

School Resources and Engagement in Technical Assistance Programs Is Associated with Higher Prevalence of Salad Bars in Elementary School Lunches in the United States



Punam Ohri-Vachaspati, PhD, RD; Lindsey Turner, PhD; Marc A. Adams, PhD, MPH; Meg Bruening, PhD, MPH, RD; Frank J. Chaloupka, PhD

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ABSTRACT

Background Salad bars have been promoted as a strategy for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption in schools.

Objective To examine school-level resources and programs associated with the presence of salad bars in elementary schools and to assess whether there were differential changes in salad bar prevalence based on school-level resources and programs before and after the new US Department of Agriculture schools meals standards were proposed (January 2011) and implemented (July 2012).

Design Repeated cross-sectional design. Data were collected annually between 2006-2007 and 2013.

Setting Nationally representative sample of 3,956 elementary schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. School personnel (ie, administrators and food-service staff) provided data using a mail-back survey.

Measures Presence of salad bars in school was the primary outcome variable. School-level programs and resources were investigated as independent variables.

Statistical analysis Weighted logistic regression analyses examined associations between dependent and independent variables controlling for school demographic characteristics.

Results Prevalence of salad bars increased significantly from 17.1% in 2006-2007 to 29.6% in 2012-2013. The prevalence of salad bars was significantly higher among schools that participated in the Team Nutrition program (odds ratio [OR] 1.37, 95% CI 1.10 to 1.70), the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (OR 1.48, 95% CI 1.13 to 1.95), a Farm to School program (OR 1.77, 95% CI 1.36 to 2.33), and where school meals were provided by a foodservice management company (OR 1.46, 95% CI 1.08 to 1.97). No association was found for schools with full-service kitchen, school gardens, those offering nutrition education, or those with dietitians/nutritionists on staff.

Conclusions Prevalence of salad bars increased significantly after the US Department of Agriculture school meal guidelines were proposed and implemented. It is likely that schools are using salad bars to offer a variety of fruits and vegetables to students, and schools with greater numbers of school-level resources and programs are better positioned for having salad bars.

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BASED ON DIETARY DATA FROM THE 2007-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, approximately 95% to 98% of boys of elementary school age and 84% to 95% of girls of elementary school age do not eat the recommended amounts of vegetables.¹ This shortfall in quantities eaten is accompanied by lack of variety in what is consumed—potatoes are the most common vegetable, constituting one-third of all vegetables consumed, and dark green leafy vegetables and red and orange vegetables (excluding tomatoes) are most infrequently consumed.² The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for

Americans (DGA)³ put special emphasis on including a variety of vegetables, especially dark green, orange, and red varieties. With regard to fruit consumption, children start off well; that is, 60% of boys and girls aged 4 to 8 years meet the fruit recommendations, but consumption drops as they get older, with only 25% of 9- to 13-year-olds meeting the recommendations. Fruit juice consumption remains high, despite the DGA recommending that the majority of fruit should be consumed whole and recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics⁴ calling for limiting fruit juice consumption.

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