

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Journal of Child Nutrition and Management (JCNM) is an important forum for presenting relevant research in the field of school nutrition, and research can lend credence to efforts to improve the school nutrition environment. Articles in this issue focus on topics of current national interest such as encouraging fruit and vegetable consumption, exploring middle school student perceptions of school lunch, and testing student acceptance of new, healthy menu items.

Three research articles focus on fruit and vegetable consumption in school meals. Huynh and associates researched how the format and placement of salad bars influences fruit and vegetable selection by elementary students. Based on their study, schools should offer stand-alone salad bars with a variety of fruit and vegetable items (12-14) over the course of a week. Neppa and Chai used a food frequency questionnaire to assess daily dietary intake at public and private schools. They concluded that efforts should be made not only to improve the school nutrition environment, but also to educate parents in promoting healthy home eating habits. Two Wisconsin researchers explored whether group-level incentives could increase consumption of fruits and vegetables by elementary students.

Dairy products are another food group frequently under-consumed by students. Not all students choose milk for school meals, and not all children who select milk consume it. Research by Miller and Kwon demonstrates that yogurt may be a good dairy food alternative for non-milk drinkers.

Middle school is where participation in school lunch programs begins to decline, so research to explore how and why these students participate in school lunch may be helpful. Connors and Bednar examined middle school student selection and consumption of foods using digital photography of meal trays. While students tended to consume entire servings of meat and cheese-based entrees, plate waste was high for many vegetable and fruit items. Two other research groups (Kjosa & associates and Smith & associates) used questionnaires developed by the National Food Service Management Institute to research middle school student perceptions of school lunch. These questionnaires, which are available to any school nutrition director, can help determine what aspects of food quality, staff attentiveness, and other cafeteria characteristics are most important to middle school students.

Not all papers in this issue of JCNM are Research in Action papers. A Current Issues paper by Misyak and associates discusses the need to improve nutrition quality of the home packed lunches brought to school by many students. They recommend more research on the decision process for packed lunches and ways to influence parents and students to switch to school meal programs. Two Practical Solutions papers suggest ideas that child nutrition professionals may wish to try in their schools. Bellow and associates describe how a "tasting challenge" influenced first graders to try jicama and edamame, and a pilot study directed by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center in Baltimore explored student acceptability of mushroom-soy-burgers compared to beef burgers. The blend burgers, which were lower in calories, total fat, and saturated fat, could be a possible substitute for beef burgers.

Also included in this JCNM issue are abstracts of research posters presented at the 2015 Child Nutrition Showcase and Mary Frances Nettles' summary of two child nutrition research projects conducted by the Institute of Child Nutrition (formerly the National Food Service Management Institute). This issue of JCNM also recognizes the valuable assistance of 47 qualified child nutrition professionals who reviewed manuscripts submitted during the past year.

Readers and future authors are reminded that JCNM is an online journal publishing articles related to the field of school/child nutrition programs twice yearly. Manuscripts may be submitted in any of four categories: Research in Action, Commentary, Current Issues, or Practical Solutions. Authors do not need to be researchers. If you are a child nutrition professional with strong opinions about current issues or innovative ideas for solutions to problems faced by school nutrition programs, please consider submitting a manuscript for publication in the Commentary, Current Issues, or Practical Solutions category. We would especially welcome papers regarding sodium standards for school meals, student acceptance of whole grain menu items, the new professional standards for school nutrition staff, and financial management of school meal programs.

Carolyn Bednar, PhD, RDN
Editor