

Modification of the School Cafeteria Environment Can Impact Childhood Nutrition

School Health Environment School-based Prevention Childhood Obesity

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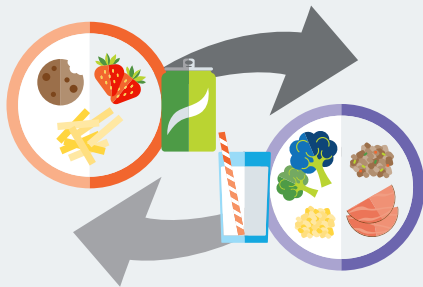
Citation

Williamson DA, Han H, Johnson WD, Martin CK, Newton RL Jr. Modification of the school cafeteria environment can impact childhood nutrition: results from the Wise Mind and LA Health studies. *Appetite*.2013;61(1):77-84. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2012.11.002

General Summary

The US Department of Agriculture made changes to school lunch and breakfast programs to help improve kids' nutrition. This paper looks at two big studies by Pennington scientists, WiseMind and LA Health, to see if changes in school cafeterias can help kids eat healthier.

Both studies made changes to the school cafeterias, like offering healthier foods and changing how food was displayed. The studies found that these changes helped kids eat healthier foods and eat less junk food. Together, these studies show that school-wide programs that encourage healthy eating and physical activity can improve children's nutrition. In other words, the school environment can have a positive effect on students' health and nutrition.



What is the purpose of the study?

This paper summarizes two Pennington Biomedical research studies: WiseMind and LA Health. Both studies wanted to know whether changes made at school can help kids eat better and be healthier.

When did the study take place?

The WiseMind study took place between 2003 to 2007 and LA Health took place between 2006 to 2010. The current paper brings together the most important things learned from both projects and was published in 2013.



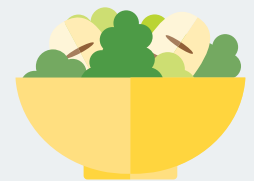
Who was involved?



WiseMind included 660 second to sixth grade students from four private schools in the Baton Rouge area and LA Health included 2,060 public school students attending 4th to 6th grade in rural communities in Louisiana.

What did we learn?

Changes to the school environment can help kids be healthier! Both WiseMind and LA Health showed that changing the school cafeteria environment, such as improving nutrition rules, can help children eat healthier and make better food choices at school.



Why is this research important to patients, clinicians, and other researchers?

Our findings show that changing school nutrition policies can benefit child nutrition. By adjusting food service practices, we can help students eat healthier and improve their nutrition in school cafeterias. These changes can really benefit children.



How did we get the results and findings?

This paper summarizes the results of both WiseMind and LA Health. For both projects, information was collected from students. Each project has its own report on the outcomes (WiseMind: Williamson et al., 2007; LA Health: Williamson et al., 2012). When comparing the two groups, the WiseMind group was slightly younger, were with less overweight, and came from urban areas and private schools. The LA Health group came from more rural areas and public schools. The LA Health group was mostly African American and had more girls, while the WiseMind group was mostly white students.



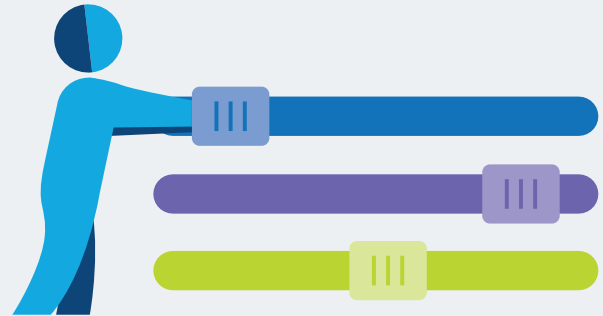
What were participants asked to do during the study?

In both studies, researchers collected weight, height, and digital photos of the food each participant chose for three lunch meals.



For WiseMind, participants also filled out two questionnaires about their physical activity levels. In groups, students completed questionnaires about their mood, self-esteem, and any signs of disordered eating.

For LA Health, students completed a questionnaire about their physical activity levels and another questionnaire about how much support they feel they get from family, friends, and teachers for making healthy food choices.



How will the results help children, parents, and those who care for them?

School environment change is possible and when it happens, it can improve the health and nutrition of children.



What was unique about this study? How were patients given a voice in research?

Both WiseMind and LA Health were programs that changed the school environment for everyone. The name WiseMind is based on the idea that when students have good information and a better environment, they will make smart choices about what they eat and how active they are.

What's next?

Our findings offer support for changing school nutrition policies to improve child nutrition. By modifying food service practices, we can help improve healthy eating and nutrition in school cafeterias.

As schools continue to change and adapt, especially with new technology, future research could explore other ways to adjust school policies and environments to promote health and wellness for students.



Were there any limitations to the study?

As school-based interventions, our findings only apply to meals eaten at school in the cafeteria. We cannot apply our results to other places where students may eat.

In the WiseMind study, we did not collect sociodemographic information, so we don't know if factors like family background or other details might be linked to nutrition-related behaviors.

For more information: www.greauxhealthy.org

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