

Nudging Healthier Choices Through Nutritional Report Cards

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Objective: To pilot test the effectiveness and efficiency of nutritional report cards (NRCs) in getting parents involved in nudging their children toward healthier food choices at school.

Design, Setting and Participants: During a 6-week period, 27 parents received a weekly e-mail with an NRC including a daily record of how many United States Department of Agriculture meal components (fruits, vegetables, starches, milk), snacks, and à la carte foods their children selected. In partnership with the New York Greater Southern Tier Board of Cooperative Educational Services, testing was conducted in an upstate New York school with a sample of students in grades kindergarten through 12.

Outcome Measures and Analysis: To measure the effects of NRCs on meal component selection—analyzed choices of students in the NRC group vs the control group, both before and during the intervention period. Data were collected from the school's Point of Sale system and analyzed with generalized least squares regressions with clustered standard errors and t tests for mean comparisons.

Results: Compared with the control group, children whose parents received NRCs took 8% more servings of fruits and vegetables. Across all grades, purchases of chocolate chip cookies decreased by 56%. Despite requiring new keys on the checkout registers for data collection, checkout times increased by only 0.16 seconds per transaction, a relatively small cost for schools.

Conclusions and Implications: Results and parents' positive feedback suggest NRCs may be a helpful tool in preventing childhood obesity through parents nudging their children toward healthy choices in an easy and cost-effective way. NRCs are easily implemented and scalable. Effectiveness in various types of schools and grades should be investigated.

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The authors recognize the U.S. Department of Agriculture - ERS/FNS for their support.

Accepted for presentation at the annual meeting for the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior