

Appendix F – Research Protocol



Date

Research Protocol for Participating Schools

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is very excited you have agreed to work with us on this project. As you know, we will be working together to see if the proposed interventions will increase the number of reimbursable meals that get to the cashier.

Background

One of the challenges for school cafeteria staff is determining whether a school meal tray contains a reimbursable meal. That decision must be made quickly and often under fast-paced conditions. As a result, a large percentage of meal claiming errors happen as a result of cashiers inadvertently marking a meal as reimbursable when it is not a complete meal.

Study Objective

The primary goal of this study is to determine whether schools can appeal to students' desire for convenience (i.e., through use of a pre-ordering system and expedited pick-up) to increase the selection of reimbursable school meals and reduce improper program payments. The project will begin with baseline data collection in the study schools. Baseline data collection will determine the percentage of meals that get to the cashier in reimbursable form. Once the baseline is established, we will work with the school to determine which intervention or interventions we will use in that school. Broadly, the possible interventions include

- setting up or modifying grab and go lines that offer pre-packaged meals or meal components,
- establishing and/or modifying paper-based systems where students pre-order their school meals, or
- establishing or modifying a technology-based approach to pre-order meals.

The study team plans to work with participating schools and their software vendors to test a range of pre-ordering options that may include:

- offering students the same menu of food choices available in the cafeteria line,

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- default sort ordering with more healthful choices (reimbursable meal components) prominently displayed,
- requiring complete meal selection, and
- some type of no-cost award system. Examples include students earning electronic “badges” or e-certificates that award milestones, e.g., ordering a reimbursable meal for an entire month.

Grab and go lines may be configurable in some schools to test similar ideas in terms of the types of choices offered to students who are willing to save time and select from a narrower range of options than are available in the regular cafeteria line.

Data

Data collection will be kept to a minimum in order to reduce any burden to the school or students. The FNS team will work interactively with the schools to collect baseline data and will work with pre-ordering app vendors on interventions that require software changes. We will not select vendors if there is any charge to the school district or to the government for software changes.

Baseline Data	The number of reimbursable, and the total number of meals served each school day. Both meal counts will be reported by day, for the month prior to the beginning of the intervention or interventions
Grab and go lines	A complete listing of what is offered on the line, e.g., complete meals, individual meal components, a la carte items, beverages, etc.
Paper pre-ordering app	De-identified copies of the pre-ordering forms
Electronic pre-ordering app	De-identified data of what individual students ordered. In schools that already have a pre-ordering app, counts of the numbers of students using the app before and during the intervention

Members of the project team will work directly with you and other members of your team to provide more information and to discuss in greater detail how the project will work in any one, particular school. In the meantime, please feel free to contact these members of our team if you have any questions:

USDA: (<<REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT>>) or Edward Harper (FNS, Child Nutrition Programs), who may be reached at (703) 305-2340 or by e-mail at Edward.Harper@fns.usda.gov.

Sincerely,