

FRESH IDEAS | TRENDS

What Kids Want

Food preferences of kids eating away from home. By Jody Shee

For an understanding of what a kid will eat, just watch. What plays in the school cafeteria likely will work in the drive-thru. And what kids pick up from the restaurant food counter can guide schools toward more popular food offerings.

Research by several industry insiders reveals that kids especially respond to hand-held items, smaller portions of "adult food", interesting and bold flavors, fresh and customizable offerings, and enticing packaging. The older they get, kids also increasingly respond to healthful items. So salads are in.

"Yes, they are kids, but they don't like being treated like kids. They like the same characteristics in food that adults do—fast and made to order," says Sharon Olson, a partner with Y-Pulse LLC in Chicago, which specializes in studying kids' eating habits away from home. According to Y-Pulse research, children ages 8 to 11 favor adult menus over children's menus, "although they claim to like the food choices on the kids' menu as well as the adults' menu," Olson adds.

In a Y-Pulse focus group, kids were asked what motivates their food choices. Top responses were: great taste; fun packaging; quick-serve restaurant or local restaurant branding; convenient and "made for me;" and quality defined as "tastes good" and "tastes fresh."

Fresh & Customizable

The students in the 41 schools that make up the Frisco Independent School District in Frisco, Texas, want to see food prepared fresh before their eyes, "like having a sub

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and independent neighborhood restaurants conjure images of quality, Olson

At school, students sniffs of cafeteria food administrator for independent School District in Brownsville, Texas, a noninstitutional setting, "I totally embrace."

Branding and food quick-serve packaging says. Last year the school packaged, self-service to 8 percent increase in school-lunch participation at the high school level.

"Kids can sniff out promotions that look like they are trying too hard and are directed to kids," says Olson with Y-Pulse.

