Increasing Participation in School Meals by Overcoming Parent Perceptions
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Background:
- National School Meal Programs and the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 are policies that ensure students are provided balanced and nourishing meals during the school day.
- School meal participation at Seattle Public Schools (SPS) is low.
- Barriers to use include:
  - Parent perception of school meals
  - Child preference
  - A stigma associated with use of school meals
- Research demonstrates that school meals are often nutritionally superior to home-packed meals

Objectives:
- Solicit parent feedback regarding their perceptions, praise and/or concerns of school-provided meals
- Highlight the current nutrition guidelines pertaining to school meals and articulate how these guidelines are implemented by SPS Nutrition Services
- Inform parents of SPS students about the benefits of participating in school meals

Methods:
- Conducted a lunch box survey at three SPS elementary schools to assess what kids brought from home
- Completed a nutritional and cost analysis that compared average nutritional value and cost of home packed meals compared to school provided meals
- Observed menu planning and meal preparation and SPS district office
- Prepared several elementary news articles and social media posts highlighting benefits of school meals
- Presented observed benefits and survey findings to parents at school open houses and PTA meetings

Findings:
- Consistent with published data, school provided meals offered a greater serving of vegetables, were higher in fiber and slightly lower in cost than home-packed meals
- Many parents were unaware the nutritional benefits of school meals
- Talking with parents about the nutritional and non-nutritional benefits of participating in school meals increased their knowledge and awareness of the efforts made by SPS Nutrition Service Staff

Sources:
OSPI Website, 2018
Johnson et al. 2016
Farris et al. 2016
Ohri-Vachaspati, P. 2014
Hur et al. 2014
SuperTracker, 2018
Amazon Fresh Database
Safeway.com

### Nutritional and Cost Comparison of Home-Packed and School Provided Meals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seattle Public School Meals</th>
<th>Seattle Public School Elementary School 1 Home-Packed Meals</th>
<th>Seattle Public School Elementary School 2 Home-Packed Meals</th>
<th>Seattle Public School Elementary School 3 Home-Packed Meals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kcal</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat (g)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat Fat (g)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHO (g)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiber (g)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sugars (g)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Added Sugars (g)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein (g)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sodium (mg)</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>1107</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>1474</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>$3.00</td>
<td>$3.63</td>
<td>$2.83</td>
<td>$4.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All values are based on an average calculation of total meals