

Title of Intervention: Trying Alternative Cafeteria Options in Schools (TACOS)

Intervention Strategies: Campaigns and Promotions, Environments and Policies

Purpose of the Intervention: To increase sales of lower-fat foods in secondary school cafeterias

Population: Mostly suburban secondary school students

Setting: 20 secondary schools in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area; community-based

Partners: School districts

Intervention Description:

- Campaigns and Promotions: TACOS addressed peer influence on adolescent food choices through a peer promotions intervention component. Student groups implemented school-wide promotional activities that highlighted one or more of the lower-fat foods available in the à la carte areas. Promotions included taste tests, student food choice self-assessments, and media campaigns (posters, newspaper articles and videos). Student groups were offered financial incentives for completing each promotion.
- Environments and Policies: The goal for the à la carte food availability intervention component consisted of increasing the availability of lower-fat foods. "Lower fat" was defined as 5 g or less fat per serving, and "à la carte" was defined as foods sold separately from the federally reimbursable school lunch program and offered at least 3 days per week. The ultimate goal was to have 50% of products be lower in fat.

Theory: Social Cognitive Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior

Resources Required:

- Staff/Volunteers: TACOS staff, food service staff, students, faculty
- Training: Student groups and faculty advisors for specific promotional activities; students to act as liaisons between student body and food service staff; food service staff to learn how to code the difference between higher fat and lower fat choices
- Technology: Not mentioned
- Space: Not mentioned
- Budget: \$100-300 incentive per promotional activity
- Intervention: Low-fat food options, promotional materials
- Evaluation: Surveys

Evaluation:

- Design: Randomized controlled trial
- Methods and Measures:
 - Weekly electronic records of lower-fat à la carte food sales
 - School food service revenues collected at the end of each semester
 - Student surveys collected information about food choices, attitudes and perceived norms regarding lower- and higher-fat foods, perceptions of the school food environment, use of the school cafeteria and vending machines, and demographic variables
 - Availability of lower-fat foods assessed every three weeks
 - Promotion data forms to track activities

Outcomes:

- Short Term Impact: Students perceived a greater availability of lower-fat food choices in the cafeteria à la carte areas and greater normative support for lower-fat food choices at school. There was a steep increase in sales of lower fat foods during the first year of the intervention. In the second year of the intervention, the percentage of sales of lower fat foods remained high.
- Long Term Impact: Not measured

Maintenance: Not mentioned

Lessons Learned: Changes in the school food environment, such as increasing both the availability and the promotion of healthier foods, can have a positive effect on secondary school students' food purchases and on their perceptions about the food environment at school. These results were achieved without a classroom educational component or a home-based family component, which were included in most previous school based nutritional intervention studies.

Citation(s):

French, S. A., M. Story, et al. (2004). "An environmental intervention to promote lower-fat food choices in secondary schools: outcomes of the TACOS Study." *Am J Public Health* 94(9): 1507-12.