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### Are School Lunches Actually Healthy?

Jenna Cedor

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# Are School Lunches Actually Healthy? (ENGL 400)



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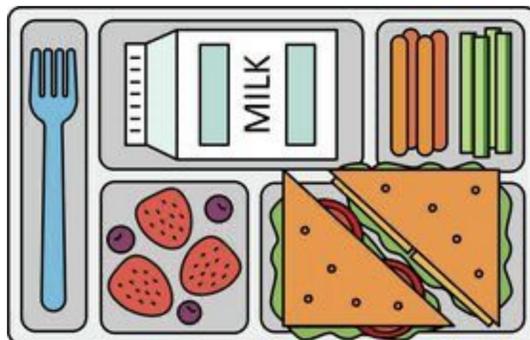
## Abstract

For my research project I chose to examine whether school lunches are actually as healthy as they come out to be, and I will briefly look at why some frown upon them. While some individuals frown upon school lunches, if they are able to be served, they have to meet the requirements and standards that are in place. I want to be able to confidently tell those who are concerned that they can let their children eat the lunches that their schools provide them and not have a choice but to only eat a packed lunch. I also think some people just think of school lunches and automatically assume they are not good for their children, there is a “mystery meat”, and a lunch packed from home will be better.



## Research

- There are guidelines that must be followed when schools are serving lunch, or any meal for that matter, to its students. The standards that are required to be followed can also be known as “the meal pattern.” According to School Nutrition Association, the standards “require schools to offer students the right balance of fruits, vegetables, low-fat or fat-free milk, whole grains and lean protein with every meal” (School Nutrition Association, n.d).
- Typically, there are “set” meals that are served for specific days, but students get the right to make choices, too. They can choose their drink, maybe a different side, or what fruit they want with their meal that day. While there are choices that can be made, the programs that schools are a part of do have to follow the standards.
- School lunch programs at schools “recommend that no more than 30 percent of an individual's calories come from fat, and less than 10 percent of them from saturated fat. Since most children eat one-third of the calories they need each day at lunch, school lunches also must provide at least one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium and calories” (Harvard Health Publishing, 2015).



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## Continued Research

- “Since school lunch and academic performance are interwoven, it is important that kids have the option of healthy food choices” (Lhg-Admin, 2019).
- When lunches are provided at school, children are easily able to access them. Since they are readily available, they should be beneficial too. This goes for the fact that children might fully rely on the meals that are provided to them at school.
- According to Harvard’s School of Public Health, “The standards, which went into effect at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, increased the availability of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, while increasing the portion sizes of fruits and vegetables offered and making their selection (either a fruit or a vegetable) a requirement. The standards also set grade-specific limits on total calories and sodium contents of the meals and removed trans fats” (Harvard T.H Chan School of Public Health, 2019).

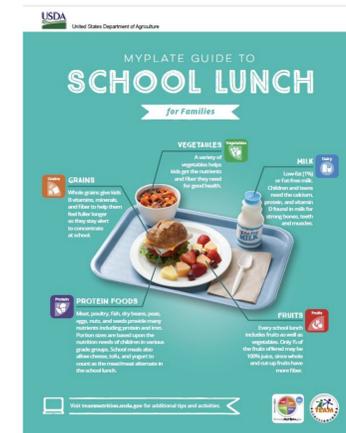


## Impact of COVID-19 on School Lunches

- Schools had to act fast when the COVID-19 Pandemic sent children home for virtual learning and that there would be no in school instruction until further notice.
- According to the CDC, “In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, school nutrition programs have developed innovative ways to ensure in-person, virtual, and hybrid learners continue to have access to safe and nutritious meals” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).
- This aligns with what the USDA Food and Nutrition Services point out because “Usually, the rules require that children gather and eat their meals on site. However, due to the exceptional circumstances of this public health emergency and the need for social distancing, USDA was able to make temporary changes so that meals may be taken home, and parents or guardians may pick meals for their children if the state allows” (Food and Nutrition Services, 2021).

## Conclusions

- Based on the research that has been conducted thus far, it is apparent that school lunches follow standards that allow the food being served to serve proper nutritional value to its students. It can be seen that schools do indeed provide lunches and have programs that follow the nutritional standards and guidelines.
- Those who have felt certain ways about school lunches can now see that what is provided is not a “mystery meat” and hopefully they can change their perspective on the idea of their children a lunch provided by the school in which they attend.
- The type of food or the quality could surely continue need to be improved if standards change or if they need to do better to provide for various allergies that a child may have.
- The information that was found can better benefit families who plan on sending their children / future children into a school where lunches can be provided, parents who have students in school that do and do not allow their children to buy lunch, and members of the school board within counties.



## Publication and Further Research

- The best way that the findings of my research would be a visual representation of the assumptions verses the findings to prove otherwise. This could be at a school board meeting or on the county / school website where parents often check.
- To continue research, I would ideally like to find specific argument that have been published about the true, real feelings about the lunch programs that are in schools. I can also do more research to provide specific meals and their actual values in a way that people can see it on paper. The sources I have found thus far ultimately lead me in the direction of answering the general question of if the lunches provided meet standards

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