, it's easy to restyle the beverage compartment so that it holds only milk cartons. If a school district used milk cartons, the tray would have a square cutout so that the square milk cart fits nicely in this space, but the rounded cans or bottles of other beverages fit awkwardly or fall through.

Research about how color influences how much you like food isn't clear-cut, but people intuitively believe that yellow, gold, and red can stimulate appetite and may complement the look of some foods.³³ If nothing else, offering the trays in bright school colors might at least make lunch seem more fun. As we know from eating Happy Meals, Chuck E. Cheese pizza, or hot dogs at a ballgame, nothing makes food taste better than when it's surrounded by fun.

Last, most standard reusable lunch trays fit singly through the automated dishwashers. By reshaping these new trays to be longer and skinnier than the conventional trays, two of them can be vertically stacked side-by-side and washed in one slot of the dishwasher instead of two. This would save energy and washing costs to the ballpark tune of 15 to 30 percent, which could be enough of a reason to bring schools back around to reusable trays.

The Smarter School Lunch Tray



Helping Your School Become Slim by Design

There's a story of a mother who's trying to get a whiny, belligerent son off to high school in the morning, but the son kicks and screams that he doesn't want to go because all the kids hate him and make fun of him, and all the teachers nag him and think he's dumb. When his mother pleads, "But you have to go to school," he says, "Give me one good reason." Mom replies, "Because you're the principal."

Aside from the principal, no school employee gets beat up more than the school lunch lady. She's gone from being the punch line of hairnet jokes to being played by a dirty-dancing, Karaoke-singing Chris Farley on *Saturday Night Live*. Now she even has her own \$10.95 action figure.³⁴ The Lunch Lady Action Figure wears heavy black-rimmed glasses and a blue, 1950s Chris Farley-size dress. She has the forearms and calves of a Nebraska linebacker and is armed with her secret weapon: a serving spoon shaped like an ice cream scoop.



This is a terrible stereotype, and most of us realize that. But what we don't often appreciate is that this woman is the true Iron Chef. She may not have perfected a signature Beef Wellington recipe for hundreds, but each week she orchestrates five different breakfasts and five different lunches, delivers them to 500+ impatient diners, has two to four consecutive seatings, takes complaints with an understanding nod, and inspires twelve staffers who work four hours every school day for minimum wage. She does all of this and feeds our kids for less than \$1.36 per meal. Let's see Chef Morimoto do that.

Here's what else you wouldn't realize. After analyzing thousands of Smarter Lunchroom schools results across the country, we've found the biggest determinate of whether a student eats a school lunch is how much he likes the lunch lady. The more he likes the lunch lady, the more often he eats lunch.³⁵ Or maybe it's because the more often he eats there, the more he likes the lunch lady. It doesn't matter. Either way, it's touching: After 175 meals a year, they can still make it personal.

What You Can Do . . .

Helping Schools Become Slim By Design

On the battleground of school lunches, the lunch lady reports to the school lunchroom manager who reports to the food service director for the whole school district. Unfortunately, the closer a person is to serving the food, the less power they have to make changes, and neither the manager nor the director have the dollars, time, or patience to listen to another helicopter parent or food extremist tell her what to do. They might, however, have time for someone who wants to help.¹ Here's what they say works:

- **Thank them for all they do.** They do a big job on a small budget, and they usually just hear from the complainers.
- **Complete the Smarter Lunchroom Self-Assessment Scorecard.** Besides showing how well your school is doing on a 100-point scale, it shows exactly what small, easy changes can be made to improve that score.
- **Tell them you learned about how there are low-cost/no cost changes that can help kids eat better.**¹ Some are as simple as giving kids the healthy foods first; making them tasty by giving them a cool name; or making it less convenient to eat the indulgent foods. Maybe even print out some ideas to save them that step.
- **Ask how you can help.** Maybe there's an informal advisory board or a "Kitchen Cabinet" group you could join or start. The purpose would not be a critique but to help be a solution. Enlist other parents from the PTA, and always think WWMcD--What would McDonald's Do?
- **Offer to put together a SNAC.** Offer to assemble a SNAC (Student Nutrition Action Committee).¹ You can run a discussion group about what easy non-food changes the kids think could help them eat better. This can be an advisory committee, but it should also be the group that gets the work done and sees themselves as advocates for school lunch.
- **Enlist the Health and Wellness Committee.** Every school district has this committee, and your food service director is on it. Ask her how you can get involved in sharing these same low-cost/no cost changes.

The Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Scorecard

Read each of the statements below as walk through your cafeteria. For each true statement, check the box in front of it. After you have completed the checklist, tally all boxes with check marks and write this number at the end. This number represents your lunchroom's score. A perfect score of 100 is pretty much impossible, and most schools score between 20 and 30 the first time they complete the scorecard.

Focusing on Fruit

- At least two types of fruit are available daily
- Sliced or cut fruit is available daily
- Fruit options are not browning, bruised or otherwise damaged
- Daily fruit options are given creative, age-appropriate names
- Fruit is available at all points of sale (deli-line, snack windows, a la carte lines, etc.
- Daily fruit options are available in at least two different locations on each service line
- At least one daily fruit option is available near all registers (If there are concerns regarding edible peel, fruit can be bagged or wrapped)
- Whole fruit options are displayed in attractive bowls or baskets (instead of chaffing/hotel pans)
- A mixed variety of whole fruits are displayed together
- Daily fruit options are easily seen by students of average height for your school
- Daily fruit options are bundled into all grab and go meals available to students
- Daily fruit options are written legibly on menu boards in all service and dining areas

Promoting Vegetables & Salad

- At least two types of vegetable are available daily
- Vegetables are not wilted, browning, or otherwise damaged
- At least one vegetable option is available in all foodservice areas
- Individual salads or a salad bar is available to all students
- The salad bar is highly visible and located in a high traffic area
- Self-serve salad bar utensils are at the appropriate portion size or larger
- Self-serve salad bar utensils are smaller for croutons, dressing, and other non-produce items
- Daily vegetable options are available in at least two different locations on each service line
- Daily vegetable options are easily seen by students of average height for your school
- A daily vegetable option is bundled into grab and go meals available to students
- A default vegetable choice is established by pre-plating a vegetable on some of the trays
- Available vegetable options have been given creative or descriptive names
- All vegetable names are printed/written on name-cards or product IDs and displayed next to each vegetable option daily
- All vegetable names are written and legible on menu boards
- All vegetable names are included on the published monthly school lunch menu

Moving More White Milk

- ❑ All beverage coolers have white milk available
- ❑ White milk is placed in front of other beverages in all coolers
- ❑ White milk crates are placed so that they are the first beverage option seen in all designated milk coolers
- ❑ White milk is available at all points of sale (deli-line, snack windows, a la carte lines etc.)
- ❑ White milk represents at least 1/3 of all visible milk in the lunchroom
- ❑ White milk is easily seen by students of average height for your school
- ❑ White milk is bundled into all grab and go meals available to students as the default beverage
- ❑ White milk is promoted on menu boards legibly
- ❑ White milk is replenished so all displays appear “full” continually throughout meal service and after each lunch period

Entrée of the Day:

- ❑ A daily entrée option has been identified to promote as a “targeted entrée” in each service area and for each designated line (deli-line, snack windows, a la carte lines etc.)
- ❑ Daily targeted entrée options are highlighted on posters or signs
- ❑ Daily targeted entrée is easily seen by students of average height for your school
- ❑ Daily targeted entrées have been provided creative or descriptive names
- ❑ All targeted entrée names are printed/written on name-cards or product IDs and displayed next to each respective entrée daily
- ❑ All targeted entrée names are written and legible on menu boards
- ❑ All targeted entrée names are included on the published monthly school lunch menu
- ❑ All targeted entrees are replenished so as to appear “full” throughout meal service

Increasing Sales of Reimbursable Meals:

- ❑ A reimbursable meal can be created in any service area available to students (salad bars, snack windows, speed lines, speed windows, dedicated service lines etc.)
- ❑ Reimbursable “Combo Meal” pairings are available and promoted daily
- ❑ A reimbursable meal has been bundled into a grab and go meal available to students
- ❑ Grab and go reimbursable meals are available at a convenience line/speed window
- ❑ The convenience line offers only reimbursable grab and go meals with low-fat, non-flavored milk, fruit, and or vegetable
- ❑ Grab and go reimbursable meals are easily seen by students of average height for your school
- ❑ The School offers universal free lunch
- ❑ A reimbursable combo meal pairing is available daily using alternative entrees (salad bar, fruit & yogurt parfait etc.)
- ❑ Reimbursable “Combo Meal” pairings have been provided creative or descriptive age-appropriate names (i.e. – The Hungry Kid Meal, The Athlete’s Meal, Bobcat Meal etc.)
- ❑ Reimbursable “Combo Meal” pairing names are written/printed on name-cards, labels, or product IDs and displayed next to each respective meal daily

- ❑ All reimbursable “Combo Meal” names are written and legible on menu boards
- ❑ All reimbursable “Combo Meal” names are included on the published monthly school lunch menu
- ❑ Reimbursable “Combo Meal” pairings are promoted on signs or posters
- ❑ The named reimbursable “Combo Meal” is promoted during the school’s morning announcements
- ❑ Students have the option to pre-order their lunch in the morning or earlier
- ❑ The cafeteria accepts cash as a form of payment

Creating School Synergies:

Signage & Priming

- ❑ Posters displaying healthful foods are visible and readable within all service and dining areas
- ❑ Signage/posters/floor decals are available to direct students toward all service areas
- ❑ Signs promoting the lunchroom and featured menu items are placed in other areas of the school such as the main office, library, or gymnasium
- ❑ Menu boards featuring today’s meal components are visible and readable within all service and dining areas
- ❑ A dedicated space/menu board is visible and readable from 5ft away within the service or dining area where students can see tomorrow’s menu items
- ❑ Dining space is branded to reflect student body or school (i.e. – school lunchroom is named for school mascot or local hero/celebrity)
- ❑ All promotional signs and posters are rotated, updated or changed at least quarterly
- ❑ All creative and descriptive names are rotated, updated or changed at least quarterly
- ❑ A monthly menu is available and provided to all student families, teachers and administrators
- ❑ A monthly menu is visible and readable within the school building
- ❑ A weekly “Nutritional Report Card” is provided to parents detailing what their student has purchased during the previous week.

Lunchroom Atmosphere

- ❑ Trash on floors, in, or near garbage cans is removed between each lunch period
- ❑ Cleaning supplies and utensils are returned to a cleaning closet or are not visible during service and dining
- ❑ Compost/recycling/tray return and garbage cans are tidied between lunch periods
- ❑ Compost/recycling/tray return and garbage cans are at least 5ft away from dining students
- ❑ Dining and service areas are clear of any non-functional equipment or tables during service
- ❑ Sneeze guards in all service areas are clean
- ❑ Obstacles and barriers to enter service and dining areas have been removed (i.e. – garbage cans, mop buckets, cones, lost & found etc.)

Smarter Lunchrooms

- ❑ Clutter is removed from service and dining areas promptly (i.e. – empty boxes, supply shipments, empty crates, pans, lost & found etc.)
- ❑ Students artwork is displayed in the service and/or dining areas
- ❑ All lights in the dining and service areas are currently functional and on
- ❑ Trays and cutlery are within arm’s reach to the students of average height for your school
- ❑ Lunchroom equipment is decorated with decals/magnets/signage etc. wherever possible
- ❑ Teachers and administrators dine in the lunchroom with students
- ❑ Cafeteria monitors have good rapport with students and lunchroom staff
- ❑ The dining space is used for other learning activities beyond meal service (i.e. – home economics, culinary nutrition education activities, school activities etc.)
- ❑ Staff is encouraged to model healthful eating behaviors to students (i.e. – dining in the lunchroom with students, encouraging students to try new foods etc.)
- ❑ Staff smiles and greets students upon entering the service line continually throughout meal service
- ❑ Students who do not have a full reimbursable meal are politely prompted to select and consume a fruit or vegetable option by staff

Student Involvement

- ❑ Student groups are involved in the development of creative and descriptive names for menu items
- ❑ Student groups are involved in creation of artwork promoting menu items
- ❑ Student groups are involved in modeling healthful eating behaviors to others (i.e. – mentors, high school students eating in the middle school lunchroom occasionally etc.)
- ❑ Student surveys are used to inform menu development, dining space décor and promotional ideas
- ❑ Students, teachers and/or administrators announce daily meal deals or targeted items in daily announcements

Recognition & Support of School Food

- ❑ The school participates in other food program promotions such as: Farm to School, Chefs Move to Schools, Fuel Up to Play 60, Share our Strength etc.)
- ❑ A local celebrity (Mayor, sports hero, media personality) is invited to share lunch with student 3 to 4 time a year
- ❑ The school has applied or been selected for the Healthier US School Challenge

A la Carte

- ❑ Students must ask to purchase a la carte items from staff members
- ❑ Students must use cash to purchase a la carte items which are not reimbursable
- ❑ Half portions are available for at least two dessert options

Scoring Brackets:

70-100 – Smarter Lunchrooms Gold

50-69 – Smarter Lunchrooms Silver

30-49 – Smarter Lunchrooms Bronze

Pfre-Commitment
Nutritional Reportcard
Large Utensils for salad bars
Small utensils for dressings
Convenience Line
Fruit naming
School wayfinding
Combo meals during school announcements
School encourages cash purchase
Default preplated entrée with veggies
Recess before lunch
Name the combo meal
Salad bar in high traffic area

Chapter 6 -- Endnotes

(For the Back of the Book)

- ¹ One of the original articles on using behavioral economics to create Smarter Lunchrooms is David R. Just and Brian Wansink (2009), “Better School Meals on a Budget: Using Behavioral Economics and Food Psychology to Improve Meal Selection,” *Choices*, 24:3, 1-6 and the USDA version of this is David R., Just Lisa Mancino, and Brian Wansink (2007), “Could Behavioral Economics Help Improve Diet Quality of Nutrition Assistance Program Participants?” Economic Research Service Number 43, ERS -- Washington DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, June.
- ² Clip-on ties were invented for wounded vets who had difficulty tying a necktie because of hand injuries. Pajamas replaced full-length nightgowns, more closely mirroring the GI’s need to sleep in underclothes. The full story of the history of hot lunches can be found at http://www.cracked.com/article_18703_5-inventions-you-wont-believe-came-from-war.html.
- ³ Specifically, “46% of African Americans and almost one-third of European Americans called for the draft were classified “4-F” – unfit for service. *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States, Volume II: Since 1865* (2011), by Mary Beth Norton, Carol Sheriff, David M Katzman, David W. Blight, Howard Chudacoff, Cengage Learning, 2011 Edition 9, p. 754.
- ⁵ Throughout this chapter I’ll use the word “Buy” instead of select or chose. Some people have to pay for the things they take in the lunchroom (or their parents do). Other people get certain foods free as part of a free or reduce USDA reimbursable meal. Instead of continually qualifying this in the text, “buy” will basically mean “take.” At any rate about the only people who really care about the distinction are reading this footnote, so at least we’ll know the semantics.
- ⁶ We’ve seen this Domino’s side-door delivery stunt a bunch of times. As someone who spent his moonlighting summer jobs delivering pizza in Sioux City, Iowa, this is neither a nutritional win for the students nor a big tipping win for the delivery driver.
- ⁷ We’ll be focusing on individual behaviors, but there is also excellent work that takes a more macro-look at lunches. These include Janet Poppendieck’s “Free for All: Fixing School Food in America” (2010), Marion Nestle’s “Food Politics,” and Ann Cooper and Lisa M. Holmes’ book, “Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children” (2006).
- ⁸ A nice treatment of these new challenges are in Katherine Ralston, Constance Newman, Annette Clauson, Joanne Guthrie, and Jean Buzby (2010), “The National School Lunch Program: Background, Trends and Issues,” Economic Research Report, forthcoming, and Schanzenbach, D. W. (2007) Does the Federal School Lunch Program Contribute to Childhood Obesity?, *Journal of Human Resources*,
- ⁹ A number of these peer-reviewed milk studies are popping up at various economics, nutrition, and psychology conferences. Two of these include Drew Hanks, David Just and Brian Wansink (2012), “A Source of Contention or Nutrition: An Assessment of Removing Flavored Milk from School Lunchrooms,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 44:4 (July-August), S21 and Laura E. Smith, David R. Just, Brian Wansink and Christine H. Wallace (2011) “Disrupting the Default Choice: The Contentious Case of Chocolate Milk,” *FASEB Journal*, 25:781.24.
- ¹⁰ Some kids receive free or reduced price lunches based on the income-level of their parents. If their income is 130 percent below the poverty level, the meals free. If it’s below 180 percent, its discounted.
- ¹¹ While putting a colorful fruit bowl out in the open consistently increases fruit sales by about 100% in most of our studies, even simply using a colorful bowl boosts sales. This is useful for schools that think they can’t bring the fruit out from behind the sneeze guard: Laura Smith, Brian Wansink, and David Just (2010), “Smarter Lunchroom.org’s Fancy Fruit Bowls Increase Fruit Sales by 23-54%,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Volume 42:4S1, S116-117. There are also other approaches, such as those used by Simone A. French and Gloria Stables, (2003), “Environmental Interventions to Promote Vegetable and Fruit Consumption among Youth in School Settings,” *Preventative Medicine*, 37, 593-610.
- ¹² Most of these fruit bowl-like changes can be made overnight for free. A few others might take a week and \$50 from the lunchroom slush fund. One way or the other, how the cafeteria is designed is going to influence how kids eat. It’s either for the better or the worse.
- ¹³ After this 60-second move, we scoured lunchroom sales receipts and production records – how much lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, and little Barbie-size corn-on-the-cobs did they sell? Within two weeks of moving the salad bar, sales went up 200-300 percent, depending on the day: Laura E. Smith, David R. Just, and Brian Wansink (2010), “Convenience Drives Choice in School Lunch Rooms: A Salad Bar Success Story,” *FASEB Journal*, 24: 732.11.
- ¹⁴ A nice visual of lunch line redesign is titled just that: Brian Wansink, David R. Just and Joe McKendry (2010), “Lunch Line Redesign,” *New York Times*, October 22, p. A10 .
- ¹⁵ The specific show is the MTV-owned show called Channel One. It’s a hip, almost too-cool-for-school program that actually is for school. It shows a 10-minute news feature every morning during homeroom to 5 million kids in America – typically those in the big cities.
- ¹⁶ The video of this can be found at SmarterLunchrooms.org. Thanks to the Ithaca Food Service Director, Denise Agati for making this happen and sticking with the changes.

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- ¹⁷ This is a great two-part (before/after) video with a lot of energy, good lessons, and some modest laughs. You can find it at YouTube at healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/healthierus-school.../lunchd-part-one and the “after” version at healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/healthierus-school.../lunchd-part-two
- ¹⁸ This works great in the lab, but that’s when you have three vegetables in a row: Brian Wansink and David Just (2011), “Healthy Foods First: Students Take the First Lunchroom Food 11% More Often Than the Third,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Volume 43:4S1, S8.
- ¹⁹ These changes can be so easy even a high school kid could do them. We showed that by having a high schooler we never met implement a vegetable naming program 200 miles away from us. More at Brian Wansink, David R. Just, Collin R. Payne, and Matthew Z. Klinger (2013), “Attractive Names Sustain Increased Vegetable Intake in Schools,” *Preventive Medicine*, forthcoming.
- ²⁰ Nothing makes it easier to choose the right food than when it’s convenient. Here’s some great tips here: Andrew S. Hanks, David R. Just, Laura E. Smith, and Brian Wansink (2012), “Healthy Convenience: Nudging Students Toward Healthier Choices in the Lunchroom,” *Journal of Public Health*, forthcoming.
- ²¹ Find more at SmarterSoupKitchens.org.
- ²² I’m pretty McBiased toward McDonalds. Each week I eat two breakfasts there. Each month my three girls eat two Happy Meals. Each year meet twice with their Global Nutrition Council to work with them on making healthy win-win changes to their menu, their restaurants, and their promotions.
- ²³ We have been working with a number of soup kitchens to develop low-cost/no cost changes that make themselves more inviting and attractive. There’s more at our website: SmarterSoupKitchens.org.
- ²⁴ Find more at SmarterSoupKitchens.org.
- ²⁵ A few years ago, a visionary governor from Arkansas, Mike Huckabee, sent BMI Report Cards home to parents. These reports told parents a child’s height and weight compared to the other kids in the class. No lecturing, no A+ or F. Simply a number and the average BMI of other kids. People went crazy. This was a violation of privacy, it was embarrassing, and it would scar the self-esteem of these kids. But it worked for many. In the early reports, Arkansas BMIs started dropping almost immediately.
- ²⁶ These Nutritional Report Cards (NRC) hold tremendous promise for changing the way kids eat and how their parents talk with them about lunch. The proof and the programming code can be found in the article Brian Wansink, David R. Just, Richard W. Patterson, and Laura E. Smith, (2013), “Nutrition Report Cards Improve School Lunch Choice,” under review at *American Journal of Public Health*,” and the initial stats on their effectiveness can be found at Brian Wansink, David Just and Richard Patterson (2012), “Nudging Healthier Choices through Nutritional Report Cards,” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 44:4 (July-August), S78.
- ²⁷ Much of our earlier work on this is summarized in my book *Mindless Eating – Why We Eat More Than We Think*, New York: Bantam-Dell (2006), and in the paper Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum, “The Perils of Plate Size: Waste, Waist, and Wallet,” forthcoming.
- ²⁸ High color contrast between food and the plate lead people to serve less and eat less. If you want more detail on this than a person should have to endure, check out Koert Van Ittersum and Brian Wansink (2012), “Plate Size and Color Suggestibility: The Delboeuf Illusion’s Bias on Serving and Eating Behavior,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (August), 215-228.
- ²⁹ Branding works better for healthy foods than the indulgent ones – basically because indulgent ones sell well anyway. Check out Brian Wansink, David R. Just, and Collin R. Payne (2012), “Can Branding Improve School Lunches?” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 166:10, 967-968.
- ³⁰ Using real trays is not a reality for every school. Some schools have gone to disposable trays and others don’t have the facilities to wash trays.
- ³¹ More details are available from Brian Wansink and David R. Just (2014) *The Smarter Lunchroom Tray: Designing the Sustainable, Scientific Solution to Lunch*, under review.
- ³² See Marla Reicks; Joseph P. Redden; Traci Mann; Elton Mykerezzi; Zata Vickers, Photographs in lunch tray compartments and vegetable consumption among children in elementary school cafeterias *JAMA - Journal of the American Medical Association* 2012;307(8):784-785.
- ³³ One exception is Van Ittersum, Koert and Brian Wansink (2012), “Plate Size and Color Suggestibility: The Delboeuf Illusion’s Bias on Serving and Eating Behavior,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (August), forthcoming.
- ³⁴ These are cool and a favorite present of mine. The price is \$10.95 and you can buy them here: mcphee.com/shop/lunch-lady-action-figure.html
- ³⁵ The power of personal connection is unbelievable. Thanks why the big chefs “work the room,” and ask how you like everything. It’s the same with tator tots: Brian Wansink, Andrew S. Hanks, and David R. Just (2014) “Server Affect and Patronage,” under review.