Smarter Lunchroom Movement - Michigan Technical Guide

Michigan Department of Education Team Nutrition

Introduction

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SML) was started in 2009 with the goal of creating sustainable research-based lunchrooms that guide smarter choices. It is a grassroots movement of those concerned with the way children eat and wish to change these behaviors through the application of evidence-based lunchroom focused principles that promote healthful eating.

The mission of the SML is to equip school lunchrooms with evidence-based tools that improve child eating behaviors and thus improve the health of children. Smarter Lunchrooms demonstrate core values, including: low cost/no-cost solutions, lunchroom environment focus, promotion of healthful eating behaviors, and sustainability[2].

Getting Started

SML is ongoing effort to improve cafeterias and create environments that encourage long-term positive eating behaviors. Best practices recommend participating schools complete a two-hour training once. Following the training, schools should complete an annual self-assessment, develop an implementation plan, implement the plan, and evaluate outcomes.
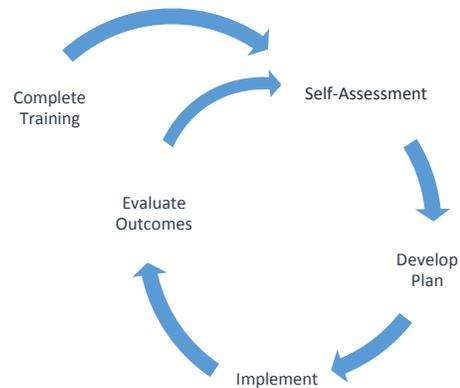
Complete Training

Complete the free Cornell Smarter Lunchrooms Online Training, which consists of three modules, comprehensive activities, illustrative videos, optional readings, and assessments. The course is 2 hours in length and is eligible for School Nutrition Association continuing education credits.

Training Module: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/training

Complete the Self-Assessment Scorecard

The self-assessment scorecard is intended to help evaluate the cafeteria, congratulate yourself for things done well, and identify opportunities for improvement. Use the scorecard to conduct a self-evaluation, checking the items already complete and taking note of those that are not[3]. It is available in PDF form or an app.

Scorecard: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/lunchroom_self-assessmt_score_card.final_.4-3-14.pdf
Scorecard App: https://scorecard.smarterlunchrooms.org/

Develop a Plan

Plan development can help you stay organized and on-schedule throughout SLM implementation. The below sample plan may be tailored to meet your school's needs as you move through the process.

- Select 5-10 changes to implement based on the self-assessment. Target high-priority areas, noting others that should be addressed in future evaluations.
- Take photos of the specific areas that will be targeted prior to making any changes. Photos are useful for assessing progress and evaluating outcomes. The SLM photo checklist provides specific recommendations for effectively documenting your changes.
  Photo Checklist: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/photo_checklist.pdf
- Gather, create, or order all materials, including signs, name cards, menu bowls, and/or decorations.
  - Alpha Graphics: http://bit.ly/1ePmnE3
  - Talk to your local printer to determine if they can create materials.
- Determine when each change will be made and who will be responsible. Record the timeline on a calendar. Changes may be made all at once or one at a time. Simple changes might occur on evenings or weekends, while larger projects might be better suited for school breaks.
  Sample Timeline: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/slm_action_plan_timeline.pdf
- Recruit volunteers to help implement the changes (i.e. parents, school staff, teachers, students).
- Draft an informal plan to help others visualize the changes. The plan should be used during implementation to ensure changes are made correctly.
- Host a meeting or training for cafeteria staff and volunteers. Explain the changes that will be made and provide the opportunity for others to offer suggestions or ask questions.
  Sample staff training materials: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/resource/workshops-lunchroom-staff
- Implement changes according to your calendar
- Photograph *after* images of each change and pair these with the *before* images for future evaluation. Example:

Before

After

Implement the Plan

The implementation phase focuses on carrying out the 5-10 changes selected for your Smarter Lunchroom. Reference the following recommendations that have proven effective in schools across Michigan. Be sure to view Michigan Smarter Lunchroom Moves videos for examples and success stories– google "Michigan Team Nutrition Youtube" then click "Smarter Lunchroom Moves."

Manage Portion Size

✓ Use smaller containers, plates, and serving utensils for foods that should be limited. Decreasing the bowl size from 18 to 14 ounces has proven effective in reducing the average cereal serving at breakfast by 24 percent (2).

✓ Use larger containers and serving utensils for healthy reimbursable foods, such as fruit, vegetables, or whole grains.

Enhance Taste Expectations

✓ Focus on presentation. If it *looks* or *sounds* appealing students are more likely to select those items. For example, cut or peel fruits and veggies, or display whole fruit in a bowl or basket instead of a stainless steel bin or tray.

✓ Allow students to taste test new items while waiting in line. This gives provides the opportunity to experiment with new food items before selecting them as a meal.

✓ Offer multiple fruits and vegetables each meal. Kids given a choice between two fruits or vegetables are more likely to choose at least one. In field studies, students given a choice between carrots and celery, rather than carrots alone, consumed 65 percent more carrots[2].

Set Smart Pricing Strategies

✓ Make Healthy bundles less expensive than a single less healthy item.

✓ Set up an express checkout for students purchasing healthy items, requiring á la carte purchases to move through the standard line. Alternatively, require students purchase á la carte items after completion of their regular meal.

✓ Require students purchase unhealthy options using cash only, allowing only the purchase of healthy items using their lunch account.

✓ Offer themed meals for special occasions or monthly specials for healthy, reimbursable items.

Increase Convenience

✓ Grab and Go meals ensure busy teenagers receive the important nutrients they need. Studies show that the availability of healthy convenience foods results in fewer students selecting unhealthy items[6].

- Rearrange the cooler to highlight white milk. Research shows that removing flavored milk entirely may result in up to an 11 percent decrease in total milk sales, whereas rearranging the case to offer white milk first increases total sales[1].
- Make healthy food more convenient by placing them at eye level in the middle of a refrigerator, displaying less healthy treats on the top or bottom shelves. Ensure white milk accounts for at least one third of all beverages in the cooler.
- Move the salad bar to the middle of the cafeteria, perpendicular with the cash registers. Studies show that relocating the salad bar can increase sales by 300-400 percent[5].


Improve Visibility

- Research shows that what people keep on their counter can influence their eating behaviors. Highlight healthy foods and keep less healthy items tucked away. For example, place ice cream in a closed cooler with an opaque lid and set out plenty of servings of the target entrée[3].
- Ensure the fruit and vegetable displays are well lit and available in at least two locations, one preferably near the cash register.
- Place the target entrée first, pairing it with healthy complementary sides. Research shows that eaters are 11 percent more likely to take the first item in a cafeteria line, regardless of the other choices offered[4].
- Keep reimbursable meal items well stocked so they look fresh. Displays with only a few items may look less appealing or as if the items are old or leftover. Set out display plates of the healthier options so kids can see what the meal looks like.

Utilize Suggestive Selling

- Utilize signs and other visual prompts to promote healthy choices. Place signs above healthful and reinbursable items, such as above fruit baskets or the salad bar. Signage at the cash register also reminds students to take all required food components.
- Research shows that descriptive food names can increase sales up to 28 percent[2]. Involve students to create names, such as champion cheese, macaroni veggie mania, or mega-milk.
- Mascots and mirals create positive eating environments, helping kids feel more comftorable and excited to eat.
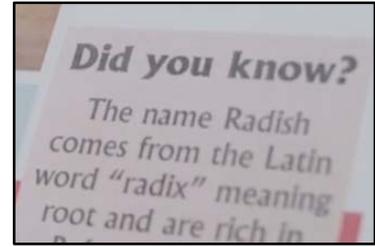
Evaluate Outcomes

Consider how the Smarter Lunchroom improvements impact metrics such as the number of reimbursable meals, sales of targeted meals, total revenue, student satisfaction, or plate waste. Utilize your production and sale records, waste observations, or surveys to assess improvements. Complete the Smarter Lunchroom Self-Assessment annually, identifying and implementing additional improvements. Sample Instructional Guides for Evaluation: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/resource/instructional-guides

Additional Resources:
- Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition
  Programs: http://smarterlunchrooms.org
- Checklists & Forms: http://smarterlunchrooms.org/resource/trainers-materials-smarter-lunchrooms-makeover-manual-checklists-and-forms
  Real Michigan Smarter
  Lunchrooms: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLaqD6X6pQgmKGbGknhuaKn_L_e3dbWhn4

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