

Healthy school lunches get thumbs up from students

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Kids aren't avoiding healthier fare or throwing more food away, research shows.

(HealthDay)—Elementary school students seem to be satisfied with the healthier school lunches being offered to them, according to a new study of school officials.

New meal standards—issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture—went into effect in the fall of 2012. At the time, there was concern that kids would stop buying lunch, or throw away most of their food. But the new study of nearly 600 elementary schools suggests that this isn't the case.

"The updated meals standards are resulting in healthier meals for tens of millions of kids," Lindsey Turner, of Boise State University and a co-investigator for Bridging the Gap, a research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said in a university news release.

"Our studies show that kids are OK with these changes, and that there have not been widespread challenges with kids not buying or eating the meals," added Turner. Turner was a research scientist at the Institute for Health Research and Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago when the study was conducted.

Roughly six months after the healthier meal standards were implemented, researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Michigan surveyed [school](#) leaders, such as principals and school food-service providers, about how their students reacted to the new meals being offered to them.

Although 56 percent of those polled said the kids initially complained, they noted the students became more accepting of their new food choices over time.

The survey also revealed what the kids were choosing for their lunch and how much they were eating. Most of those polled, or 84 percent, said about the same number of students were buying their lunch and 79 percent reported the kids were also eating about the same amount or more than they did the year before. The researchers concluded the new meal standards did not result in kids wasting food or not buying their lunch anymore.

Moreover, 70 percent of the school leaders questioned said their students generally liked the healthier lunches provided at school. The researchers noted, however, there were some geographic and socioeconomic differences in the reactions to the new meal standards.

The schools with more students from lower-income families reported an increase in the percentage of students buying lunch. The opposite was true at schools with more children that had a higher socioeconomic status. Urban and suburban school students had fewer children stop

buying lunch. These students also complained less and wasted less food than children attending rural schools, the investigators found.

Although those polled didn't report much change in the amount of food that was wasted at lunchtime, students from lower-income areas had less plate waste, the researchers noted.

The study, which was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, was released online in advance of publication in the August issue of *Childhood Obesity*.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more about [child nutrition](#).

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