



# Mickey’s Mighty Milk: Food Naming to Reduce Food Waste in an Elementary School Cafeteria

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## BACKGROUND

Cereal producers use catchy and fun names to boost their sales to kids. Such creative naming has been adapted for use in school cafeterias under the strategies of the Smarter Lunchroom Movement. Studies show that giving healthy foods appealing names can increase consumption among children and adults (Turnwald, Hanks). This hypothesis was tested in the cafeteria at Summit Park Elementary School, a kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade school in New City, NY, where 88.4% of students receive free or reduced price meals.

## METHODS

At first, food items kept their names and students’ intake was evaluated using the quarter-waste method, a quick and reliable visual evaluation estimating the proportion of wasted food on a plate (all,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , or  $\frac{1}{4}$ ). Data was collected for two weeks, three times a week throughout three lunch periods to compare results pre-and post-intervention for 282 students. The school’s bagged carrots were renamed as “Crunchy Carrot Sticks,” meatballs as “Meatball Dunkers,” apples as “Crunchy Red Apples,” white milk as “Mickey’s Mighty Milk,” orange slices as “Outrageous Oranges,” fruit cups as “All-mixed-up Fruit Cup” and broccoli as “Tasty Tree Tops.”

## RESULTS

Results from pre-and post-intervention groups were analyzed for each grade year. The table below shows the percent decrease in food waste (thus inferring increased food consumption) after naming food items with appealing and descriptive names.

Participants N=282	Food items	% waste decrease
1st grade n = 88	bagged carrots	10.25
	white milk	18.25
	meatballs	18.5
	apples	43
2nd grade n = 80	fruit cups	11
	sliced orange	17.6
	apples	39.75
3rd grade n = 114	whole wheat rolls	23.5
	broccoli	25.5
	bagged carrots	28

## CONCLUSION

The interventions used here were very modest and easy to implement. Simply describing school lunch items with fun, catchy names resulted in significantly reduced food waste and higher food consumption. This simple study illustrates the significant impact of food naming on young eaters. This successful pilot study can be replicated to promote use of similar strategies throughout the school district. If schools in the East Ramapo District adopt additional Smarter Lunchrooms interventions, there might be a further decrease in food waste and an increase in healthier food choices by the student body.

## SUPPORTING STUDIES

1. Turnwald, B.P., Boles, D.Z., Crum, A.J. (2017). Association Between Indulgent Descriptions and Vegetable Consumption: Twisted Carrots and Dynamite Beets. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 177(8), 1216-1218. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2017.1637
2. Jacko, C.C., Dellava, J., Ensle, K., Hoffman, J.D. (2007). Use of the Plate-Waste Method to Measure Food Intake in Children, *Journal of Extension*, 45(6). <https://www.ioe.org/joe/2007december/rb7.php>