

# 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:

- licit 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
- Elicited parent feedback regarding school meals through surveys given at PTA meetings

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

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

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



## 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

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## Sources:

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