

Chefs move to schools can increase school meal participation and vegetable intake among students

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Chefs Move to Schools Event via USDA Flickr

Gourmet pizza in school? According to a new Food and Brand Lab pilot study, published in *Appetite*, chef-made meals can increase participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) by 9% and overall selection and consumption of vegetables by 16%!

Chefs Move to Schools (CMTS), an initiative of Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign, pairs chefs with schools in order to provide nutrition instruction to students and culinary advice to interested school food service workers.

A CMTS event was held in an Upstate New York high school (of 370 students) and researchers David Just, PhD; Brian Wansink, PhD (director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and author of *Slim by Design* Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life); and Andrew Hanks, PhD collected and

analyzed [school lunch](#) sales and tray waste data before and after the event to determine its impact on student's food selection and consumption. The professional chef arrived three days ahead of the date of the event to meet the lunchroom staff and observe student preferences. She also held a tasting event after-school for students to meet her and taste the foods she was going to prepare for lunch the following day. To comply with the NSLP requirements for a reimbursable meal each student must select one entrée, one milk and three sides. The chef created five new NSLP compliant entree recipes: meat taco pizza, bean taco pizza, garlic spinach pizza, meat lover's pizza, and a mozzarella burger. She also prepared a new pre-packaged side salad. Each of these new items was offered as an optional alternative to the regular school lunch choices: pizza or burger, canned fruit, and green beans, broccoli and milk.

Sales data indicated that after the introduction of the new chef-made items, 9% more students bought NSLP compliant meals. Tray waste data showed that the high school students ate about the same amount of their entrée as they did before the new offerings were added; however, they actually ate 16% more of the selected vegetable sides—specifically the new salad. The researchers speculate that this increase was due to the appealing pairing of [pizza](#) and salad.

Co-author, Dr. Hanks notes that, "These findings suggest that Chefs Move to Schools has potential to offer a win-win opportunity for school lunch programs and for students. CMTS can increase NSLP meal compliance and also potentially improve [students'](#) nutrition by increasing consumption of vegetables or other healthy sides that complement the main dish."

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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