

Evaluation of the Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools Initiative

Executive Summary

January 2014



Introduction

Higher fruit and vegetable intake has been shown to be associated with a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as various cancers, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes¹. Incorporating salad bars into schools is one environmental change strategy to increase school-age children's fruit and vegetable intake. However, only 17% of schools, elementary through high school, offer a salad bar daily.² Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools (LMSB2S), launched in 2010, aims to increase children's fruit and vegetable intake by donating salad bar equipment to schools across the country and supports First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* initiative. All K-12 school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program are eligible to apply via the www.saladbars2school.org website. Funding for these salad bars was primarily provided to LMSB2S partners by individuals, corporations, and foundations. To date, salad bars have been donated to more than 2,800 schools across the country in 49 states. In Spring 2013, LMSB2S partnered with the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN), an independent research institution, to complete a post-implementation survey of school districts that received salad bars from LMSB2S.

Evaluation Methodology

An online post-implementation survey was distributed to 585 school districts that had received salad bars from LMSB2S from 2010 to Jan 2013, ensuring that all salad bar recipients that had participated in the program for a minimum of 6 months received the survey; 357 school districts responded to the online survey (61% response rate). A majority of respondents (79%) identified themselves as the food service director for the district; other respondents were school administrators, kitchen managers, and other food service staff. On average, 51% percent of students in these schools were eligible for federal free and reduced price school meals.

Key Findings

Salad Bar Use

- ✦ Nearly all donated salad bars continue to be in use (94%)
- ✦ A majority of salad bars are used daily (78%)
- ✦ A majority of salad bars are used as *part* of a reimbursable lunch (77%)
- ✦ Salad bars are also used as a *complete* reimbursable lunch (54%)

Successful Outcomes of Salad Bar Implementation

- ✦ Increased students' access to fresh fruits and vegetables
- ✦ Most schools reported increased student participation in school lunch (57%)
- ✦ School administrators, teachers, staff, and parents became more supportive of salad bars
- ✦ A majority of schools reported purchasing more fruits and vegetables (78%)
- ✦ Schools used fresh, pre-cut fruits and vegetables for salad bars (81%)

¹ Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010, to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. *Agric Res Serv.* 2010.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Service, Office Food and Nutrition of Research and Analysis, School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study IV, Vol. I: School Foodservice Operations, School Environments, and Meals Offered and Served by Mary Kay Fox, Elizabeth Condon, Mary Kay Crepinsek, et al. Project Officer, Fred Lesnett Alexandria, VA: November 2012.

School Activities to Promote Healthy Eating

- ✦ Schools reported providing classroom education (87%), taste testing (75%), special days or events (70%), food service promotion (68%), and cooking classes (53%) for their students
- ✦ Schools reported sending letters and/or e-mails to parents specifically about the new salad bar program (69%), inviting parents to lunch (60%), presented the meal program at parent meetings (55%), and created print materials specifically targeting parents to educate them about salad bars (52%)
- ✦ Schools reported that their district wellness policy encouraged increasing access to healthy foods (55%), and some specifically emphasized increasing fruit and vegetable intake (22%)

Impact on School Food Service Operations

- ✦ Increased time for students to get through the line (24%)
- ✦ Increased staffing (19%) and labor hours (27%)
- ✦ Offered hand washing to students in bathroom sinks near the cafeteria (92%), free-standing hand sanitizers in the dining area (52%), and hand-washing sinks in the cafeteria (25%)
- ✦ Increased number of professional development hours per year

Conclusions

Overall, findings demonstrate that salad bars are an effective strategy to increase students' fruit and vegetable intake and can help schools comply with new federal school lunch nutrition standards.³ Nearly all schools reported continued use of salad bars donated through LMSB2S (94%), with a majority (78%) used daily. Most (57%) schools saw an increase in student participation in the school lunch program as a result of salad bars, demonstrating the value of the LMSB2S initiative to both the students and schools. More than half of the students in these schools were eligible for federal free and reduced price school meals (51%), suggesting donated salad bars are reaching low-income students. Schools also reported that throughout their involvement, support of the salad bar program increased among school administrators, teachers, staff and parents. This evaluation highlights the success of LMSB2S.

³ Many salad bars were implemented at the time in which new school meal patterns were rolled out.