

A Source of Contention or Nutrition: An Assessment of Removing Flavored Milk from School Lunchrooms

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Abstract

Objective: To determine how removing flavored milk from cafeterias in a school district affects participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the uptake of white milk.

Design, Data, and Analysis: Schools in a district in Oregon provided enrollment, NSLP participation, and milk sales data for September and October of the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. At the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, all schools in the participating district removed flavored milk from their cafeterias. Ordinary least squares regression was used to estimate how enrolment in the NSLP and sales of white milk were affected after flavored milk was removed.

Results: Between the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, average daily participation in the National School Lunch Program dropped by 6.8% ($p < 0.01$), potentially driven by elimination of flavored milk. Daily milk sales decreased by nearly 11% ($p < 0.01$) such that a daily average of approximately 15 fewer students took milk.

Conclusions and Implications: While removing flavored milk from school cafeterias does eliminate a source of added sugar, it also removes a good source of important nutrients-calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin D. Students who no longer take milk must compensate for lost nutrients by eating other foods. Whether they choose healthy or unhealthy items at school, or at home, is a subject for future research.

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