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School Lunch Report Card

A Report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

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As childhood obesity rates climb, attention is increasingly focused on the importance of improving the healthfulness of school meals. The prevalence of childhood overweight could double over the next two decades, according to a recent study from researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. While many factors contribute to childhood obesity, poor nutrition plays a leading role.

Because the school lunches served to millions of children every day have a critical impact on their health and eating habits, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) evaluates meals served in the National School Lunch Program each year. This year, PCRM dietitians analyzed elementary school lunches served by 20 school districts and evaluated the districts' efforts to promote healthful eating habits to students.

The results, which are summarized in a report card on page 8, show a major shift in the healthfulness of school lunches. Despite rising food prices, many districts have found cost-effective ways to improve their lunch menus. More and more schools are now serving fresh fruit, low-fat vegetable side dishes, and healthful vegetarian entrées on a daily basis. Many schools have also initiated nutrition education programs and other efforts to encourage good eating habits.

Unfortunately, some school districts continue to lag behind in serving healthful food to students. Menus in these schools are full of hamburgers, hot dogs, and other high-fat, high-cholesterol items, and students have difficulty finding healthful options.

Background

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was created in 1946 with the passage of the National School Lunch Act. It is now one of five federally funded child nutrition programs aimed at contributing to food security among low-income families. As of 2007, the NSLP serves approximately 30.5 million lunches per day at a cost of \$8.7 billion a year.

Schools participating in the NSLP receive cash subsidies and commodity foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal served, as well as bonus commodities when they are available from agricultural surplus. In return, participating schools must serve lunches that meet federal nutrition requirements and must provide free or reduced-price lunches for eligible children.

One longstanding barrier to schools serving more healthful meals is the USDA's commodity foods program, which distributes large quantities of unhealthful "entitlement foods." Every year, the USDA purchases hundreds of millions of dollars worth of pork, beef, and other high-fat, high-cholesterol animal products, primarily as an economic benefit to American agribusiness. In 2005, for example, the USDA allocated close to 60 percent of food program procurement expenditures to meat, dairy, and egg products, while providing less than 5 percent to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

The department then distributes these products through the NSLP and other food-assistance programs. About half of these commodity products are converted into ready-to-eat processed foods such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and chicken nuggets—high-fat, high-cholesterol products commonly found on school menus. The USDA's distribution of unhealthful products helps explain why it can cost a school district more than twice as much to provide a high-fiber, low-fat veggie burger instead of a high-fat, fiber-free hamburger.

Rising Food Costs

School food service departments have often faced tight financial constraints, but many schools have been hit particularly hard by the recent rise in food costs. The problem is likely to continue: Food price may rise this year at the fastest pace since 1980, according to a USDA report released this month.

For some districts, rising food prices may create a new barrier to serving more healthful foods. However, many healthful plant-based entrées—such as homemade bean chili and black beans and rice—are relatively inexpensive options. PCRM's 2008 School Lunch Report Card found that many school districts have found creative ways to serve more fruits, vegetables, and low-fat meatless meals that help students stay trim and healthy.

The federal government has begun to address high food costs by making changes to the NSLP. Congress recently authorized an increase in funding earmarked for the purchase of fruits and vegetables. The NSLP has also begun working to expand its commodity food purchases to include more whole grains, such as brown rice. Next year, when Congress takes up the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2009, legislators could further address high food costs by increasing reimbursement rates for schools serving healthful meals low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

School gardens may also help reduce food costs. A growing number of school districts have established gardens because they offer students a chance to become involved in growing and harvesting their own food. Evidence also suggests that school gardens can help persuade children to try new kinds of produce.

Making the Grade

To receive a high grade in PCRM's School Lunch Report Card, schools must go above and beyond USDA nutrition guidelines, which many experts agree are inadequate and outdated. USDA guidelines allow schools to serve high-fat, high-cholesterol foods regularly and do not require school districts to offer any plant-based meals. These

nutrition requirements continue to lag behind the federal government's current Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, Congress mandated that the USDA update meal planning guidelines; however, no improvements have yet been made.

To earn a perfect score, school districts must meet several criteria. They must meet USDA standards for fat and saturated fat. They must offer a healthful vegetarian entrée daily. Schools must also have at least one vegan option—an entrée free of eggs, meat, and dairy—available each day and must serve a variety of vegan options. At least one serving of fresh fruit and a low-fat vegetable side dish must also be served daily. In addition, schools must provide a nondairy beverage to all students and provide nutrition education in the cafeteria, as well as offer programs that promote healthful eating habits.

School Lunch Trends

PCRM's survey found that schools are serving an increasing number of healthful vegetarian and vegan entrées. Seventy-five percent of schools evaluated in PCRM's report serve at least one vegetarian option every day, and of these schools, 65 percent offer a vegan entrée (up slightly from 64 percent in PCRM's 2007 report).

Dietitians also found that 100 percent of the school districts surveyed now offer an alternative to dairy milk. In 2007, 73 percent of districts offered nondairy alternatives for free or to purchase, and 67 percent did so in 2006. Of the schools offering an alternative (water, juice, or soymilk), 45 percent serve beverages to students at no additional charge, and 55 percent make nondairy drinks available à la carte.

Sixty-five percent of school food service departments now offer nutrition education, and 75 percent of districts offer additional inventive nutrition programs. Both trends could play an important role in improving children's health.

Most Improved

Omaha Public Schools improved its school lunch score by 30 points from last year—rising from a D to an A on PCRM's School Lunch Report Card—by making many healthful improvements to its meal choices. Students now have the option of choosing a vegetarian entrée each day, and all vegetarian items are clearly marked on the lunch menu. Fresh fruit is available daily, as is fruit juice at no extra cost to students. Low-fat vegetable side dishes are available daily. Omaha still has room for improvement. The district continues to serve many high-fat entrées, including cheeseburgers and BBQ chicken sandwiches. But Omaha's rising score is a good indication that it is focused on improving lunches to promote wise eating habits and the health of its students.

The Criteria

Review Process

PCRM evaluated surveys completed by food service directors from 20 school districts in the United States. Many are among the 100-largest districts. School districts from all regions of the country participated: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and West.

PCRM relied on school districts to accurately complete the survey and provide valid information about their menus and nutrition education programs, and a team of PCRM dietitians worked to verify this information.

Criteria and Grading System

This year's report looked at two essential categories for children's nutrition in schools:

- obesity and chronic disease prevention
- nutrition and healthy eating initiatives

Each category includes subcategories, as described below, to measure different aspects of nutrition, health promotion, and disease prevention.

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention

This category consists of two major components. First, do districts meet, at minimum, the USDA requirements that the average meal over a five-day school week contains no more than 30 percent of calories from fat and no more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat? Second, what is the availability of healthful vegetarian entrées? Both are essential components of a healthy diet to prevent obesity and disease.

In theory, schools are required to meet USDA guidelines on fat and saturated fat; however, a government study completed in 2003 found that many school districts were not in compliance with these guidelines. Therefore, PCRM included this question to measure compliance.

Providing low-fat, cholesterol-free vegetarian entrées is a key step in obesity and disease prevention. Vegetarian entrées tend to be lower in calories and fat and higher in fiber than meat-based dishes. Scientific evidence clearly supports the consumption of a plant-based diet for health promotion. Research shows that people following healthful vegetarian diets are less likely to be overweight or obese and have a reduced risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, and some cancers.

Numerous studies have substantiated the health risks of cholesterol and fat. Therefore, it is especially important that schools provide plant-based entrées that are low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Most vegetarian, egg-free, dairy-free (vegan) entrées are naturally low in fat and cholesterol-free.

When low-fat, cholesterol-free entrées are offered regularly to students, they are more likely to choose these healthful options and develop good eating habits. PCRM awarded schools 15 points for having a vegetarian entrée option available each day, 10 points for having one at least three times a week, and five points if at least one vegetarian option was available every week. Schools received another two points for each day of the week an egg-free, dairy-free (vegan) option was available and, to reward variety, received another point for each unique egg-free, dairy-free entrée served.

Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention: 55 points			
Subcategory	Data Source	Total Points	Formula
Did the district meet USDA National School Lunch Program nutrition requirements?	School district menu nutrition analysis	25 points	Average daily meal must contain: Fat <30% of calories Saturated fat <10% of calories
Does the district offer healthful vegetarian entrée options?	Recent lunch menu (five-day period)	15 points	Vegetarian entrée option available five days a week: 15 points Vegetarian entrée option at least three days per week: 10 points Vegetarian entrée option at least once a week: 5 points Vegetarian entrée option available rarely or never: 0 points
What is the availability of healthful egg-free, dairy-free entrées?	Recent lunch menu	10 points	Every day an egg-free, dairy-free entrée option is available during a five-day week: 2 points per day
Is there a variety of healthful egg-free, dairy-free options?	Recent lunch menu	5 points	Each different vegan option: 1 point

Nutrition and Healthy Eating Initiatives: 45 points

This category evaluates whether lunch menus reflect current nutrition recommendations to meet students' needs and whether they provide dietary options and education that encourage good health.

First, lunches were evaluated to see if the foods offered contained essential vitamins and minerals and adequate fiber. To do this, PCRM dietitians asked how many fresh fruit and low-fat vegetable side dishes are available during any given five-day week. The report also looks at the availability of nondairy beverages, which can help meet the needs of children with lactose intolerance or milk allergies.

PCRM dietitians also sought to determine whether nutrition education is provided through the food service department, if the cafeteria specifically promotes the consumption of plant foods, and what other innovative programs the school provides. In addition to providing healthful food choices, schools must also help students understand the consequences of food choices and encourage them to make nutritious decisions.

Fruits and vegetables. To provide nutritionally adequate meals, schools must include low-fat vegetable side dishes and fresh fruit. Almost all fruits and vegetables are low in

calories and fat, and they provide many important nutrients, including vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin, iron, calcium, and fiber. Children who grow up eating fruits and vegetables tend to develop a taste for these foods and enjoy them as adults. Schools should offer a variety of options such as steamed vegetables, baby carrots, seasoned spinach, melons, apples, and strawberries.

Nondairy beverages. Nondairy beverages should be widely available in schools. Many children are lactose intolerant or allergic to milk, and others avoid milk for other reasons, such as taste, religious or ethical reasons, or other health needs. Dairy milk is also the largest source of artery-clogging saturated fat in children's diets, according to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The USDA does not require schools to offer an alternative to dairy milk, but an increasing number of schools are doing so. PCRM's report card recognizes schools for their attention to student needs by giving them 10 points for any healthy nondairy beverage available at no extra cost to students and five points if nondairy beverages are available to purchase à la carte.

Nutrition education. Adults establish their eating habits in childhood. Nutrition education in both the cafeteria and classroom helps students understand the relationship between their food choices and good health. Because many children today do not consume the recommended amount of plant-based foods, education that specifically focuses on the health benefits of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and vegetarian options is important. Six points were given to all schools whose food service department participated in nutrition education.

Labeling of vegetarian foods. The school menu can also be a valuable tool for promoting healthful foods. Since a growing number of students look for vegetarian entrée options, these items should be clearly marked on menus and offered as main entrée choices.

Innovative food programs. Many schools have initiated programs that help children learn more about how healthful foods are produced and cooked. Examples include school gardens, cooking classes, farm-to-school programs, and taste-testing promotions. Such programs seem to make students more likely to choose healthful food options in the lunch line.

Nutrition and Healthy Eating Initiatives: 45 points			
Subcategory	Data Source	Total Points	Formula
What is the availability of healthy, low-fat vegetable side dishes over a five-day period?	Recent lunch menu	10 points	Fresh vegetable, steamed or low-fat vegetable dish (3 grams fat or less per serving): 2 points per day
How many fresh fruits does the district offer over a five-day period?	Recent lunch menu	10 points	Fresh fruit: 2 points per day
Is a healthful nondairy beverage available daily?	Survey completed by school districts	10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nondairy beverage available at no cost: 10 points • Nondairy beverage available for purchase à la carte: 5 points • No additional beverages available or available only with a parent or physician note: 0 points
Labeling of vegetarian/vegan options	Recent lunch menu	3 points	Vegetarian/vegan options clearly labeled on menu
Nutrition education in cafeteria or through food service department with specific reference to plant foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains)	Survey completed by school districts	6 points	
Innovative food programs	Survey completed by school districts	6 points	Participation in any of the following: School garden, salad bar, farm-to-school program, cooking classes, other

THE REPORT CARD

School District	Score	Grade
Montgomery County Public Schools (Md.)	98	A
Pinellas County Schools (Fla.)	98	A
Omaha Public Schools (Neb.)	96	A
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (N.C.)	92	A-
Fairfax County Public Schools (Va.)	92	A-
Broward County Public Schools (Fla.)	91	A-
Santa Ana Unified School District (Calif.)	91	A-
Prince William County Public Schools (Va.)	89	B+
San Diego Unified School District (Calif.)	87	B+
Volusia County Schools (Fla.)	85	B
Anchorage School District (Alaska)	79	C+
Oakland Unified School District (Calif.)	79	C+
San Francisco Unified School District (Calif.)	75	C
Sacramento City Unified School District (Calif.)	74	C
Washoe County School District (Nev.)	66	D
Garland Independent School District (Texas)	65	D
Anamoose Public School (N.D.)	61	D-
Buffalo City Schools (N.Y.)	61	D-
Caddo Public Schools District (La.)	53	F
East Baton Rouge Parish Schools (La.)	42	F

INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS

Montgomery County Public Schools: A

State: Maryland

2007 Score: B+ (87)

Montgomery County Public Schools is the 16th-largest school district in the nation and one of the two top performers in this year's report. Montgomery County achieved an A by serving a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and healthful vegetarian foods and by encouraging children to make healthful choices. The district offers a minimum of four low-fat vegetable side dishes every day in its elementary schools. Low-fat salad dressings are used on both side salads and entrée salads, and students can also choose fresh baby carrots every day. Schools dish up black bean burgers, vegetarian "chik'n nuggets," and other healthful vegetarian options on a daily basis, and these items are listed on the menu throughout the three-week cycle. Nondairy beverages are available at no added cost to students purchasing a complete lunch; they can also be purchased à la carte.

Montgomery County Public Schools encourages healthful eating habits by providing nutrition messages in its monthly newsletter article. The food and nutrition services department serves as a resource for school-based cooking classes and also conducts focus groups at all grade levels to gain insight into food preferences and dietary habits. The district has participated in a study with the United Soybean Board to incorporate soy-based items on the menu. District food service officials report that students are very accepting of the soy and vegetable-based protein items.

One weakness of Montgomery County's school lunch program is that some menus feature a fairly high percentage of processed meats. For example, 13 percent of the meals on the district's elementary school lunch menu contained processed meats. Consuming processed meats is associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer, according to a comprehensive report released late last year by the American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund. This year's School Lunch Report Card did not factor the amount of processed meat into a district's score, but Montgomery County should work to eliminate such items from its menus.

Montgomery County is a longtime participant in the School Lunch Report Card and has steadily increased its score over the years. The district moved from a C+ in 2003 to a C- in 2004, a B in 2006, and a B+ in 2007.

Pinellas County Schools: A

State: Florida

2007 Score: A (94)

Pinellas County Schools is the 24th-largest district in the nation and another top performer in this year's School Lunch Report Card. Pinellas' high score reflects its varied

menu, which boasts many healthful low-fat vegetarian entrées, including an egg-free and dairy-free farmer's salad, a veggie burger, and pasta with marinara sauce. The district also serves a hot low-fat vegetable side dish such as broccoli or sweet potatoes and a side salad made of either leafy greens or romaine lettuce every day, along with a selection of assorted fresh fruit. Students can select 100 percent juice for free instead of milk. Soymilk and bottled water are available for purchase.

Pinellas County Schools has implemented an extensive nutrition education program with the help of two full-time specialists. Activities in this program explore topics such as the "Give Me 5 a Day" fresh fruit and vegetable promotion, beans and nuts as high-fiber protein sources, and dark leafy greens as a source of calcium. The nutrition education specialists also present an interactive farmers market display that allows students to sample and learn about assorted fruits and vegetables.

The Pinellas food and nutrition service department has implemented a program to help elementary school children make more healthful snack choices. The Snackwise Nutrition Rating System evaluates snacks for calories, fat, saturated fat, protein, fiber, sugar and vitamins. Two elementary schools in the district participate in a Winning with Wellness program that brings in celebrity chefs to work with students to create healthful snack recipes.

Pinellas County Schools has experienced a steady increase in its grade, which rose from a B in 2003 to an A- in 2006, to an A in 2007, to the current A.

Omaha Public Schools: A
State: Nebraska
2007 Score: D (66)

Omaha Public Schools, which serves about 46,000 students, has the most improved school lunch program in this year's report. The district raised its school lunch score by 30 points from last year by making significant changes to its meal choices. Students now have the option of choosing a vegetarian option each day, and all vegetarian items are clearly marked on the lunch menu. Fresh fruit is available daily, as is fruit juice at no extra cost to students. The district also offers low-fat vegetable side dishes such as steamed vegetables daily.

Omaha still has room for improvement. The district continues to serve many entrées high in fat and cholesterol, including cheeseburgers, stuffed-crust sausage pizza, Italian sausage sandwiches, rib-a-queues on a bun, and BBQ chicken sandwiches.

The district's school lunch menus provide nutrition education on such topics as diabetes prevention and the basics of soy-based foods. Students in many of the district's schools have the opportunity to participate in a culinary arts program.

Omaha's rising score is a good indication that it is focused on improving lunches to promote wise eating habits and the health of its students.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: A-
State: North Carolina
2007 Score: A- (92)

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the nation's 21st-largest school district, continues to be near the top of the list for healthful school lunches. The district's menus always include a healthful vegetarian option, and these items are clearly marked. Examples include spaghetti with meatless sauce and black-eyed peas, rice, and a whole-grain roll. Charlotte-Mecklenburg does an outstanding job of providing several different fruit and vegetable options daily, including mixed fresh squash and onions, mashed potatoes, fresh apples, lettuce and tomato with pickle, or a tossed salad.

The district's nutrition initiatives include adding information on healthy plant foods and other nutrition tips to each month's menu and hanging cafeteria banners promoting the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. Charlotte-Mecklenburg also has several school gardens and cooking classes. Students maintain the school gardens and are allowed to take home some of the crops.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's progressive improvement in serving healthful meals sets a noteworthy example for other large districts. Since 2004, the district's score has risen from a C to an A- in 2006 and 2007 and again in this year's report.

Fairfax County Public Schools: A-
State: Virginia
2007 Score: A- (92)

Fairfax County Public Schools, the 13th-largest school district in the nation, continues to serve healthful lunches. In addition to complying with USDA standards, Fairfax County has made an effort to eliminate trans fat from all items served. The district serves several different healthful vegetarian entrées, and a vegan entrée option is available daily. Menu highlights include "hummus bitable," veggie burgers, and spaghetti with marinara sauce with a wheat breadstick. Students can also choose a salad entrée. All vegetarian items are clearly marked on the menu. Fresh fruits and low-fat vegetable side dishes are also available daily, including zucchini and carrot coins with dip, chilled peaches, and fresh melon. Nondairy beverages, including vanilla soymilk, are available but must be purchased à la carte.

Fairfax County Public Schools puts a strong emphasis on education and nutrition programs. The district publishes nutrition messages in parent newsletters, on menus, and on its Web site, which also includes a nutrition calculator that allows students and parents

to evaluate their snacks. School menus provide students with detailed nutrition information to help them make better choices.

To meet the needs of a diverse community, Fairfax’s food service department often incorporates new menu items, including such recent additions as rice bowls and hummus bitable, and holds student tasting parties to evaluate and select these new products. Nutrition programs include kids cooking, as well as and nutrition education classes taught by food and nutrition services. “Give Me 5! Colors that Jive!” and other programs introduce children to unfamiliar fruits and vegetables.

One weakness of Fairfax County’s school lunch program is that some menus feature a fairly high percentage of processed meats. For example, 17 percent of the meals on the district’s middle school and high school lunch menus contained processed meats. The situation was better on the elementary school menu—7 percent of the meals on that menu contained processed meats. Consuming processed meats is associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer, according to a comprehensive report released late last year by the American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund. This year’s School Lunch Report Card did not factor the amount of processed meat into a district’s score, but Fairfax County should work to eliminate such items from its menus.

Fairfax County has participated in the School Lunch Report Card since 2002. In that year, the district received a C, but it has since made great improvements to its food service program.

**Broward County Public Schools: A-
State: Florida
2007 Score: Not a participant**

The sixth-largest school district in the nation, Broward County has done an excellent job of adding healthful foods to menus that must meet the needs of a diverse population of more than 258,000 students. Broward offers a healthful vegetarian entrée of salad with sunflower seeds and legumes every day, along with a variety of low-fat vegetable and fresh fruit choices. Prepacked salads are offered daily, along with rotating vegetables including green beans and baby carrots. Starting in September, the district will serve a hot vegan entrée at least once a week after a pilot program earlier this year showed that students appreciate having vegan options.

A monthly menu that goes to 150,000 households promotes the benefits of fruits and vegetables. This menu always features a nutrition article for parents. Additional nutrition programs include school gardens at some schools and classroom nutrition education. Broward County schools participate in the “Commit 2 B Fit” program, which emphasizes fruit and vegetable consumption along with exercise. Broward is also working with the University of Florida Cooperative Extension to implement a family nutrition program in

some elementary schools. This program includes classroom lectures and food preparation highlighting fruits and vegetables.

Broward County received a B+ (89) in 2006 and a B (85) in both 2002 and 2003. To raise its grade to an A, Broward would simply need to serve a nondairy beverage free of cost.

**Santa Ana Unified School District: A-
State: California
2007 Score: C (75)**

Santa Ana Unified School District is the 66th-largest district in the nation. In the past year, the district has made healthful improvements that have raised its School Lunch Report Card score 16 points from 2007. At the elementary school level, Santa Ana offers healthful vegetarian entrées such as the X-treme burrito daily, and two of these items are free of dairy and eggs. The menu specifically indicates the vegetarian options. In addition to an entrée, students can choose from a minimum of four fresh fruit and low-fat vegetable sides daily. Soymilk is offered as an alternative to dairy milk at no extra cost.

The district offers information about the benefits of fruits and vegetables and other nutrition education in both English and Spanish. The food service department features a fruit or vegetable in classrooms monthly and offers taste-testing. Food service personnel also teach cooking classes for parents and have a booth at the farmers market.

Santa Ana could further improve its score by removing the cheese from some of its vegetarian entrées. This would lower the fat content of these items and make them completely cholesterol free.

**Prince William County Public Schools: B+
State: Virginia
2007 Score: Not a participant**

With more than 46,000 students, Prince William County Schools is the 50th-largest school district. The district's lunches are fairly healthful, but there is room for improvement.

Elementary school lunches meet USDA requirements, and at least one egg-free, dairy-free option is available daily. Healthful options include vegetarian garden burgers, hummus and pita, and bean burritos, and all vegetarian options are clearly labeled with a carrot on the menu. Students can choose from several low-fat vegetable side dishes daily; choices include red beans and rice and raw vegetables. Either fresh fruit or vegetables are offered daily; however, on average, fresh fruit was offered only three days out of five. Prince William County received five points for having juice, water, and soymilk available for purchase with lunch. The district has made a concerted effort to revise all recipes and

products to eliminate trans fat and to offer whole-grain bread products such as dinner rolls and French bread.

Nutrition education includes the implementation of a “virtual cafeteria” that students can use to make menu selections and have their selection compared with the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowances for a lunch. Students can opt for the vegetarian option and see how it compares with others nutritionally. The district also sends a monthly newsletter called “Nutrition Nuggets” to parents of elementary school students.

In one of the more distinctive nutrition-outreach efforts in the country, Prince William’s food and nutrition services department started a book-reading program that helps demonstrate the importance of fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet. Each month, the reading program highlights a different fruit or vegetable and encourages students to read a corresponding book. A tasting party featuring the fruit or vegetable is then held for the winning class of a monthly contest held by each school.

San Diego Unified School District: B+
State: California
2007 Score: A- (92)

San Diego Unified School District, the nation’s 19th-largest district, once again received a high grade in the School Lunch Report Card. The district has made some positive changes over the years to serve healthful meals throughout its 221 schools. Healthful vegetarian entrées such as a teriyaki veggie burger and a pasta marinara bowl are available every day and are highlighted on the menu. The district also offers fresh fruits and low-fat vegetable sides as part of the daily salad bar. Students can purchase nondairy beverages à la carte in the cafeteria.

San Diego Food Service provides information on vegetarian diets in the district’s newsletter, which is sent home to parents. Every month, the newsletter highlights a different fruit, vegetable, nut, seed, or grain. The department collaborates with schools that have gardens to highlight and promote them, and the district’s executive chef visits schools to teach students how to prepare healthful dishes.

San Diego has participated in PCRM’s School Lunch Report Card since 2003. Although the district’s score has dropped slightly from last year, it is still well above the C San Diego received in 2003 and the B it received in 2004.

Volusia County Schools: B
State: Florida
2007 Score: B (84)

Located on the east coast of central Florida, Volusia County Schools is the 56th-largest district in the nation. Although Volusia County Schools does meet USDA nutrition

requirements on fat and saturated fat, it could improve its menu by including more healthful vegetarian options in place of some of the school lunch staples such as chicken nuggets, corn dogs, and chicken “fryz.” The district seems to offer just two vegetarian options. Students can choose an “uncrustable” peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and healthful vegetarian salads are available upon request. Both options are listed on the menu. Schools in Volusia County can choose fresh fruit and carrots with dressing every day, in addition to other low-fat vegetable sides such as green beans and broccoli. Students can purchase nondairy beverages.

The district lost six points because it does not offer any nutrition education programs. However, many schools within the district do have school gardens, which have proven to be an excellent way to introduce children to fresh produce and increase their vegetable consumption.

Last year, Volusia scored a B (84) in the report card. The district was not graded in previous years.

Anchorage School District: C+
State: Alaska
2007 Score: F (60)

Anchorage School District is the 87th-largest district and serves lunch to more than 21,000 students. Since receiving an F on the 2007 School Lunch Report Card, Anchorage has made substantial improvements. Healthful vegetarian options such as a fresh garden salad and vegetarian burrito are available each day, though these items are not listed on the menu. Anchorage could improve its score by replacing some unhealthful premade items such as baked teriyaki beef nuggets and baked popcorn chicken with zero-cholesterol, low-fat vegetarian options and offering these healthful dishes on the menu. Fresh fruit is available, but only appears on the elementary school menu twice per five-day period on average. The district offers at least one low-fat vegetable side dish such as a side salad or fresh carrots daily, and students can have either apple juice or orange juice at no extra cost.

The monthly menu includes information on healthy eating, and a monthly newsletter offers additional nutrition education for parents and family members. The district also teaches cooking classes in schools.

Anchorage could benefit from making additional healthful changes to its food service program, but the district has seen an impressive improvement since it received an F on the 2007 School Lunch Report Card.

Oakland Unified School District: C+
State: California
2007 Score: B (84)

Oakland Unified School District is the 96th-largest district in the nation. In PCRM's 2007 School Lunch Report Card, Oakland Unified School District won most improved for making healthful changes to its school lunches, but the district's grade declined this year.

On a positive note, elementary school students always have a vegetarian entrée option that is clearly marked on the menu. These healthful vegetarian options include a "Griller's Prime" vegetarian burger. Fresh fruits and low-fat vegetable sides are available every day of the week. Students can also choose a nondairy beverage at no extra cost.

Oakland Unified has plans to introduce wellness kiosks that will include information on fruit and vegetable consumption and physical education. However, the district did not receive points for this project in PCRM's 2008 report because the program has not yet been implemented. Oakland does have several sites with school gardens and 36 schools with fresh salad bars. The district operates a Harvest of the Month education program that highlights seasonal fruits and vegetables at 20 schools. Many schools in the district also offer cooking classes as part of their after-school programs.

Oakland received a C in 2006 and a B in 2007.

San Francisco Unified School District: C

State: California

2007 Score: Not a participant

The 75th-largest school district and one of the largest school districts in California, San Francisco lost points because of its lack of healthful vegetarian entrées. On average, the district serves one vegetarian entrée each week, and in most weeks, none of these meals are egg-free and dairy-free.

San Francisco's average meal does meet USDA nutrition standards, and the district serves fresh fruit and low-fat vegetable side dishes such as brown rice and vegetables and baked beans every day. On another positive note, students may choose a nondairy beverage at no extra cost.

The district's menus include nutrition information and nutrient analysis. School nutrition programs and education are supported by the School Health Programs department.

Sacramento City Unified School District: C

State: California

2007 Score: B (84)

Sacramento City Unified School District is the 83rd-largest in the country. The district serves healthful vegetarian entrées five days a week, but they are not typically on the menu and are available only by request.

Sacramento does serve fresh fruit and low-fat vegetables every day. The district's salad bar contains salad mix, broccoli florets, baby carrots, and seasonal fruits and vegetables, and fresh fruit or a fruit cup is also available. Nondairy beverages can be purchased à la carte. Nutrition education on the benefits of plant-based foods is not given on a regular basis, although Sacramento does have some school gardens, has participated in a farm-to-school program, and holds cooking classes for students.

Sacramento could improve its grade by instituting more nutrition education programs and by regularly offering healthful vegetarian options and including them on the menu for students.

Washoe County School District: D

State: Nevada

2007 Score: Not a participant

Washoe County School District, the 57th-largest in the country, serves the Reno/Sparks and Lake Tahoe region of Nevada. The lunch menus tend to be heavy in high-fat, high-cholesterol entrées. Cheeseburgers and pizza are offered every day. Washoe does serve healthful vegetarian options such as a veggie wrap and veggie rice bowl at least once a week. The district could improve the healthfulness of its lunches and its grade on PCRM's report card by offering such items more often. Assorted fruits and vegetables are available each day, and Washoe did receive 10 points for offering nondairy beverages to students at no extra cost.

Washoe does not offer any nutrition education or innovative food programs such as school gardens, so the district did not receive any points for those criteria.

This is the first year Washoe has participated in the School Lunch Report Card.

Garland Independent School District: D

State: Texas

2007 Score: Not a participant

Located northeast of Dallas, Garland Independent School District is the 71st-largest in the country. The district is a first-time participant in the report, and its score shows substantial room for improvement. Garland's elementary school menus feature such high-fat, high-cholesterol items as fried fish and fried chicken.

On a positive note, vegetable side-dishes are usually steamed, and the district is making an effort to reduce the number of fried foods served. Low-fat vegetable side dishes are offered five days a week, and fresh fruit is offered daily on every serving line.

Garland does have vegetarian options available every day, but most contain cheese, which can dramatically drive up the saturated fat content of any dish. The district lost points because these vegetarian options are available but not always listed on the menu, so many students may not be aware of these healthful options. Students can purchase nondairy beverages à la carte.

Garland Independent School District also lost points because it does not offer nutrition education on the benefits of fruits, vegetables, and plant-based foods and because it does not participate in any innovative programs such as farm-to-school or school gardens. As Garland Independent School District moves into the 2008-2009 school year, it would greatly benefit from adding nutrition education instruction or other programs to encourage children to choose healthful foods.

**Anamoose Public School: D-
State: North Dakota
2007 Score: Not a participant**

Anamoose Public School is a small school district near central North Dakota that serves around 70 students daily. Lunch offerings are very limited, with only one main entrée served per day. Healthful vegetarian entrée options are rare, and the district typically dishes up high-fat items such as pepperoni pizza, grilled brats, hotdogs, and cheeseburgers.

On a positive note, in addition to the main entrée, Anamoose does offer low-fat vegetable side dishes and fresh fruit daily. Students are also given the option of a nondairy beverage at no extra cost. Nutrition education is provided through posters displayed in the cafeteria.

Anamoose could improve its score by adding more healthful vegetarian options such as a veggie burger, pasta marinara, or a bean burrito. Additionally, the district might want to offer nutrition programs to promote these healthful items.

**Buffalo City Schools: D-
State: New York
2007 Score: Not a participant**

Buffalo City Schools in Buffalo, New York, serves 29,000 students through its school lunch program. The district's elementary school lunch menus are packed with meatball subs, Egg McMuffin Sandwiches, and other high-fat items. Elementary schools offer healthful vegetarian options just once per week, though these options are listed on the menu.

On a positive note, fresh fruits and healthful vegetable side dishes are available every day, and Buffalo does offer whole grain breads, rolls, and crusts. Students can purchase nondairy beverages à la carte.

Education includes classroom activities and nutrition newsletters. One highlight: Buffalo City Schools participates in a farm-to-school program through which schools receive fresh local apples, pears, and potatoes. The district is also working with a research foundation on a program called Healthier Options for Public School Children.

Caddo Public Schools District: F

State: Louisiana

2007 Score: Not a participant

Caddo Public School District in Louisiana offers lunches to 27,500 students daily. Caddo falls behind other school districts because it serves an average of just two low-fat vegetable side dishes a week, and fresh fruit is available just two days a week. On a positive note, lunches do meet USDA standards on fat content, and a vegetarian option is available daily. Further, students can purchase nondairy beverages.

The food service department at Caddo Public Schools does not participate in any nutrition education or innovative food programs.

Caddo Public Schools District could boost its grade by expanding its menu options and engaging in nutrition outreach programs.

East Baton Rouge Parish School System: F

State: Louisiana

2007 Score: Not a participant

The East Baton Rouge Parish School System serves meals to an average of 734,466 students per month. The district's elementary school lunch menus feature hot dogs, corn dogs, chicken nuggets, Salisbury steak, and other high-fat, high-cholesterol items. Healthful vegetarian options are rarely or never available, and fresh fruit and low-fat vegetable side dishes options are limited.

On average, the district serves low-fat vegetable sides and fruit three times per five-day period. On these days, healthy options include such choices as dark green salad, seasoned mustard or turnip greens, and steamed broccoli.

Additionally, East Baton Rouge Schools fails to offer any nutrition education through the cafeteria or innovative nutrition and health-promoting programs. The district could improve its score by addressing either of these issues. School lunches would benefit from including more healthful entrées such as veggie tacos or a vegetarian burger instead of such current high-fat menu items as beefy tacos, hot dogs, fish strips, hamburgers, and cheeseburgers.

East Baton Rouge Parish School System has not previously participated in the School Lunch Report Card.