

Refrigerated & Frozen Foods

School meal innovation lab report shares top rate menu concepts in 2017

The findings of this study highlighted that adults and kids both rated menu options very similarly.

December 4, 2017

The **2017 School Meal Innovation Lab** created and evaluated 10 new school foodservice menu concepts with 900 K-12 students and compared their reactions with 1,020 adults. In this unique dining study, Y-Pulse, Chicago, worked with a team of chefs and dietitians to create restaurant quality menu concepts that meet school meal nutrition requirements. The study's participants evaluated these menu 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," says **Sharon Olson, executive director**. "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 of this study highlighted that **adults and kids both 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 2 box scores for "love it" and "like it." The Banana Berry Smoothie was described as "a creamy smoothie made with berries, banana, yogurt, milk and topped with fresh fruit and homemade granola." Kids gave the Banana Berry Smoothie a score of 77%, while adults gave it a score of 71%.

Other top-scoring meal concepts with both kids and adults were the Mexican Tostada, Overnight Oatmeal and Tex-Mex Breakfast Bowl.

Mexican Tostada was described as "a crispy shell topped with refried beans, cheddar cheese, crunchy shredded romaine lettuce and diced tomatoes, drizzled with sour cream and lime." Kids gave Mexican Tostada a score of 71%, while adults gave it a score of 70%.

Overnight Oatmeal was described as "creamy and hearty overnight oats in milk, layered with fresh fruit and yogurt, ready to grab on the go." Kids gave the Overnight Oatmeal a score of 64%, while adults gave it a score of 55%.

The Tex-Mex Breakfast Bowl was described as "a breakfast bowl with a blend of eggs, cheese and beans served on top of roasted potatoes, peppers and onions, with salsa on the side." Kids gave the Tex-Mex Breakfast Bowl a score of 61%, while adults gave it a score of 62%.

However, the study found that adult and kid expectations on where they would find these meal concepts told a slightly different story. Both **adults and kids had greater expectations of finding their higher scoring meal concepts in restaurants as opposed to finding them in school foodservice.** For Banana Berry Smoothie, 56% of adults expected to find this item in a restaurant, compared to 46% of kids. For Mexican Tostada, 75% of adults expected to find this item in a restaurant, compared to 66% of kids. For Overnight Oatmeal, 48% of adults expected to find this meal concept in restaurants, compared to 36% of kids. With the Tex-Mex Breakfast Bowl, 66% of adults expected to find this food in restaurants, while 69% of kids expected the same.

However, when the same participants were asked to share their expectations of finding these meal concepts in K-12 foodservice, it turned out that the **kids' expectations exceeded those of the adults.** For instance, 17% of adults expected to find the Banana Berry Smoothie on school menus, whereas 44% of the kids expected the same. Likewise, 16% of adults expected to find the Mexican Tostada on school menus, while 26% of the kids expected the same. For Overnight Oatmeal, 30% of adults expected to find this food served in schools, compared to 53% of kids. As for the Tex-Mex Breakfast Bowl, 15% of adults expected to find this meal in schools, compared to 29% of kids.

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 K-12 school marketplace.

About the study

Y-Pulse conducted a study on 900 K-12 students and 1,020 adults about their perceptions on menu options and where they would expect to find them. Chefs and dietitians worked to create meal concepts that met current USDA school meal nutrition requirements and included ingredients and preparation techniques widely used in school foodservice operations. All the menu concepts were professionally photographed and shown to the survey participants for evaluation. The surveys were conducted online with parents/guardian permission for the student surveys. The study participants evaluated the meals based on photographs and menu descriptions, but without the knowledge that these were meals often served in schools.

