

US SCHOOL MEALS CONCEPTS RATED BY YOUNGSTERS AND ADULTS

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School meals in the US have received endorsement from both students and adults in research carried out by a marketing company specialising in the millennial and Gen Z markets.

A team of chefs and dietitians created 10 restaurant quality menu concepts that meet school meal nutrition requirements and asked 900 students aged 5-18 about them and compared their reactions with those of 1,020 adults.

Participants evaluated the concepts through photographs and menu descriptions.

"The study found that both adults and kids liked the same foods but quite often expected to find them in restaurants rather than in school cafeterias," said **Sharon Olson, executive director of Y-Pulse.**



Banana Berry Smoothie - the number one choice for pupils and adults

"This study points to an opportunity for school nutrition professionals to build awareness among their young consumers and their parents about the quality of school meals."

With slight differences, the findings highlighted that **adults and youngsters rated menu options very similarly.** For example, both adults and kids rated items such as the Banana Berry Smoothie as their top choice in meal concepts based on top two box scores for 'love it' and 'like it'.

Described as 'a creamy smoothie made with berries, banana, yogurt, milk, and topped with fresh fruit and homemade granola', children gave it a score of **77%** and adults gave it **71%**.

Other top scoring meal concepts included the **Mexican Tostada**, 'a crispy shell topped with refried beans, cheddar cheese, crunchy shredded romaine lettuce and diced tomatoes, drizzled with sour cream and lime' got 71% from children and 70% from adults.

Overnight Oatmeal, 'creamy and hearty overnight oats in milk, layered with fresh fruit and yogurt, ready to grab on the go' rated 64% with pupils and 55% with adults, while the **Tex-Mex Breakfast Bowl** 'a blend of eggs, cheese, and beans served on top of roasted potatoes, peppers and onions, with salsa on the side' achieved 61% with students and 62% with adults.

However, the study found that **adult and pupil expectations on where they would find these meal concepts differed slightly.** Both groups felt the higher scoring meal concepts would be more likely to be served in restaurants than in schools.

But many more students also expected to find them on school menus. Only **17%** of adults thought the Banana Berry Smoothie might be found in schools, but **44%** of pupils expected to find it on the menu.

Olson added: “The findings certainly raise interesting insights in how adult and young consumers have lower expectations from school foodservice compared to restaurant dining.

“Would a robust communication plan increase participation in school foodservice if kids and parents were educated on school menu offerings?
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“Also, can restaurants elevate kids’ menus knowing that they have similar, sophisticated menu expectations as their parents?

“Either way, the study highlights that **kids are walking into school cafeterias with greater menu expectations than their parents** and on-trend meals designed for school foodservice offer restaurant quality food to kids at school.”

Other meal concepts that were evaluated in this study were Honey Sriracha Chicken Flatbread, Spaghetti with Korean Meatballs, Grilled Cheese and Roasted Veggie Sandwich, Jamaican Pulled Pork Tacos with Pineapple Salsa, Apple Kale Salad, and a Buddha Bowl.

The study was designed to assess how culinary, nutrition and industry communication intersects in the kindergarten (age 5) to 12th grade (age 18) school marketplace.