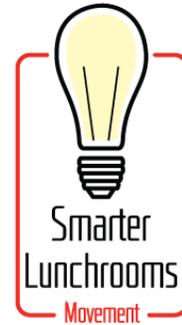


1 — Introduction

The **Smarter Lunchrooms Action Guide** provides guidance for school nutrition programs on strategies to change the cafeteria environment and help students make healthy food choices. This guide is based on the Smarter Lunchrooms principles developed by the Cornell B.E.N. Center, and reflects the experiences of six schools that participated in the Smarter Lunchrooms Makeover Pilot (SLMP) through Connecticut’s 2013 Team Nutrition grant from the USDA. For more information on the SLMP, see section 5.

SMARTER LUNCHROOMS OVERVIEW

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement was established as part of the B.E.N. Center in 2010, through a grant from the USDA. Smarter Lunchrooms uses **behavioral economics**, the science of how environmental cues influence decision-making, to promote healthy choices in school lunchrooms. Strategies focus on making small environmental changes – such as ambience, prompting and the packaging, order and placement of food items on the cafeteria line – to influence students’ daily food choices.



Smarter Lunchrooms strategies are evidence-based, simple, no cost or low-cost changes to the school lunchroom environment that:

- promote healthy eating behaviors and nudge children toward nutritious foods; and
- improve school meal participation and profits while decreasing waste.

Smarter Lunchrooms helps schools evaluate the lunchroom, determine what they are doing well, and identify opportunities for improvement.



WHY SMARTER LUNCHROOMS?

The goal of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) is to provide children with nutritious meals that combat the dual problems of childhood hunger and obesity. Hunger and food insecurity affect millions of our nation's children. More than one in three children are overweight or obese.

The USDA school meal patterns required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 address these problems by meeting children's nutrition needs. However, meals are only nutritious when students eat them. Smarter Lunchrooms helps schools meet the NSLP and SBP goal by promoting healthy choices for students, and encouraging selection of reimbursable meals.



CAFETERIA ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCES STUDENT CHOICES

Like all businesses, school nutrition programs need to promote a specific image to bring in and keep their customers. Smarter Lunchrooms addresses key strategies to help schools create a positive cafeteria environment that encourages student participation.

School food service staff plays a critical role in influencing what students choose to eat each day. How staff serves the food and interacts with students determines whether students buy school meals, and what meal components they decide to take. It can also determine whether students buy a la carte items instead of school meals, or bring foods from home.

The cafeteria environment is shaped by many decisions such as what and how many food choices to offer, and where and how to present foods on the serving line. Smarter Lunchrooms strategies help food service staff structure the cafeteria environment so it encourages students to:

- increase selections of reimbursable school meals;
- increase selections of healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables; and
- select healthier a la carte options such as yogurt parfaits and vegetables with hummus.

Positive attitudes are key to success. Positive staff attitudes, communication (including nonverbal communication like body language), and messaging are critical to creating a pleasant cafeteria environment that promotes healthy eating. Staff interactions should welcome and encourage students to enjoy delicious healthy meals in a pleasant atmosphere.

Keep the goal of school meals in mind! Have a **positive attitude** about making changes to help students eat healthy.