



How to Increase the number of Students that select Reimbursable Meals

During a busy lunch period, **time** is students' most valuable commodity and they will often grab a snack or skip lunch altogether rather than wait in a long line for a full meal, even when they are hungry! *Worse, over 70% of students surveyed said long lines were a problem at their school!* Hungry, time-pressed students are more likely to order foods that take little time to serve/take. Use this "how to" sheet to give healthy reimbursable meals and snacks an advantage—and improve National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation too.



Materials: Supplies for creating an attractive brightly colored sign

1. Convert one line or window to healthy-items-only service. Stock with a variety of snacks and entrée options, with the focus on being as quick-service (grab-and-go) as possible
 - **Entrées:** offer sandwiches/subs, prepackaged salads, yogurt parfaits (yogurt with fruit and nuts), and bagged lunches. Also, offer the lowest-fat/lowest-sodium entrée if possible (temperature rules may or may not allow this, depending on your lunchroom facilities)
 - **Drinks:** milk, juice, and water
 - **Snacks/Sides:** finger-food sides (raw veggie packs, whole fruits, and/or sliced fruits in bags or cups)
2. Advertise! Create an attractive, brightly-colored sign about the line or window
 - Emphasize the time savings: "Short on time? Pick this line! Sandwiches and salads are Grab-and-Go!"
 - Emphasize that students can get full reimbursable meals at the window
 - **Important note:** Do not use the word "healthy" in your sign – curiously, our research has shown that giving a food the title "healthy" actually decreases its sales. Better options are "Fresh Bites," "Fresh Express," "Fast & Fresh," etc.
3. Offer less-healthy snacks in regular lines only
 - Cover ice cream freezer with paper (no transparent top)
 - Place snacks on a rack behind the counter or on the back wall, where students must ask for them
 - Offer snacks only after meal service is finished

- Instead of offering deals that encourage students to buy many snacks (for example, a 3-for-\$1 cookie discount), “bundle” indulgent snacks with healthy partner foods (for example, a one-cookie-and-milk discount)

References

“Create a healthy-items-only convenience....” Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs
<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/idea/create-healthy-items-only-convenience-line-or-window-stocked-all-types-healthy-foods-milk>