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School Lunch Report Card

A Report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

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Overweight and obesity, and the diseases that accompany them, have become epidemics in the United States. A recent report published by a research team at Johns Hopkins University predicts that if current trends continue, by the year 2015, 75 percent of all Americans, including 24 percent of all children and adolescents, will be overweight or obese. While there may be multiple reasons for these problems, some societal factors play a particularly significant role. School lunch is one of these.

Because school lunches have an important influence on childhood health, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) evaluates the meals served in the National School Lunch Program each year. Healthful lunches rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and other vegetarian foods will not only nourish children, but help them maintain normal body weights, develop good lifelong eating habits, and reduce the risk of chronic disease later in life.

For this year's report, PCRM analyzed the lunches served in 22 of the nation's largest elementary school districts and evaluated the districts on their efforts to educate children about good nutrition. The results are summarized on page 9.

PCRM's team of dietitians graded schools based on criteria in three major categories: Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention, Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy, and Nutrition Initiatives. The main objective was to determine whether foods served in schools are truly promoting the health of all children.

The results show that some schools are doing an excellent job, having incorporated more plant-based entrées, seasonal fruits, vegetables, and whole grains into menus than in years past. Too many others are failing, offering few, if any, healthful selections. Some schools have launched nutrition education programs to promote healthy eating habits, but have not changed their menus accordingly.

Background

Established in 1946 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is one of five federally funded child nutrition programs that provide meals, snacks, and other food to children. All of these programs play an important role in contributing to food security among low-income families while also feeding a large number of all children. The NSLP serves approximately 30 million lunches a day; approximately 100,000 schools participate. The program cost \$8.2 billion in 2006.

Schools participating in the NSLP receive cash subsidies and commodity foods for each meal served and bonus commodities, as they are available from agricultural surplus. In return, schools must serve lunches that meet federal nutrition requirements. They are also required to offer free or reduced-price lunches for eligible children. Each day, approximately 17.5 million students receive a free or reduced-price school lunch.

Unfortunately, a multitude of factors can have a negative influence on what food service directors end up serving for lunch. These include financial constraints and outdated federal requirements that permit schools to serve unhealthful foods.

One of the most significant roadblocks to change is the USDA's commodity system. Each year, the USDA purchases hundreds of millions of pounds of pork, beef, and other animal products, primarily as an economic benefit to agricultural interests, and donates them to the NSLP and other food assistance programs. Unfortunately, these "entitlement foods" are almost all unhealthful foods. This system makes it easy and inexpensive for food service directors to choose chicken nuggets, hot dogs, and other high-cholesterol, high-fat foods.

Despite these challenges, progress is being made in some areas. For example, four states—California, Florida, Hawaii, and New York—have instituted healthful school lunch resolutions that aim to combat the obesity epidemic. These resolutions recommend that vegetarian entrée options be served daily and urge schools to place an increased emphasis on healthful plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes.

PCRM's Healthy School Lunch Campaign

PCRM's Healthy School Lunch Campaign was established in 2001 to help protect children's health and to reduce childhood obesity rates by increasing the availability of healthful plant-based foods in schools.

Through the annual school lunch review, the annual Golden Carrot Awards for innovation in food service, and pilot projects in individual school systems, PCRM encourages lawmakers, the USDA, and school districts to achieve the Healthy School Lunch Campaign goal of ensuring that all foods served promote the health of all children.

Making the Grade

To earn a high grade on PCRM's School Lunch Report Card, school districts must go above and beyond USDA requirements, which many nutrition experts believe are inadequate. The guidelines permit high-fat, high-cholesterol foods to be regularly featured in school lunches and do not require school districts to serve any plant-based meals or, in most cases, to offer nondairy beverages. Nor do the guidelines require food service staff to offer nutrition education or any other type of programs to promote healthful eating. (A new USDA wellness initiative does require schools to provide goals for nutrition education but it stops short of requiring the schools to actually offer any programs.)

Given the prevalence of obesity among children and adults, it is clear that schools should meet nutrition standards that are more stringent than those set by the USDA. That is why PCRM has developed a new grading system. Districts that score well on this report card deserve special recognition.

To earn a perfect score, school districts must meet USDA nutrition requirements, *and* they must also serve a nondairy, vegetarian (vegan) entrée daily, offer a variety of fresh or low-fat vegetable side dishes and fresh fruits daily, make a nondairy beverage available to all students, and provide nutrition education in the cafeteria, as well as offer programs that promote healthful eating habits. Innovative programs include farm-to-school programs, cafeteria school gardens, farmers' market salad bar programs, and other inventive ways to encourage the consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes.

School Lunch Trends

Every year, PCRM documents the changes and improvements—or lack thereof—in the types of foods offered in schools. Unfortunately, too many school districts continue to emphasize less-than-healthful choices—hot dogs, cheeseburgers, and other high-fat, high-cholesterol foods.

The good news is that since PCRM began compiling these reports in 2001, there has been an increase in the availability of healthful vegetarian and vegan entrées in some school districts. This year, PCRM dietitians noted that 64 percent of the school districts regularly feature vegan selections on their menus or offer them upon request.

PCRM dietitians also found that 73 percent of the school districts now offer an alternative to dairy milk—bottled water, juice, or soy milk. (Fifty-five percent offer the alternative for free; 18 percent made it available for purchase.) In 2006, 67 percent of the districts offered an alternative for free or for purchase.

Past scores for individual districts are also a good indication of the positive trend among some schools. San Diego Unified School District, for example, earned a C- in 2003; a B- in 2004, and an A- both in 2006 and this year. Miami-Dade County Public Schools received a C in 2002, but earned a B+ this year. And Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland steadily climbed from a C- in 2004 to a B in 2006 to a B+ in 2007.

PCRM dietitians have also noted that, in some school districts, the variety of healthful choices is expanding to some degree. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich is an acceptable vegan option that PCRM encourages all schools to offer, but it's good to see some food service staff getting more creative. Tasty-sounding new dishes spotted this year include Italian pasta fagioli, veggie burger wraps, and build-your-own bean burritos.

Unfortunately, even the school districts that offer healthful options continue to serve them alongside unhealthful foods, which makes it less likely that children will make a wise choice.

Most Improved

The most improved school district this year is Oakland Unified School District in California. Its score rose from a C in 2006 to a B this year.

The district has expanded its healthful offerings, including a vegetarian Griller's Prime burger and a peanut butter and jelly entrée, both of which are clearly labeled on the menu as vegetarian. Oakland also gained points by increasing the number of fresh fruit and low-fat vegetable side options available each day.

The Criteria

Review Process

PCRM evaluated 22 elementary school lunch programs from the top 100 largest districts (by student population) in the country. The report includes districts from the following regions: Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Central, Midwest, and Pacific West. PCRM dietitians surveyed each food service director and analyzed a week's worth of menus.

Criteria and Grading System

This year's review looked at three essential categories for children's nutrition in schools:

- Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention
- Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy
- Nutrition Initiatives

Each category includes subcategories, as described below, to measure different aspects of nutrition, health promotion, and disease prevention.

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention: 50 points

This category consists of two components: First, do districts meet, at minimum, the USDA requirements that over a five-day period, meals average no more than 30 percent of calories from fat and no more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat? Second, how available are healthful low-fat, zero-cholesterol entrées?

School districts were awarded the most points when a variety of these dishes were available as "featured" entrées, meaning they were included on the lunch menu so students did not have to make a special request.

Numerous studies have spotlighted the benefits of nutrients found exclusively in plant foods and substantiated the health risks of cholesterol and fat. Therefore, it is especially important that schools provide plant-based entrées that are low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Most vegan entrées are naturally low in fat and cholesterol-free. When offered to children on a regular basis, these foods will help children develop good eating

habits that will, in turn, help them maintain an appropriate weight and, in the long run, prevent chronic disease.

Abundant scientific evidence supports the consumption of plant-based diets for health promotion. Individuals following healthful plant-based diets are less likely to be overweight or obese, and they have a reduced risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, and some cancers. Moreover, studies show that vegetarian children have higher intakes of essential vitamins and minerals.

School districts receive more points for vegan dishes than for vegetarian ones because many of the vegetarian items are cheese- or dairy-based and high in fat and cholesterol.

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention: 50 points			
Subcategory	Data Source	Total Points	Formula
Did the district meet USDA National School Lunch Program nutrition requirements?	School district menu nutrition analysis	25 points	Average daily meal must be: Fat <30% of calories Saturated fat <10% of calories
How many vegan/vegetarian entrée options does the district offer over a five-day period?	Recent lunch menu (5-day period)	25 points	Vegan entrée included on menu: 4 points per day or Vegan option available on request: 3 points per day or Vegetarian entrée included on menu or available on request: 2 points per day Bonus: A variety of vegan options offered on a rotating basis (3 or more rotating options weekly): 5 points

Please note: PCRM dietitians relied on the school districts to say whether they comply with USDA nutrition guidelines and this year, all the schools maintained that they do. Still, it is important to note that in 2003, a government study found that many school districts were not in the compliance with the guidelines.

An additional note: The USDA's guidelines are currently being revised to comply with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, which put more emphasis on whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy: 35 points

In addition to focusing on the relationship between nutrition and disease, the report card evaluates whether meal patterns meet nutrient needs and provide dietary options that encourage good health. To that end, the Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy category specifically measures whether the foods offered in elementary school lunches provide essential nutrients and fiber.

Each school district was rated on the availability of daily low-fat vegetable side dishes, fresh vegetables, and fresh fruit. This category also includes extra points for school districts that offer a nondairy beverage as an alternative to the dairy milk that all are required to serve, with few exceptions. These components are fundamental to a balanced and nutrient-sufficient meal pattern.

Fruits and Vegetables: To promote health and be nutritionally adequate, meals should include low-fat vegetable side dishes and fruit. Adults who consume plentiful amounts of fruits and vegetables often learned to eat them in childhood. Fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin, iron, calcium, fiber, and many other nutrients. When schools offer attractive and delicious fresh baby carrots and celery, corn on the cob, and fresh pineapple and pears, children begin to enjoy these items and regularly include them in their diet.

Nondairy Beverages: Nondairy beverages should be an essential component of the NSLP because many children cannot drink dairy milk. Many children are lactose intolerant or allergic to milk; others choose to avoid milk for other reasons, such as taste preferences, religious or ethical considerations, or health needs. Numerous scientific studies link the consumption of dairy milk to obesity, anemia, ear infections, constipation, respiratory problems, heart disease, and some cancers.

Unfortunately, schools are not required to offer an alternative to dairy milk even if a child has a written request from his or her parent. (Schools are required to offer an alternative if the child has a medical necessity and a doctor's note.) Additionally, the program will not cover any price difference between dairy milk and alternative beverages such as calcium-fortified fruit juices or rice and soy milk. Nondairy beverages are typically more expensive because the USDA purchases dairy milk through the commodities program and distributes it to the schools at very low cost.

Fortunately, a growing number of districts recognize the various issues with dairy milk and, despite the extra expense, offer nondairy beverages such as rice and soy milk, calcium-fortified fruit juices, or bottled water as options. PCRM awarded points to school districts that offer alternative beverages and additional points if students did not have to pay extra for the drinks. No points were given if children had to provide a parent's or physician's note.

Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy: 35 points			
Subcategory	Data Source	Total Points	Formula
How many healthful vegetable side dishes does the district offer over a five-day period?	Recent lunch menu	10 points	Fresh vegetable, steamed or low-fat vegetable dish (3g of fat or less per serving): 2 points per day Note: No points for fried or high-fat vegetable side dishes
How many fruits does the district offer over a five-day period?	Recent lunch menu	10 points	Fresh or dried fruit: 2 points per day Note: No points for canned pre-sweetened fruit
Wide variety of fresh fruits or fresh, steamed, or cooked low-fat vegetables over a five-day period	Recent lunch menu	5 points	Three or more different options available each day: 1 point per day
Nondairy beverage		10 points	Nondairy beverage available daily to all students at no cost: 10 points or Nondairy beverage available daily a la carte: 5 points Note: No points if nondairy beverage only available with note

Nutrition Initiatives: 15 points

To be most effective at changing children’s eating habits, school districts must not only serve healthful food but teach children about better nutrition and smart eating habits. This category includes three subcategories:

Labeling of healthful plant-based options: School districts receive points for promoting plant-based foods by labeling these items on their menus. They receive additional points if they have an incentive program that rewards children for choosing these wholesome lunch options.

Innovative Programs: School districts receive points for maintaining gardens, salad bars, farm-to-school programs, or other innovative programs that not only encourage healthful eating but engage children in the food growing and preparation process.

Nutrition Education: Education is critical to establishing good nutrition habits. Therefore, districts receive additional points for including nutrition messages on their menus, presenting nutrition classes taught by dietitians or food service staff, and developing other creative means of nutrition education. Districts also receive additional points for including information about plant-based diets on their menus or Web sites.

Nutrition Initiatives: 15 points			
Subcategory	Data Source	Total Points	Formula
Labeling of vegetarian/vegan options	Menu	3 points	Vegetarian/vegan options clearly labeled on menu
Incentives for choosing healthful meal	Food service director/menu	3 points	School districts charge less for healthful meals, reward students for choosing them, or encourage students to choose wisely in some other way
Innovative programs	Food service director	3 points	School garden Salad bar Farm-to-school Other
Nutrition education in cafeteria or through food service department about plant foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes)	Food service director	3 points	
Education about benefits of plant-based diets on menu	Menu	3 points	Discussion of vegetarian/vegan diets on menu or Web site

The Report Card

School District	Score	Grade
Pinellas County Schools (Florida)	94	A
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (North Carolina)	92	A-
Fairfax County Public Schools (Virginia)	92	A-
San Diego Unified School District (California)	92	A-
Miami-Dade County Public Schools (Florida)	89	B+
Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland)	87	B+
Oakland Unified School District (California)	84	B
Sacramento City Unified School District (California)	84	B
Volusia County Schools (Florida)	84	B
DeKalb County Schools (Georgia)	80	B-
Capistrano Unified School District (California)	79	C+
Davis School District (Utah)	77	C+
Santa Ana Unified School District (California)	75	C
Milwaukee Public Schools (Wisconsin)	72	C-
Orange County Public Schools (Florida)	67	D+
Atlanta Public Schools (Georgia)	67	D+
Omaha Public Schools (Nebraska)	66	D
Anchorage School District (Alaska)	60	F
Hancock County Schools (West Virginia)	59	F
Ysleta Independent School District (Texas)	58	F
Jordan County School District (Utah)	56	F
St. Louis Public Schools (Missouri)	53	F

Individual Districts

Pinellas County Schools: A

State: Florida

2006 Score: A- (92)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	50
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	35
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	94

Pinellas County, the 22nd largest district in the nation, is this year's top-rated school. Its menus regularly include and highlight vegetarian items. Pinellas County has also put together an index of vegan options available in all schools. These include black beans and rice, vegetarian chili, a veggie burger wrap sandwich, and a variety of vegan salads. A

low-fat hot vegetable side is available every day, as well as a side salad. Free juice is always an option, and soy milk is available for purchase.

Pinellas County participates in an innovative nutrition education program called “Teen Cuisine.” As part of this program, older students partner with local chefs to create cooking shows for younger children. The shows feature healthy recipes consistent with the food service department’s “Health Tips of the Month.”

Two nutrition education specialists also help to educate students throughout the district. In the 2006/2007 school year, they gave nutrition education lessons to nearly half of all elementary students on the benefits of eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes.

Pinellas County received a B in 2003 and an A- last year.

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: A-
State: North Carolina
2006 Score: A- (92)**

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	42
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	35
Nutrition Initiatives	15
TOTAL	92

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the 24th largest school district in the nation, kept its A- score from last year, a significant improvement over its C score in 2004.

Once a week, the district’s menus feature a vegan entrée such as black-eyed peas and rice with a whole grain roll or spaghetti with meatless sauce. The dish is distinctly marked with two stars for being vegan. What’s more, vegan options are always available upon request and vegetarian entrées—marked with one star—are listed on the menu daily.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg boasts a long list of healthful side dishes, which include a rotating variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and low-fat offerings such as oranges, grapes, turnip greens, broccoli, baked vegetarian beans, and spinach. Bottled water and juice are available daily.

Nutrition education includes instruction about the benefits of plant foods, after-school programs which feature hands-on activities centered around unusual fruits and vegetables, school gardens, and a partnership with “Fruits and Vegetables: More Matters” and the Mecklenburg County Health Department. Online resources include the “Healthy Student Body Chart,” a monthly check-off calendar to improve nutrition and health that includes such suggestions as “try a new vegetable” and “eat a vegetarian meal today.”

Fairfax County Public Schools: A-
State: Virginia
2006 Score: A (94)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	50
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	30
Nutrition Initiatives	12
TOTAL	92

Fairfax County School District, the 13th largest district in the nation, continues to be a standout program, serving and promoting healthful school lunch options to its 140,000 students.

A variety of vegan options are featured on the menu daily. These include a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, veggie patties, pasta with marinara sauce, and additional items upon request. Brown rice is added to whole wheat/grain breads and pizza crust and Fairfax is now introducing couscous. All sides are low fat, and a wide variety is available ranging from fresh broccoli and baby carrots to kiwi and orange quarters.

Fruits and vegetables are promoted through the Give Me 5! Colors that Jive! Program. In addition, Fairfax celebrates the diversity of its district through a monthly international menu. Fairfax County also has a noteworthy online component to its food service program, the Energy Zone Web site. This site, which receives an average of 10,600 hits per month, allows parents and student to calculate the nutrition content of the foods they eat and compare the analysis to the Virginia Governor’s nutrition standards.

Fairfax is a school lunch success story, showing great improvement over the years. The district earned only a C on PCRM’s 2002 Report Card, but in 2003 and 2004 it received a B, and in 2006 earned an A.

San Diego Unified School District: A-
State: California
2006 Score: A- (92)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	45
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	35
Nutrition Initiatives	12
TOTAL	92

With approximately 133,000 students, San Diego is the 16th largest district in the nation. This district is successful at offering fresh and healthful low-fat meals on a regular basis. A vegan option is available every day; twice a week, it is one of the featured options on

the menu. Vegan dishes include hummus with pita bread and a teriyaki veggie burger. An extensive variety of fresh produce is featured daily through salad bars.

Each month the food service department's newsletter spotlights a Harvest of the Month item, grown in California. The article includes information about the history, health facts, and growing practices of this featured item. San Diego also promotes vegetarian items in its newsletter by defining the term vegetarian and providing resources for students and parents on how to follow a healthful vegetarian diet.

Many schools in the district currently have gardens, and the district is encouraging all of its schools to apply for the California Instructional School Garden Program grant.

San Diego has been steadily improving its school lunch offerings. It received a C- in 2003, a B- in 2004, and an A- in 2006.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools: B+
State: Florida
2006 Score: B+ (88)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	45
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	35
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	89

As the fourth largest district in the county, Miami-Dade County Public Schools does well by its diverse student population. Vegan options such as rice and beans, potatoes with broccoli, vegetable salads, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are all available upon request each day. In addition, a variety of healthful side items are available daily, including black beans, plantains, fresh carrots, and salads. Each low-fat side item is marked on the menu with a heart.

Some of the district's schools have gardens, and cooking classes are given through various programs such as the Healthy Options for Public Schools Program. Food service managers conduct classes on request from teachers, and food service interns must present a nutrition education project to students during their training program.

Miami-Dade maintains an informative Web site with nutrition information featuring topics such as cholesterol and phytochemicals. The district also participates in the "Extreme Cuisine" program, in which a guest chef comes into the school to demonstrate how to incorporate fruits and vegetables into students' diets.

Miami-Dade has been a high performer since it bumped its score from a C in 2002 to a B+ in 2003 and 2006.

Montgomery County Public Schools: B+
State: Maryland
2006 Score: B (84)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	40
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	35
Nutrition Initiatives	12
TOTAL	87

Located just outside of Washington, D.C., Montgomery County caters to a diverse and large student population. The nation’s 17th largest district boosted its score by half a grade this year due to an increase in the number of fresh fruit and low-fat vegetable side dish offerings.

Montgomery County’s menus clearly identify all meatless items. Vegetarian and/or vegan options are available daily, while vegetarian items are featured on the menu three times per week. Vegetable-based soups such as tomato soup are also offered regularly. All schools offer baby carrots on a daily basis, as well as a variety of low-fat vegetable side dishes and fruits. Bottled water and juice are always on hand as part of a reimbursable meal.

This school year Montgomery County participated in a trial study with the National Soy Board to test several different soy-based products for possible inclusion in the menu.

Nutrition education is included on the menus, which go home with the “youngest in family” and reach close to 50,000 homes. Montgomery County also offers wellness information available on its Web site. Montgomery County Public Schools iTV has filmed several different programs dealing with nutrition education, including making wise choices, the importance of physical activity, and smart snacking.

Montgomery County has been steadily improving its offerings since 2003 when it earned a C+ and 2004 when it received a C-. Last year, the district bumped its score to a B and this year, the district has earned a B+. Montgomery County could receive an even better score if vegan options were featured on the menu on a daily basis.

Oakland Unified School District: B
State: California
2006 Score: C (75)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	45
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	33
Nutrition Initiatives	6
TOTAL	84

Among schools that were also rated in 2006, Oakland Unified School District shows the biggest improvement, increasing its score by nine points and moving up a full grade. The 72nd largest school district in the country now offers a variety of featured vegetarian and vegan options and clearly labels them with a (v).

Among the healthful low-fat vegetarian entrées is a vegetarian Griller’s Prime burger. Nutritious vegetable side dishes are available regularly and include stir-fried vegetables, baby carrots, and the Harvest of the Month option, a local and seasonal item.

Recently, Oakland implemented a free bottled water program in two of its schools and is expanding to 30 schools in the upcoming school year. This program allows students the option of choosing bottled water each day instead of dairy milk.

Nutrition education includes school gardens in approximately 40 schools as well as cooking classes. A farm-to-school program is in the works for the upcoming school year.

Sacramento City Unified School District: B
State: California
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	45
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	30
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	84

Serving approximately 50,000 students, the Sacramento City Unified School District offers at least one vegetarian option daily: choices include bean burritos, nachos with refried beans, and the “Big Daddy Garden Salad.” Additionally, students can always choose the salad bar option. Typical items featured on the salad bar include mixed fresh vegetables, almonds, walnuts, and trail mix.

Sacramento could improve its score by featuring its low-fat vegetarian dishes on the menu and by expanding its offerings. Some kid-friendly dishes include meatless chicken tenders, veggie BBQ riblets, and hummus wraps.

The district participates in multiple nutrition education programs such as school gardens, farm-to-school programs, and cooking classes. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes are promoted through articles in the district newspaper and cafeteria promotions.

Volusia County Schools: B

State: Florida

Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	45
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	30
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	84

Volusia County Schools is 54th in size in the nation, located on the east coast of Central Florida. A vegan option of peanut butter and jelly is always on the menu; in addition, students can request other vegetarian options such as a vegetarian salad. Including these special-request options on the menu would let students know they are readily available and help to improve Volusia's score.

Students always have the option of fresh carrots and fruit along with regular side items such as baked beans, broccoli, and garden salad. Occasionally, additional healthful dishes such as pasta with marinara sauce and Cajun rice are available. Bottled water and juice is always on hand for purchase.

Currently Volusia County participates in a monthly "Fresh to U" program sponsored by the USDA and the Florida Department of Education that allows the schools to offer samples of fresh fruits and vegetables to all students. The district also provides students with nutrition information from local fast-food restaurants so they can see how their lunch choices compare.

DeKalb County Schools: B-

State: Georgia

Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	40
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	28
Nutrition Initiatives	12
TOTAL	80

DeKalb County Schools in metropolitan Atlanta serves a diverse population of more than 102,000 students in 143 schools and centers. It is the 29th largest district in the country.

DeKalb offers a vegan option such as a teriyaki veggie burger upon request every day. All vegetarian items are clearly labeled on the menu. Fresh raw vegetables are always available, along with healthful vegetable sides such as pinto beans and baked beans. Students also have the option of choosing bottled water and juice as a beverage instead of dairy milk.

Menus periodically feature nutrition information about plant-based diets, and all cafeterias offer some sort of additional nutrition education.

DeKalb could improve its score by adding vegan options to the menu to make it easier for students to order these dishes.

Capistrano Unified School District: C+
State: California
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	35
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	35
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	79

Capistrano Unified School District serves nearly 18,000 meals each day. Vegetarian options such as burritos and baked ziti are available daily and clearly marked on the menu with a (v). Unfortunately, Capistrano’s menus also include a number of less healthful school lunch standbys such as hot dogs, nachos, and French bread pepperoni pizzas. The district could improve its score by including additional low-fat vegetarian options such as vegetarian chili, sloppy Joes with soy-based crumbles, and black bean enchiladas.

On the plus side, a variety of fresh fruit and vegetable options are available daily at the salad bars. On any given day, students can choose two of the following: baby carrots, orange, apple, kiwi, and/or sliced peaches. Juice is available with the meal instead of dairy milk.

Through a nutrition network grant, some schools offer recipe demonstrations using fresh produce. Capistrano’s menus include nutrition education. For example, the April menu that highlighted National Garden Month discussed the benefits of asparagus and how to plant a garden. In addition, food service staff encourage fruit and vegetable consumption by offering produce samples to students.

Davis School District: C+
State: Utah
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	45
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	25
Nutrition Initiatives	7
TOTAL	77

Davis is the 64th largest school district in the country. It offers a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, satisfying the requirement for a cholesterol-free, vegetarian option. Other vegetarian options are available on a rotating basis; however, most are cheese-based and high in fat and cholesterol. Davis could improve its score by adding low-fat options such as broccoli potato soup, baked beans, and Chinese noodle salad.

Healthful side dishes are available daily through a fresh fruit and vegetable bar. Among the many options are a romaine and spinach salad with carrots and red cabbage, fresh seasonal fruit, and various vegetable crudités, including carrots, celery, and cucumber. Davis' score could be substantially improved if it offered a nondairy beverage to all students, not just those who have a parent's or doctor's note.

Dietetic interns provide nutrition education in approximately 150 classrooms. But other than these classes and the menu labeling of plant-based entrées, there are few incentives for students to make smart menu choices. Only one school in the district has a school garden.

Santa Ana Unified School District: C

State: California

Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	35
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	25
Nutrition Initiatives	15
TOTAL	75

Santa Ana Unified School District is 60th in size in the country and is located in Southern California. Its vegetarian choices include a whole-grain and high-fiber bean burrito, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and a vegetarian taco hot pocket.

The district could better its score by adding more healthful options such as pasta with marinara sauce, vegetable wraps, or tamale pie. The district could also improve its score by offering a nondairy beverage to students. On a positive note, Santa Ana just began labeling its vegetarian options.

Santa Ana participates in the Harvest of the Month program, which features a nutrition-related activity and taste testing of local fresh fruits and vegetables. This program is reinforced by food service staff offering the same produce items in the cafeteria.

Food service supervisors attend monthly nutrition workshops taught by a registered dietitian and later present this information to the students.

Milwaukee Public Schools: C-
State: Wisconsin
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	40
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	23
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	72

Milwaukee Public Schools is the largest public school district in Wisconsin, serving 90,925 students. Its food service department offers a daily vegan option upon request. Vegetarian options are also available; however most include cheese, which is high in both calories and saturated fat. For example, typical items include cheese quesadillas and cheese pizza. Milwaukee could significantly raise its score by increasing the number of low-fat vegetarian offerings, featuring them on the menus, and highlighting the benefits of plant-based diets.

Milwaukee does offer a variety of healthful vegetable side dishes, including picante-style rice and corn, green beans and carrot sticks with herb dip, and fresh green salads.

Two schools participate in a Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Pilot and successful foods used in this program are being added to the lunch menu for the entire district. The district also promotes the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables with posters and flyers in the school cafeterias.

Orange County Public Schools: D+
State: Florida
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	40
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	27
Nutrition Initiatives	0
TOTAL	67

The 15th largest district in the country, Orange County is home to the city of Orlando. Orange County School Food Service could do a far better job of feeding its students. Menus regularly include such high-fat, high-calorie dishes as double-stuffed crust pizza, beef rib-shaped nuggets, and hot dogs.

Fortunately, the cafeterias offer a vegan option upon request and feature a vegetarian option at least three times per week. In addition, a variety of nutritious low-fat vegetable side dish options such as broccoli and mixed green salad are available regularly; however, fresh fruit offerings are limited.

The district could greatly improve its score by replacing its cholesterol-packed standards with more healthful vegetarian dishes such as rice and stir-fried vegetables, black bean enchiladas, and pasta primavera.

Orange County Food Service does not participate in any nutrition education initiatives.

Atlanta Public Schools: D+
State: Georgia
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	37
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	24
Nutrition Initiatives	6
TOTAL	67

As the 69th largest district in the nation, Atlanta Public Schools consists of 89 schools serving 50,000 students. All too often, its menus feature high-fat, high-cholesterol dishes such as corn dogs, beef-a-roni, and fish sticks. Although vegetarian options are clearly labeled and available daily, the choices are often limited to high-fat dishes such as macaroni and cheese and cheese pizza.

Atlanta could improve its score by adding kid-friendly vegan dishes such as soy cheese pizza, noodles with peanut sauce, and alphabet soup to its daily menus. In addition, Atlanta could improve its score by offering more fresh fruit options each week. Fortunately, students do have the option of purchasing nondairy beverages such as juice and bottled water as a la carte items.

Atlanta Public Schools promotes nutrition through classroom food demonstrations, but the food service department does not offer any further nutrition education about fruits, vegetables, or whole grains in its cafeterias. Offering education at the point of sale of foods is important to help students make healthy choices.

We note that Grady High School in Atlanta won PCRM's annual Golden Carrot Award for innovation in food service in 2006, in large part for a vegetarian lunch line it offers. This healthful program could serve as an excellent model for the city's elementary schools.

Omaha Public Schools: D

State: Nebraska

Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	35
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	22
Nutrition Initiatives	9
TOTAL	66

Omaha Public Schools provides lunch each day for approximately 46,000 students. The menu is very limited compared with many of the larger school districts. Students are offered an option of an entrée, sandwich box, or chef salad. All vegetarian options are clearly labeled, and the menu includes information on plant-based diets; however vegetarian options are unfortunately limited to cheese sandwiches and yogurt. On a positive note, juice is offered as part of the meal.

Omaha could greatly improve its grade by reducing the meat and dairy offerings on the menu. For example, the chef salad, which features such items as pepperoni, mozzarella, and provolone, could be replaced with a three-bean salad, a California Waldorf salad, or a potato salad with vegan mayonnaise. The turkey, ham, and cheese sandwich could be replaced with veggies and a low-fat spread such as hummus. Additional healthful choices could include veggie chili, bean burritos, and barbecue-style baked tofu.

Nutrition initiatives include posters and flyers that coordinate with the menu. One such initiative used a “Color Your Steps to Healthy with Vegetables!” theme.

Anchorage School District: F

State: Alaska

Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	40
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	14
Nutrition Initiatives	6
TOTAL	60

Located in Alaska, the Anchorage School District serves a diverse population of approximately 50,000 students.

Although vegetarian options are served each Monday and vegan items are available upon request, there is little promotion of these plant-based entrées and their benefits. They are not included, or highlighted, on the menu and there is no educational information about them.

Anchorage could raise its score by adding some of these healthful items to its regular menu. Typical menu items include cinnamon-glazed toast with turkey sausage, mini-corn dogs, and a baked chicken sandwich.

When fresh fruits are not available, food service staff substitute canned fruit or sugar-free juice. Low-fat and fresh vegetables sides are available most days of the week, but tater tots, baked French fries, and potato coins appear regularly.

Some nutrition education is offered through cooking classes, and the food service department is willing to speak to any classrooms that request a presentation.

Hancock County Schools: F
State: West Virginia
2006 Score: D (63)

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	27
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	29
Nutrition Initiatives	3
TOTAL	59

As a smaller district, Hancock County Schools, located in West Virginia, has a limited menu heavy on typical and unwholesome school lunch fare—fish nuggets, beef hoagies, hot dogs, and the like. The district also falls short when it comes to offering nutritious vegetable side dishes. This is one of the main reasons the district’s performance worsened over the last year.

On the plus side, Hancock has made some health-promoting improvements in the recent year. All entrées are served on wheat buns, and fresh fruit is available every day.

Nutrition education is limited but does include some taste-testing of fruits and vegetables among students.

Hancock could increase its score by replacing its high-fat, high-cholesterol menu options with low-fat, nutrient-dense dishes such as all-vegetarian nuggets, vegetable hoagies, or vegetarian chili. It could also boost its score by adding more healthful vegetable side dishes. Some dishes popular with kids include winter squash with peanut sauce, oven-roasted sweet potatoes, and sesame asparagus.

Ysleta Independent School District: F
State: Texas
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	27
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	25
Nutrition Initiatives	6
TOTAL	58

Ysleta Independent School District serves nearly 45,000 students in El Paso, Texas. Its extremely limited menu offers just one main entrée choice per day. Regular items include sloppy Joes, steak fingers, and chicken nuggets. Occasionally, a vegetarian meal such as a nacho salad with pinto beans is available.

Low-fat vegetables side dishes and fruit are available daily; however, more fresh produce options would improve the district's grade. Fruit cups, fruited gelatin, and apple crisp appear more often than fresh fruit.

Nutrition classes are given to parents in the summer on nutrition and the benefits of fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes. Ysleta also participates in a farm-to-school program, which brings fresh and local produce to the students, when available.

Ysleta could improve its score by offering healthful vegetarian dishes more frequently. Some possibilities include steamed veggie dumplings, dairy-free lasagna, and polenta with spicy tofu.

Jordan County School District: F
State: Utah
Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	31
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	25
Nutrition Initiatives	0
TOTAL	56

Located near Salt Lake City, Jordan County School District is the largest school district in Utah. Only one entrée choice is offered daily, and vegan or vegetarian entrées are only available by special request. Some of the many high-fat, high-cholesterol entrée menu items include the foot-long hot dog and the Colossal Burger.

Although a daily side dish bar does offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, there are no alternatives to dairy milk without a doctor's or parent's note.

In addition, the food service department does not offer any nutrition education.

Jordan County could improve its score by adding such healthful, child-friendly dishes as a vegetarian burger or vegetarian tacos and by marketing these items to students. The district also needs to initiate some nutrition education programs.

St. Louis Public Schools: F

State: Missouri

Not graded in 2006

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention	31
Health Promotion and Nutrition Adequacy	19
Nutrition Initiatives	3
TOTAL	53

The St. Louis Public School District includes more than 95 schools. Its menu is heavy with high-fat, heat-and-serve items such as chicken corn dogs, fish sticks, and pizza.

Although vegetarian items are labeled on the menu, they are only served once a week on average. St. Louis could improve its score by offering healthful vegetarian items such as meatless chicken tenders, barbecue veggie riblets, or pasta primavera on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, low-fat vegetable side dishes and fresh fruit are not always available. French fries, mashed potatoes, and canned fruits appear often on the menu. St. Louis could also improve its score by offering low-fat vegetable side dishes and fresh fruit more consistently. Water and juice are both free.

Nutrition education, if any, is offered through the school curriculum, not the food service department. Adding an educational program that is integrated with the food service department would be another essential step to improving St. Louis' school lunch program.