

School Foodservice

Vol. 18, 2023

Trends • Challenges • Solutions



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2023 School Food Trends

What Do Kids Want For Lunch?

Culinary experts and registered dietitians from Chartwells K12, a company that serves 2 million meals a day in 4,500 schools across the country, shared their insights based on student surveys of what kids want for lunch.

Global Cuisines

Students are interested in exploring authentic global flavors from around the world.

Spicy Flavors

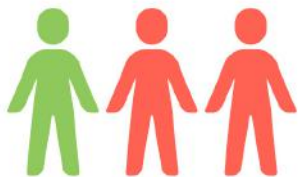
Cravings for bold flavors are hot with students. Bring the heat.

Healthy Treats

Healthy dessert and snack options that are good for you and taste great are a win. Ingredient twists could include oat, sunflower butter, black beans, etc.

Plant-Based Food, Veggies & Fruit

Plant-based is not just an adult favorite, kids are all in too. Baja Bean Tacos, Orange Tofu Salad with Baby Spinach, you name it. Colorful fruits and vegetables that add health and immunity benefits are also popular.



1 in 3 students said they prefer having a vegetarian option available for lunch



Smoothie Stations

Chartwells K12 Smoothie Station concept, featuring healthy, whole-some drinkable breakfast, lunch, and snack options, allows students to eat more yogurt, milk, and fruits in new and traditional combinations. Students love the option to enjoy a quick and tasty health boost in the cafeteria or on the go.



Signature Sandwiches

Always a popular choice with students. Many operators are spicing up sandwich options by adding Mexican Tortas, Asian Chicken Wraps, and more.

With Rising Food Costs and Menu Item Shortages, Who Can Afford Food Waste?

Ideas to Reduce Food Waste In Schools

Extend Time for Meals

In a study by the Harvard School of Public Health, schools that gave students more time to eat lunch (at least 25 minutes versus 20 minutes) revealed:

Impact snapshot



Engage Students/Taste Tests

Respondents to a national survey of 489 school nutrition directors said engaging students in taste tests were among the most effective ways to reduce food waste. Taste tests empower kids to express their choices and help identify food that will be a hit with kids.

Set Up Share Tables

Share tables are stations where children may return unopened and uneaten food and beverage items for students wanting additional servings. It's a great alternative to tossing food in the garbage.

Serve Lunch After Recess

Research shows that moving recess before lunch can increase student consumption and decrease food waste. One study revealed that students ate 54 percent more fruits and vegetables when recess was offered before lunch.

Saving Food

Allowing students to save specific school meal components for later in the day helps to ensure they receive the full nutritional benefits offered and helps to reduce food waste.

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Student Engagement THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

Welcome to the Cafeteria

Create a fun and inviting atmosphere where students can enjoy their lunch break with their friends and be proud of their school. Decorating the cafeteria with colorful posters and student artwork is a fun way to spice it up. Give your menu items enticing, restaurant-style names that spark curiosity. Celebrate holidays and school events with special menu items and decorations.

Students and Teachers

Friendly staff who engage with the students in meaningful ways can make a difference. Teachers know their students on another level; be sure to ask them for ideas on what would resonate with their students and how to improve your foodservice. Asking students for suggestions and listening to their responses can get them more invested in 'their' lunchrooms. A great idea that came from Huron Valley Schools is offering samples and doing taste tests rewarding students with an 'I Tried It' sticker.



Reduce Wait Times

Students are excited to engage and start eating. Their lunchtime is very valuable to them. Find ways to minimize the time spent in lines. Creating multiple lines and food stations is very helpful. Consider adding reimbursable grab-and-go stations with packaged salads and sandwiches that can be made fresh daily and kept in merchandiser coolers for quick meal service.

At the end of the day, many students will respond to the questions about their favorite subjects with the answer: lunch.

Source: [Blodgett Ovens for Schools](#)

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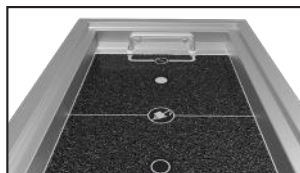


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IWELB-FUL-A shown with 2.5" deep pan



IWELB-FUL-A adjusted for a 2.5" deep pan



IWELB-FUL-A adjusted for a 4" deep pan

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insinkerator.com/foodservice

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Valuable Resources

The School Nutrition Association, a valuable resource for school foodservice directors, surveyed its school nutrition director members to evaluate economic, operational, and regulatory challenges for school nutrition programs and assess the impact of the loss of federal pandemic waivers. They reported their findings in the [2023 School Nutrition Trends Report](#).

Chartwells, provides extensive insights through student surveys, research conducted from Culinary dietitians and chefs, and more. They strive to help make cafeterias a happy place every day. www.chartwellsk12.com

NO KID HUNGRY is also on the same mission that you share and has very helpful resources. Visit: www.nokidhungry.org

We value our partnership with you!
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Knowledge Is Power, And Students Want It!

Many schools are finding success in empowering students of all ages with information about the specific health benefits of certain foods so they can make good choices for themselves. For example, what should they eat before and after physical activities or athletic events to improve their game? What will make them feel good and what will make them look good too?

Students are also interested in food sources. Getting students involved and providing transparency and knowledge on the health benefits of food helps them make it their lifestyle choice to engage in healthy eating.

What are teens saying about school lunches?

A survey conducted by the nonprofit [No Kid Hungry](#), reached a sample of 1,000 students across the country, ages 12-18 for their insights on school lunches.

The results are very encouraging and reflect the ownership teens are craving when it comes to their health.



Knowing what is in the food that schools serve would motivate them to get school meals.



Knowing that school meals meet specific standards for healthy, nutritious meals would make them more likely to participate in school meals.



If schools asked them for their input on how to improve school meals, they would be more likely to eat them.

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