

CAFETERIA CULTURE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO
LUNCHTIME IN A CENTRAL FLORIDA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

Public school cafeterias are used by nearly 51 million children (ages 4-17) in the United States every day. With over 40% of the approximately 73 million children (ages 0-17) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), public school lunches carry resounding nutritional, social, and educational significance for their consumers. This fact, coupled with frequent media attention to school lunch food, notwithstanding, a notable lack of social scientific engagement with both students' perspectives and NSLP operators persists. Divided into two studies, this research utilizes ethnographic methods to explore students' lunchtime experiences within a Central Florida public elementary school cafeteria. Both works are grounded in information collected from 22 semi-structured and unstructured interviews with students, parents, cafeteria workers, school faculty, and a county official while also participating in a one-month lunchtime observation period in Spring 2017. The first study utilizes ethnographic methods to investigate students' food selection, social practices, and mealtime behaviors within the cafeteria. In this work, I argue that student's preferences are most often informed by taste and familiarity, though both age and personal belief systems strongly outline students' experiences. In the second study, I focus on the top-down priorities of nutrition, food production, and student feedback that guide how institutions construct lunch menus for elementary students. Specifically, I investigate what role public institutions play in forming elementary school students' understandings of food and expectations for mealtimes. Synthesizing findings from both studies, I assess how social, economic, and industry pressures are tangible within local cafeteria and governmental contexts. This research contributes to academic scholarship and public policy regarding childhood nutrition in institutionalized settings and advocates for

the inclusion of elementary-aged children as important social actors in their call for increased and dietarily-inclusive food options.

Key words: ethnography, children, National School Lunch Program, food, nutrition, structuration

To any policymaker who reads this and recognizes that feeding children is important, and
what you feed them matters, too.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As adults, we've seen so much before that we often turn the pages of a picture book without really looking. Young children tend to look more carefully.

(Browne 2009)

Extensive debate has surrounded school lunches since the National School Lunch Program's (NSLP) launch in 1946. Over the past 70 years, this initiative has established the guidelines for feeding schoolchildren based on various public health and educational reasons. Lunch food and lunchtime rules are subject to significant debate in political and popular discourses. Amid such considerations, school cafeterias remain important settings for critical study. This is especially true considering the fact that five billion lunches were served in nearly 100,000 schools across the country in the 2016-2017 School Year (SY) (USDA Food and Nutrition Services 2017).

Research Objectives

In this research, I strive to understand the influence of school lunch on public elementary students' formative food ideologies and the overall effectiveness of the NSLP's goals. I hypothesize that aspects of taste and familiarity shape students' attitudes towards lunch foods while nutritional goals will guide those of NSLP operators. Over subsequent sections I address three specific questions:

1. How do students experience lunch time at a local elementary school? (Chapter 2)
2. What do NSLP operators prioritize in their construction of school meals? (Chapter 3)
3. How do political and socioeconomic considerations differ between these elementary students and lunch program operators? (Chapter 4)

Methods

To address these questions, I conducted ethnographic research at a public elementary school (Pine Hollow Elementary) within the Gator County School District of Central Florida County. In the strictest sense, this research seeks to qualitatively collect and bring student and institutional perspectives to light through qualitative data.

I spent approximately one month in May 2017 collecting qualitative lunchtime data in Pine Hollow's school cafeteria. My own personal observations are supplemented by insights derived from student, parent, and cafeteria worker interviews. Information derived from this ethnographic technique add both context and depth to my first research question. For my second research question, I interviewed the Gator County official in charge of lunchtime menu construction, innovation, and staff development within the school district in September 2017. To address my third question, I assess the shared themes that emerge after synthesizing the perspectives of both students and the Gator County Meal Coordinator.

Reconstructing the School Lunch Experience

Given that most Americans have consumed a public school lunch at one point or another, it is perhaps useful to briefly review ongoing school lunch discourse. Recent controversies that have garnered serious public attention center around two events: (1) President Obama's 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (or HHFKA); and (2) the call for evidence of children's welfare services by key members of President Trump's cabinet in 2017.

School Lunch Discourse

While school lunch programs are not partisan issues in and of themselves, political controversy has swirled around the HHFKA since it became part of the NSLP in 2012. Many contribute these policy changes to former First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign and her collaboration with the School Nutrition Association (SNA), whose joint goal was to address the quickly rising American child obesity rates. By 2012, over one-third of American children (ages 2-19 years) were classified as clinically obese (Ogden et al. 2016:806). In past 30 years, the percentage of obese children aged 6–11 years had climbed from 7% to nearly 18% (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2012).

Growing childhood obesity has set the tone for much of the American public discourse on how to improve childhood nutrition and health throughout the Obama era. Attempts to control and regulate food and beverage industries, which play large roles in both generating and advertising high-calorie, low nutrient-dense foods for children, have long been stifled by these industry lobbyists. Public and government efforts to address childhood obesity have most effectively taken place through the institutionalization of American public school lunch menus (Paarlberg 2013:95).

During this time, school lunch waste or "plate waste" emerged as a theme leading theme in both local and national news media after HHFKA was enacted (Confessore 2014). The increased perception of food waste is something that dominated school lunch discourse for years, even though a Government Accountability Office report (U.S. GAO 2014: 27) found that many of these claims were largely anecdotal and lacked reliable data. Another 2014 study published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*

further argued that, contrary to media reports, the HHFKA school meal standards had improved students' overall diet quality and further reforms to it were unwarranted (Cohen et al. 2014). Despite such revelations, many political actors including the SNA would subsequently call for a loosening of these nutritional standards. The SNA, a nonprofit organization made up of the county and school level NSLP operators- that is, those who create and serve the NSLP-regulated meals- also cited plate waste in their call to weaken HHFKA's regulations.

This school lunch discourse cooled down somewhat starting in late 2015 until early 2017, given loosened school lunch reforms passed by Congress in early 2016 (Aubrey 2016). This happened despite continued studies that showed nutritional reforms were not increasing plate waste and participating children's nutritional intake had improved with regulations (Johnson et al. 2016).

Public conversation surrounding school lunch has picked up again after just a year of relative calm. Many members of President Trump's cabinet have voiced objectives that would weaken various aspects of both NSLP reform and funding that are perceived as burdensome and unnecessary. Overall, the current tone of American political discourse is set against school lunch programming, however this time much of the public conversation is set for it.

In February 2017, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos came under fire for her comments during a talk at the Conservative Political Action Conference when she stated, "I, however, pride myself on being called a mother, a grandmother, a life partner, and perhaps the first person to tell Bernie Sanders to his face that there's no such thing as a free lunch." Though the use of "free lunch" here was meant as a declaration of DeVos'

neoliberal and conservative economic values in contrast with Sander's, this set off a fiery response and ensuing public debates by American parents, particularly mothers. Despite this comment being misconstrued by the public, her comments are noteworthy because, though were intended to tote her disapproval of government programs, these do include child welfare programs such as the NSLP.

In March 2017, U.S. Management and Budget Secretary Mick Mulvaney brought further attention to school lunch programs by supporting the then-proposed deep and staunch budgetary cuts to social welfare programs. Speaking about school lunch programs particularly, Mulvaney stated,

They're supposed to be educational programs, right? I mean, that's what they're supposed to do. They're supposed to help kids who don't get fed at home get fed so they do better in school. Guess what? There's no demonstrable evidence they're actually doing that. There's no demonstrable evidence they're actually helping results, helping kids do better in school... the way we justified it was, these programs are going to help these kids do better in school and get better jobs. And we can't prove that that's happening.

(Nelson 2017)

Having a more direct effect than DeVos' statement, Mulvaney's has been publically viewed by the public as an attack on services that aim to feed hungry students. Finally, in May 2017, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue voiced his intent to reel back two particular aspects of nutritional regulations in school lunches: sodium restrictions and calorie labeling requirements required in menus. Addressing a crowd outside a Leesburg, Virginia elementary school, Perdue stated, "We all know that kids are

pretty outspoken about what they want to eat and what they don't... We've got to balance the nutritional aspect with the palatability" (Aubrey 2017).

As of the writing of this thesis, Perdue's statement is one that is yet to receive much public attention in relation to other demanding current events in local and national news outlets. Further, the position that Perdue voices here is one that NSLP operators in the SNA have lauded. Though this stated aim would arguably diminish the overall public health improvements made since 2010, it points to the inclusion of palatability as an important factor in students' mealtime experiences at school. This call for students' acceptance, or even endorsement, of their meals walks a fine line between catering to subjective taste and establishing public policies that prioritize nutritional health.

In order to reconstruct school lunch experience using anthropological tools, in this thesis I refer to the ways in which school lunch food holds both nutritional and cultural value. Given the backdrop of nutritional policies and debates, I focus more so on the more hidden and understudied relationships between students and their food. This project addresses various aspects of students' cafeteria experiences. Within each school, grade, and student, these mealtime experiences develop a students' understanding of their own relationship with their food and others as they find their own role within the cafeteria culture and also within America's food culture. To illustrate this concept, I refer to anthropologist Gillian Crowther, who builds off of the work of food scholars Mary Douglas (1997; 2003) and Margaret Visser (1986; 1992) in stating,

Meals are a defining social institution of humans. They are structured interactions through which we share our social relationships, construct our identity, and eat our cultural history (and that of others). They are the expression of our social appetite, driven by and satisfying our biological hunger.

Research Site

In this research, I use ethnography as an investigative tool to collect student perspectives at one school in Central Florida, Pine Hollow Elementary. My goals include practicing ethnography, gathering granular data within a local cafeteria culture, and testing its efficiency in understanding children's formative food experiences. Research findings are somewhat fettered by its small sample population. All names and identifying information related to the county, school, and students in this thesis have been changed or omitted. Names and details of state and national level actors and NLSP operators have not been modified.

Conducting research within a Central Florida public school is significant given the state's high level of child homelessness. In 2014, Texas, California, and Florida had the highest numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 (AHAR 2013). Significantly, these three states that are the top NSLP participant states in the 2016-2017 SY (USDA Food and Nutrition Services 2017). This becomes even more significant considering almost one-fifth of Florida's homeless public-school students live in Central Florida counties (Santich 2015). Given the current lack of local community-based studies on children's experiences surrounding food in American educational institutions, Central Florida offers an especially fitting setting for this kind of research given its high rate of child homelessness, school-aged poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 2014), and high use of public food assistance or "SNAP" programs (Food Research and Action Center 2016).

Pine Hollow Elementary School is situated in a semi-urban part of Gator County, surrounded by both culturally and economically diverse neighborhoods, some of which have become gentrified in recent years. This coupled with its unique “advanced program” courses made available to out-of-zone students makes Pine Hollow a high socioeconomic status (SES) Gator County school. According to the school principal, Ms. Rosie Baggins, of what makes Pine Hollow a reasonably good representative of Gator County elementary schools,

What makes us really unique is that we have three diverse student groups on this campus. We have a number of homeless students from quarter to quarter, though it varies. We have advanced program students, some from out-of-zone. And we also have our regular, zoned students, too... There are also students from all over with their own culture and heritage.

-Ms. Baggins. Principal

While at Pine Hollow, I observed a highly diverse school with a largely bilingual population that included some 13 homeless students. My 23-day cafeteria observation provided me with access to all Pine Hollow students, sixteen students agreed to share thoughts, ideas, and experiences with me during semi-structured interviews. This small sample group is limited partially because of the fact that the school year was winding down, which contributed to a drop off in parental response to the take-home flyers that served as my chief method of interview recruitment. The students I talk to are somewhat representative of the greater Central Florida community in regard to age, sex, ethnicity, and grade level, the demographics (see Appendix G.)

Overview of Thesis

Conducted at Pine Hollow Elementary and Gator County in 2017, this research effort is organized into articles that exemplify two different ethnographic approaches. With the NSLP providing the institutional context and Central Florida serving the physical backdrop for both studies, this thesis aims to critically analyze the multifaceted processes that shape elementary students' various food experiences.

In Chapter Two, I present my first research article that first reviews existing studies of school lunch programs and the public health discourses that inform them. Employing a bottom-up approach, I use ethnography to give voice to students' everyday cafeteria experiences. In this investigation, I address my first research question: how do students experience lunch time at Pine Hollow? I highlight the themes of commensality, discipline, and food choice that emerge from the cafeteria, which imbue various impressions to Pine Hollow students. As young students of primary and intermediate grade levels, I discuss displays of personhood and agency rendered in this study.

Chapter Three utilizes a top-down perspective of Gator County's lunch programming by addressing my second research question: what do county-level NSLP operators prioritize in their construction of school lunch meals? In this second article, I provide a vertical slice of the institutions that give shape to the NSLP in Gator County, Florida. Using key insights from the county's meal coordinator, I note how industry influences and tools of food manufacturing variously support nutritional initiatives and develop student preferences. I also discuss the theoretical concepts of discourse and rationalization, the latter of which I argue discounts the NSLP's overall public health aims.

In Chapter Four, I synthesize findings and emerging theoretical concepts from both Chapters Two and Three in order to answer my third research question: how do social, economic, and political considerations differ between these elementary students and lunch program operators? Throughout Chapter Four I consider the the reality of food choice for elementary students, but also, delineate my contention that food industries have gone beyond supporting NSLP operations as independent actors. That is, they have become embedded actors in both institutional and cultural contexts.

In Chapter Five, I summarize my research objectives and conclusions from preceding sections. This final chapter highlights potential policy applications and future directions for critical U.S. student of school lunch cultures. Finally, a collection of pertinent field guides, tables, and documents are presented in the appendices.

CHAPTER TWO:

UNPACKING LUNCH AND THE SELF: ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS FROM A CENTRAL FLORIDA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CAFETERIA

Abstract

This article focuses on children's perspectives of their daily lunchtime from research conducted at one Central Florida elementary school. In the reoccurring conversations regarding school lunch in the United States, the voices most often heard are those of parents, news reporters, public officials, and other adults. The academic literature on school lunch is heavily concentrated on the public health aims of the National School Lunch Program. In studies seeking student perspectives, elementary aged students (5-11) are often excluded from consideration. To elucidate what elementary students experience during lunchtime, I draw on ethnographic findings from a one-month study in May 2017. By observing the daily lives of elementary eaters, I outline many of the daily meal offerings, mealtime rituals, and disciplined practices that generate an overall "cafeteria culture." Citing student interview narratives, I argue that taste and familiarity are prioritized, especially within certain age groups and among those with or near those with strong food beliefs.

Key words: National School Lunch Program (NSLP), ethnography, children, mealtime, self-concept

Introduction

School lunch in the U.S. is a shared mealtime experience that most children hold in common. Lunchtime serves as an important “break time” for American students’ in the middle of their busy school days, even though it lasts just 25-45 minutes for young, elementary-aged children. With an average of 180 annual school days, a 25-minute lunch period roughly comprises 75 hours or 3.12 days spent in the school cafeteria per year. The cafeteria provides a setting where students can express themselves, connect with others, and build formative relationships with lunch food.

School lunch represents an important area for social science research. It encompasses a common event in which most American schoolchildren participate. Moreover, meals and the customs that surround them also represent an important, defining social institution (Crowther 2013:162). Against this backdrop several questions arise about the role of school lunch in students’ lives: (1) what role does school lunch play in developing these students’ ideas of food?; (2) what lunchtime routines, concepts, or preferences do students hold in their daily purview?; and, (3) when or at what age do students begin to think about food choices?

Seeking to contextualize these larger questions, I aim to gain elementary student perspectives from lunchtime at one public elementary school in the Central Florida region, which I call Pine Hollow Elementary. In this study, I address my research question, “How do students experience lunchtime at Pine Hollow?” by relaying ethnographic findings grounded in participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted in Spring 2017. Throughout this article, I use the terms *student*, *child*, and *participant* interchangeably to describe the Pine Hollow students I observed and who provided me with their insights.

Research Site

The site of this research is the pseudonymous Pine Hollow Elementary School. This high socioeconomic status (SES) school is situated in a semi-urban, suburban region of Central Florida under the jurisdiction of the Gator County Public School District, another alias which I also refer to as *Gator County*.

Pine Hollow Elementary School is a unique research site for this investigation in two ways. First, its student population is demographically representative of Gator County (see Appendix G). Second, it has three distinct student populations. Pine Hollow's principal, Rosie Baggins, states,

“What makes us really unique is that we have three diverse student groups on this campus. We have a number of homeless students from quarter to quarter, though it varies. We have advanced program students, some from out-of-zone. And we also have our regular, zoned students, too.”

At the time of my observation, just under 15 of some 400 students at Pine Hollow were homeless and over one-third were advanced program students. During my 23-day observation, I interviewed 16 Pine Hollow Elementary students.

Background

Every successive decade has left its mark on school food. Each new concern... has provided a new set of rules but seldom eliminated any old ones... We need a new paradigm for school meals, one that sees expenditures for school food as investments in the current and future health of our children.

(Poppendieck 2010: 259)

The priority of serving children “healthy food” has been a core mission of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) since its 1946 creation. This federal nutrition assistance program has been expanding its scope over the past 70 years. In 2016, over five billion lunches were served in nearly 100,000 public schools across the country (USDA Food and Nutrition Services 2017). Requiring collaboration between the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Agriculture, the NSLP implements its public health mission primarily through the public-school cafeteria setting.

While federally-funded research of NSLP participation demographics and nutritional regulations are highly quantified and publicly available, there remains a critical lack of localized research exploring how schoolchildren as the NSLP “investments” interpret these lunchtime meals. This qualitative, student culture-centered research has been identified as vital by global scholars arguing that such studies may deepen understanding of what unmonitored or unintended food customs, attitudes, or practices these public health initiatives generate within school cafeterias (Morgan 2006:386; Fairbrother et al. 2016:56). In light of the usefulness of such studies, I begin this article by reviewing the NSLP’s public health aims, anthropology as a fitting tool of investigation, and select postmodern theories that contextualize underrepresented student perspectives from within public school cafeterias.

The Institutionalization of Lunch Food

Across the U.S., public institutions serve as national regulators of food production, processing, and practice. These institutions and their respective policies are largely informed by neoliberal forces of consumerism and mandated with national trust

and authority to manage the public's shared concerns over relevant health issues. Rising childhood obesity currently represents a major many issue of concern in Western countries (Cohn 2013; Warin 2011). Several public health studies suggest that childhood obesity has grown due to poor public nutrition, prevailing food insecurity, fast food consumption, and a lack of healthy food alternatives. Against this backdrop, many countries have moved to reform state food programs over which it has control.

In the U.S., growing nutrition and health concerns about nutrition have elicited policies and campaigns emphasizing nutritional action in public contexts, including sectors of health, trade, and education. President Obama signed 2010's Healthy Hungry Free Kids Act (or HHFKA) into action with the goal of promoting healthier, accessible food to public school children through the NSLP, a program that effectively governs each school district's nutritional guidelines (fig. 1). The HHFKA has elicited various dietary perspectives on governing children's health by both promoting more accessible healthy foods and regulating menu items that are viewed as acceptable by health science agencies, such as the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP). In this way, the goal of improved children's health is informed by institutional standards and situated in the belief that access to scientifically "healthy" foods will ameliorate health problems. Since this most recent reform, most scholarly NSLP research has focused on measuring schools' nutritional application, economic challenges, and increased food waste. All of these factors are attributed to students' distaste for healthy meals.

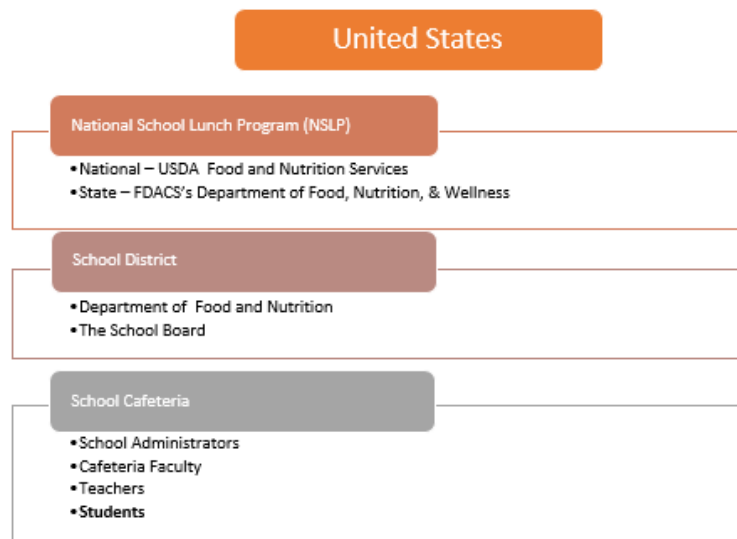


Figure 1: A descending list of NSLP authorities and actors

Photo Credit: Emily Herrington

Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Food

With most research focusing on institutional perspectives of nutritional reform of school lunch menus, there remains a critical lack of ethnographic perspective in school lunch programs. In this way, the anthropological approach to public institutions is often hinged on a “strongly intensified focus on practice and agency” (Herzfeld 2001:17). To elucidate the NSLP’s impact on the dining experiences of public school students, one anthropological method that holds promise is ethnography. This data elicitation technique entails observing and understanding people in their natural setting rather than in experimental contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:4). This particular methodology draws on a range of data sources that arguably adds to studies of children’s health and

eating practices by regarding schoolchildren as active social actors and not silent perpetual recipients of institutional policies.

Anthropologists Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:18) state that ethnography is a unique method that bridges connections between anthropological theory and real-world application. Ethnography is very useful to critically examine students in nationalized lunch programs where health initiatives and other governing forces and objectives seek to control or discipline them.

In a qualitative study from the Congressional Hunger Center, Daniel Cohn and colleagues (2013) examined newly formed public school lunch programs in metropolitan New York City. This study tests the effectiveness of a newly implemented food services program by integrating both institutional and student perspectives. From the institutional perspective, researchers discovered that unregulated market forces for approved food suppliers and uncontrollable student consumption and compliance rates were the primary concerns of institutional stakeholders. In contrast, student perspectives focused on inner concerns about lunchtime experiences within the school lunch program; specifically, the lack of explanation behind menu changes. Study findings reveal the complex relationship between the food boards, food service management, and unionized food service workers, which, in this school's case, led to a decreased food quality and increased food waste (Cohn et al. 2013:391).

Anthropologists studying NSLP student participants are better equipped to answer important questions about how these children see themselves, others, and their eating habits vis-à-vis school settings, public health initiatives, and their own personhood.

Besides understanding how students perceive and experience the NSLP, anthropologists can add additional depth to food studies research.

Regimes of Truth and Tools for Studying Food

Food anthropologists consider the inextricable role food plays in human existence (Crowther 2013, xvii-iii). As human linkages and food become increasingly informed by state policies and health authorities, the necessity for scholars to critically engage the ritual practices and sacred spaces surrounding human food customs intensifies.

Anthropological studies on the relationship between food practices and their practitioners emerged in the 1980's, during the postmodern movement in the social sciences (Klein and Watson 2016:3). Renowned anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz, known as the Father of Food Anthropology (Roberts 2015), was one of the first ethnographers to engage in the deeply historical and entangled perspectives of food culture. His food research exerts a popular influence in Academia for his development of World Systems Theory. In the 1980s, he published an annual review on the *Anthropology of Food and Eating* (2002) with public health scholar Christine M. Du Bois. This work provides insight into the ways ethnography and anthropological theory has enhanced our understandings of the relationship between food and people.

Michel Foucault and other postmodern theorists can enhance understandings of how “younger human beings” are regulated within institutional education contexts. Examining public school systems requires a particular inclusion of children's perspectives. Adults often implicitly view students as wielding no power or agency. That is, they are the “other” that receives an educational experience dictated to them by

institutionalized policies. Unsurprisingly, students are sometimes considered the “ultimate ‘Other’” (Cannella 2000:36).

Postmodern ideas can help us elucidate how school lunch programs impact student’s health. First, it is important to recognize that institutions operate through the enactment and enforcement of policies. In public school lunch programs, individual schools adhere to these nutritional regulations because of economic or political considerations. Within the NSLP, federal standards generated by the USDA CNPP are incentivized through federal subsidies. Schools that document healthy food purchases and follow strict dietary standards for menus are rewarded by having a portion of their cafeteria costs underwritten by the federal government. For the most part, this process produces an erroneous tone of realism as it assumes that student health has been addressed when nutritional standards are “officially” integrated into lunch menus. This assumption’s inaccuracy is demonstrated by the highly-publicized reaction of American schoolchildren to the HFFKA’s regulations of the NSLP. In 2012, students began throwing away their newly-nutritionally balanced meals (Byker et al. 2014). Policy makers eventually came to see meals were being perceived as unpalatable. Even so, they arguably still lack a deeper symbolic understanding of both students’ daily lives and encounters within cafeteria rooms.

Given this situation, Foucault’s theoretical insights, emphasizing “regimes of truth” over realism emerge as useful. Foucault’s work not only entails how these regimes of truth are constituted but also “how they have structured institutional practices during the development of Western society” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:12). Regimes of truth surrounding students as they build relationships with food include those from their

families, the food industry and media, those adults within the cafeteria who enforce food choices and mealtime rules, and childhood nutritional policies. To best assess the various truth regimes that coexist within the cafeteria, it is necessary to understand how each student comes to value food differently.

In their editorial in *Children's Geographies*, Samantha Punch et al. (2010:227) highlight the importance of understanding food perspectives as they reflect a symbolic level of beliefs that represent important thoughts, feelings, and relationships. Children are particularly insightful study participants. They function as knowledgeable social actors (Punch et al. 2010:229). Appreciating children as powerful actors and not just future citizens, is an important step for researchers, institutions, and adult authorities.

Accordingly, scholars begin to see that school lunch is not just a regulated control for better public health aims, but is a greater process that comes with a set of expectations and values for future food practices.

British sociologist Jo Pike, who has called for students as social actors in much of her qualitative research on British school lunchrooms. Her 2010 study of four public primary schools in Britain is particularly helpful in illustrating power relationships that are played out between teachers, lunch staff, and students in the school cafeteria. Viewing cafeterias as educational spaces, Pike (2010: 282-285) not only explores the ways that students are disciplined by staff, but also how students negotiate these actions and students resist control entirely. She describes “lunch ladies” as the trite authoritarians for proper mealtime behavior. She highlights how teachers’ perspectives of lunchrooms emphasize ideas that children need specific instruction that the teachers themselves can

execute. Most teachers suggest that lunch ladies could benefit from training to better discipline the unrulier children at lunchtime.

Macbeth and MacClancy's (2004) book on research design within food studies *Researching Food Habits* serves as an important research tool for food anthropologists. They state that, "food is fundamental to a social event. So, while food choices may not necessarily reach or aim at optimal nutritional results, they may still fulfill important, non-material, cultural goals" (Macbeth and MacClancy 2004:19). Thus, dining experiences often assume added, sometimes implicit dimensions of function. Studies regarding lunchtime in public schools should aim to understand young students' participation in both nutritional and social contexts.

School Lunch Programs as Biopolitical Institutions

In Michel Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish*, he provides a historically-rich narrative of how power and control have evolved through the institutionalization and control of humans in Western societies. Throughout this process, he characterizes two of his most popular concepts- biopower and biopolitics- as parallel mediums through which hegemonic powers physically discipline human bodies by viewing them as machines. He states that biopower over these machines is the "anatomy-politics of the human body" (Foucault 1979:139) while biopolitics is described as the "series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population." Further he states that "docile bodies" are the subjugated targets of these controlling powers that are subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault 1979:136).

Concepts of biopower and docile bodies emerge as are useful tools for highlighting the true effect of public health initiatives and policies on children's health. In fact, the first example that may come to mind when viewing student's as docile bodies that can be treated as future citizens in public health policies (Punch et al. 2010). Other factors include lunch lines, assigned seating, and adult supervision within the cafeteria room. These methods transform the space of the cafeteria and the latent setting of student agency in public discourse of food and health.

There are many contemporary movements towards transforming, rather than arresting the biopower enforced over schoolchildren. The notable rise of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver has garnered particular interest in redirecting children's eating habits. In a study using Foucault's concept of biopower, social geographers Kristina Gibson and Sarah Dempsey state that public health interventions are "key exemplars of biopower" (Gibson and Dempsey 2015:44). By setting public health initiatives against childhood obesity, politicians and dietary scientists attempt to regulate what literally goes into students' bodies while "curbing" their self-discipline by taking away potentially harmful, unhealthy lunch options.

Anthropologist Megan Warin extends the concept of biopower illustrated in Jamie Oliver's food revolution by calling for children to develop "self-discipline" in order to redirect an interest in cooking and eating quality food. Looking at this model, Warin (2011) examines how biopower can be used "positively" by advocating for children to have an increasing awareness of food politics. Warin investigates how British schoolchildren are dictated by nutritional institutions and motivated to self-govern by Jaime Oliver. The key difference here is that Oliver wants to become them aware of their

food choices, whereas school cafeterias enforce more indirect approaches to improving nutrition.

Despite a lack of student perspectives and resulting absence of theoretical engagement on this topic, notable costs and benefits in using Foucauldian concepts exist. The way these Foucauldian theories connect to cafeteria settings and dining practices can not only enhance perspectives of what students experience but also *how* and *why*. Pike's (2008:421) use of these concepts holds that they "enable us to critically examine the ways in which we contribute to... the marginalization of children within society." In the context of this article, reviewing these concepts is important to prepare the reader to identify the layers of institutional priorities that set-in place elementary students' plates (and the rules) for lunchtime.

Methodology

To better understand how students experience school lunch, I conducted *moderate* participant observation at Pine Hollow's cafeteria for one month in May 2017 (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010:23). Within this setting, I could observe the cafeteria as a meal place setting, monitored students' food selections and social behaviors, and interacted with students who volunteered their unprompted commentary on their daily lunch. My cafeteria observations and note-taking followed guidelines indicated in an observation guide (see Appendix E) that I developed to protect any personally identifiable student, school, or county information, as stipulated by the school district. The purpose of this first ethnographic method was to immerse myself within the social setting of the cafeteria and, thereby, appreciate students' lunchtime experiences while capturing a rich record of events and observations. The observations and interactions I recorded during this period

were continuously contextualized and filtered through 16 semi-structured interviews with Pine Hollow students.

Over 400 research flyers and parental permission forms were distributed to all Pine Hollow students through their homeroom teachers in April 2017. Besides this approach, I also attended a PTA meeting in May 2017 to introduce myself and secure more interest in study participation. Over the course of my cafeteria observation, there were multiple students who offered their own subjective perspectives and expressed the desire to be interviewed. Due to the lack of parental consent forms returned in these instances, any prompted feedback gained from these interactions was not recorded and has not been included in this study.

Semi-structured student interviews served as my chief method of gathering detailed student perspectives. I utilized an interview guide (see Appendix F) that I constructed to ask ten basic questions along with other clarifying or reoccurring questions that would emerge from my daily lunchtime observation as a function of contextualization (Spradley 1979:139). The type of questions I asked varied. Many questions were directional (“Tell me about your daily routine of ordering lunch food”), opinion-based (“What do you think about school-provided lunch?”), anecdotal (“I noticed that there is sharing even though it is against the rules. What do you see people sharing most?”), or defining (“In your best words, can you tell me what the word ‘nutrition’ means?”) Interviews lasted on average just over one hour. With various permissions required to interview public school students, interviews were scheduled after the successful return of parental consent forms. Student interviews were held after school at a time and location specified by the students’ parent or guardian. Throughout the consent

process, I invited parents to sit in on their child's interviews if it was preferred for their child's or their own comfort.

Besides student interviews, I conducted unstructured interviews with six parents, three teachers, two cafeteria workers, and one school principal. In seeking also to understand the perspectives of these relevant adults, I aim to elucidate various regimes of truth present with the cafeteria. By interviewing parents, I could also learn about students' at-home influences and how these factors affect their food selection and practices at school. Other adult interlocutors are those who I frequently encountered in my cafeteria observation.

Because this ethnography is localized to a cafeteria, which seats a maximum of 140 students, individual input was mainly captured through student interviews. To supplement my own lunchtime observations and individuals' subjective experiences, I also rely on of close-up or non-face bearing photos of food, objects, and figures found throughout the cafeteria.

Upon receiving consent, I audio recorded all semi- and unstructured interviews. Jot notes were used to capture information and expanded into extended notes immediately following the interview (Bernard 2006). These interviews were digitally transcribed and the transcripts were secured within password protected computer files. All observation notes, transcribed interview notes, and extended interview notes were compiled and coded for using common themes and key words. Common threads highlighted in coding include categories of: nutrition and health, rules and behavior, peer influence and socialization, sharing, meal presentation, taste and "favorite foods," food selection, home-packed vs. school lunch, and out-of-school food influences.

Results

In this section, I elucidate the everyday experience of lunchtimes within the Pine Hollow Elementary School cafeteria. In so doing, I focus on findings that address my research question: How do students experience lunch time at Pine Hollow? I originally hypothesized that I would encounter student perspectives that focus on taste and familiarity as key guiding priority in students' lunchtime decisions and interactions. My findings, however, reveal how there are many routinely physical, social, and mental arenas within the cafeteria that students have to navigate, which go beyond their own tastes, practices, and preferences.

While sociologist Janet Poppendieck (2010:259) has called for a new paradigm that sees school meals as investments in the health of American students, this study seeks to simply clarify many of the in-cafeteria goings on that are often protected, dismissed, or otherwise hidden in the academic purview of school lunch studies. As an opportunity to conduct a general investigation of students' day-to-day school lunchtime preferences and perspectives, the following findings show how students' experiences build other meaningful expectations about food, mealtime, and personal food philosophies. In this section, I highlight the key findings of Pine Hollow students': (1) daily routines and expectations; (2) lunchtime discipline and surveillance; and, (3) displays of personal agency and developing personhood.

The Lunchtime Routine

Pine Hollow students get just 25 minutes a day for their lunch period, which falls within the window of 10:45am-12:35pm. The first class of kindergarteners come speed

walking into the cafeteria at 10:35am, followed closely by the second class a few minutes later and so on. There are four classes per grade, except for the third grade which has five classes. As students enter the cafeteria, they split off into two groups: those entering the lunch line to their immediate left and those home-packed lunch students who proceed to their seats at their assigned tables (see Appendix D for cafeteria diagram). With seven pairs of tables in Pine Hollow's cafeteria, Tables 1-7 are filled within three minutes of one another, then emptied in staggered 3 minute intervals after each table's 25 minutes are up. This means students who order school lunch have just 25 minutes to get in line (fig. 2), select their food, show their ID at the register, sit, and eat and interact with peers until their table is instructed to leave. When dismissed from their tables by teachers or paralegals on cafeteria duty, all students collect their trash, line up at the trash station, pour excess milk and other liquids into a waste bin, throw away trash, and line up their foam trays on a table if they had school lunch. From here, students line up at the exit doors leading to the recess area and playgrounds. If it is Wednesday, some classes line up at the hallways exit and prepare to go back to class.



Figure 2: View from the lunch line

Photo Credit: Emily Herrington

However intuitive or monotonous this brief description of daily lunchroom activity seems, it nevertheless elucidates how students perceive their time spent within the space of the cafeteria. In my student interviews, I ask various questions that aim to contextualize how students perceive how they see lunchtime as fitting into the rest of their day (see Appendix F).

When I ask students questions about their lunchtime routines, such as, “How do you choose or order the lunch food you will eat?” or “Besides eating, what do you go during lunchtime?”, I receive mostly similar answers. Regarding the latter question, all 16 students tell me that they socialize or play with friends while eating, with the most common response being “talk with my friends” and “play games.” One fifth grader named Jennifer states, “We do whatever is ‘in trend’” while another student, a third grader named Angela, smartly says, “You can make an inference. We’re kids, we like to talk.”

Commensality, or the act of eating together, is something that I address when asking, “Do you like food or eating with others, in general?” This query allows me to measure students’ preferences for lunchtime. Thirteen students respond that they value socializing over eating, and some explicitly express preferences for this option if they would have the guarantee of sitting with just their friends in a small group. One interesting insight I gathered from older students is that “snack time” is something that teachers permit in morning classes, since these students must wait longer for their lunch period. These morning snacks may influence why students are not starving at lunch time, but they are ready to take a break from class and socialize.

Many students also inform me that they do not like the seating system for lunchtime, since some of the friends that they really want to talk to during lunch sit at other tables. Up until second grade, a policy of assigned seating is in place. Three of my six informants in these grade levels express their discontent with assigned seats forcing them away from friends.

As students informed me about how much they socialize at lunch, I wondered about how they perceived the passing of time in their lunch periods. I asked many of my informants to guess of how long their lunch periods were. Of the ten students asked this question, four answered correctly. These four students were in gifted or accelerated coursework for their grade level. Younger students, especially the kindergarteners, asked this question had a very low understanding of time spent in the cafeteria and were very shy or underconfident in providing answers, even when prompted by parents. Of the first and second graders observed, this was not the case, though attention to detail or contradicting answers were common. When parents attended student interviews, they

help keep the kids on-track and focused on providing insights that they were most able or interested in sharing.

Student Expectations

During the start of many interviews, students expressed why they volunteered to participate in the study. These unsolicited comments often ranged from “My friends and I want you to know how *bad* the food is” to “I don’t think the cafeteria ladies realize what the food tastes like” and even “I just wanted to be interviewed!” These comments made me wonder if Pine Hollow students held any self-generated critiques of school lunchtime as a dining experience.

By asking “What did you eat today?” and “How do you like the cafeteria food?” I gather and assess students’ attitudes about school lunch options (see Appendix C). Of the students that “mostly” or “always” eat school lunch, most believe the food is good. Most of these students reveal that they are enrolled in the free- and reduced-lunch program. Given that students that rely and eat the meals most frequently hold the fewest complaints, it is interesting to interview students who “mostly” and “always” packed lunch groups to learn their opinions about school lunch food. Those students find school offerings inedible happen to be students that do not even qualify for discounted meals. More than expectations of food looking or tasting good, more than half of students interviewed cite unfair rules as a negative aspect of their dining experience.

Rules and Discipline for Lunchtime

According to both parents and students who have been at the school for consecutive years, Pine Hollow has a history of testing out various rule and punishment systems for loud or rude behavior in the lunchroom. On my first day of observation during the second graders' lunch period, I heard the rules called out by one of the school's leadership teachers, Ms. Castellano.

She raised her hand and walked around the room until nearly all the students' hands were raised. "Clap once!" she called, and they followed. She called for students to use "inside voices," a term that I would continue to hear every day of my cafeteria observation. She continued making her announcement, without using the cafeteria podium's microphone, and gave a review of the lunch rules for students to repeat. They include:

- Do not share food.
- Give others their personal space.
- Sit quietly (not necessarily silently), but talk to your neighbors quietly.
- No running—which is also a general school rule!

In my following three weeks of cafeteria observation, Ms. Castellano did not repeat this message to students. In fact, I was not sure if she had listed these rules for my benefit, as an outsider or for the students. One of the Pine Hollow's secretarial staff members, Mrs. Winter, called for quiet or enforced discipline on students every day. She had lunch duty for the first and second grade periods. I heard her use the microphone each day to call out for silence with a total of 26 announcements over the entire observation period. Though there were cases where other teachers told students to lower the cafeteria's general volume or keep their hands to themselves, none of them used the

microphone. Instead, many of the teachers on lunch duty would engage with one-on-one discipline, bringing students who had been given a lunch detention in their morning classes or who were misbehaving at lunch to the “Reflection Table,” a standalone table near the head of the lunch line where I sat for most of my cafeteria observation.

Mrs. Winter, however, was particularly strict on the students monitored. Her routine of moving towards the stage and tapping on the microphone before yelling “Quiet!” Many times, she remained at the cafeteria podium with the microphone and called out tables that she felt were too loud. During some class exits from the lunchroom, she would instruct individual students to stand quietly remain silent and face forward. Her “call outs” were especially unique from those made by other in-cafeteria authorities, as she established herself as a panopticon of sorts. What is interesting about her routine discipline of students is that it was not something that was both respected by students nor warmly received by in-cafeteria teachers. In my latter weeks of observation, I noticed that students would resist Mrs. Winter’s instructions by rolling their eyes, exclaiming that they were not even that loud, or ignoring her completely. In this regard, it’s important to note that, given the first and second grade lunch period that she disciplined, there were often remaining kindergarteners or entering third graders who would get caught in her calls for quiet, many of whom did not understand why she was disciplining them.

When these forms of resistance were met, Mrs. Winter often called on students whose “ears hurt because of all the noise” to reinforce her reasoning. I find that students’ reactions and responses to Mrs. Winter, compared to other in-cafeteria adults who make calls to lower voices or behave appropriately, was much less effective or short-lived if students were not constantly reminded of her surveillance from the stage. In almost one-

third of her announcements, Mrs. Winter would stay positioned at the cafeteria podium with the microphone and make statements, including: “I’m still here,” “This doesn’t sound like quiet to me,” and “I guess you guys don’t care about peoples’ ears hurting.”

Developing Personhood and Displaying Agency

It is important to note that though my time within the cafeteria allowed me to observe the culture of Pine Hollow students, it was the semi structured interviews with my 16 student interlocutors that helped bring unique and individual experiences to this study. Hearing students’ responses to questions and often unprompted tangents and narratives adds a layer of authenticity that helped me to understand how students perceive themselves. The perspectives I discovered in this manner include students’ narratives about what food means to them, either a tool and/or toy, and also what lunchtime means to them as a “break” time within their educational routine.

Food Beliefs and Food Choice

One question that I decided to ask all students was “Are there any questions, thoughts, or ideas you would like me to share with the county or school lunch officials about your experience?” Of the responses I received, I collected: one “I am sad brownies are not free” (see fig. 3), five simple and full “no’s,” three complaints about cafeteria seating arrangements, and ten responses that were geared towards menu options and how they should be changed or how they were “unfair.” It is important to note that among young children, the concept of fair and unfair are used as blanket terms for good and bad.



Figure 3: Snack station with purchase-only options

Photo by: Emily Herrington

Many of the ideas about unfair food options came down to students' dislike of food's taste or unappetizing options, though there was an important and frequent citation that make students provided in their reasoning: the lack of inclusive meals for those with food beliefs. Of students interviewed, only one second grader, Shana, had a restricted diet as a self-identified vegan. In speaking with her mother, Kaley, about Shana's veganism I learned that this food belief is something the family held and had been practicing for just over a year. Shana rarely eats school lunch. She expressed that she really could not. On days when she forgot her lunch at home and could not have it brought to her by lunchtime, she described not being able to eat anything on the menu except for the vegetable and fruit options. Though she says she likes fruits, she admitted it was not enough to make her full, so she had learned to always double check for her lunchbox every day for fear of going hungry for the day.

There are also many students that expressed their food restrictions for religious reasons such as those following a halal or vegetarian diet. One student, who I did not have consent to interview, would walk by my seat near the lunch line's exit and read off his meal to me nearly every day. On the first day of my observation, he let me know that he ate halal and often had trouble finding school meals where he could eat every food item. Thus, a routine formed where he would, unprompted, let me know why he had selected his meal items for the day or omitted others. Most of the times his selections were limited to cold pack lunches. With permission to speak with another student, a fifth grader named Teya who eats halal, she had this to say about the school lunch options,

You should write down that the food sucks... there are almost no vegetarian or halal options, so when I forget my lunch all I can eat is the PB&J cool packs.

This sentiment was reiterated in my interviewees with students who had friends with food beliefs or even food allergies that lessened their ability to participate in lunch in one way or another. One of Teya's friends who I also interviewed, remarked,

Our school... sometimes doesn't give vegetarian dishes. One of my friends is a vegetarian, and it applies to her religion and everything. Sometimes she can't eat the school lunch. It's like I'm getting this entre while she's getting a PB&J.

-Jennifer, fifth grader

This response reiterates others that I received from students who said that meal options should be more plenty, customizable, or inclusive in some form or another. One student, a fourth grader named Elizabeth, let me know about a classmate with severe food allergies who ate lunch in the nurse's office every day. In our interview, Elizabeth and her mother told me about this friend and how he often complained about not being able to

talk or play with the rest of the class at lunch. However, this instance highlights that there is only so much that a school menu can include in order to serve its various students' needs.

One suggestion I got from a third grade student, Jessie, is to make the lunch line more like a "build-your-own" station, where you are charged for ingredients rather than what you might end up picking off because you do not like it or cannot eat it.

Age, Food Choice, and Identity

After a week of observation, I wrote, "there seems to be a shift in student interactions among the first grade, second, and third grade tables. At first, I thought I might be sensing a shift in the cafeteria culture because of the large, five-class size of third grade that sometimes dominated the lunchroom. However, after further observation I made notes of the overall increase students' bodily awareness has increased and social interactions take up much more of their focus while sitting at their lunch tables." This phenomenon is one that I watched for every day after, when the second grade tables were dismissed and as third graders began to enter I tried to note the subtle differences in students' behavior with their meals and with one another.

I shared this observation with one of the teachers who served lunchroom duty for the second to fourth grade lunch periods, Mrs. Elle. "Of course! It's the Age of Independence." She went on to explain that students in the third grade begin realizing more about their self-identity and how it connects to the world around them. In further studying this idea and observing the second and third grade students, I find that what

she's referring to is the "self-concept", a collection of beliefs about oneself that develops around children aged seven and eight years old (Trautwein et al. 2009).

The way that youngest Pine Hollow students, kindergarteners, are treated within the lunchroom in relation to the oldest, fifth graders, speaks to the varying level of teaching, monitoring, conversing, and serving that occurs between adults and students within the lunch room. This makes sense, to speak to older students more maturely and with higher standards for lunchroom behavior, but I was surprised to learn about other ways students of different ages and grades are treated differently regarding food options. kindergarteners, who as still developing their physical facilities and the concept of "personal space," need help with varying lunchtime tasks. Their classroom teachers stay with them through the lunch line process, helping them identify and order food. Next, they raise their hands for nearly a third of their lunch period so that they can get help opening things. They also need help cleaning up with the on-duty teachers that help them balance all their trash to the trash station.

One key observation that speaks to how age impacts students' cafeteria experience is how more entrée options are saved for fourth and fifth grade students. On days with high student participation in school lunch, it is common for the cafeteria staff to alter or update the lunch menu to meet their supply needs if they think they will run out of the most popular hot-served entrée item. With the intention of saving an amount of this hot option for the older students, the staff will strategically prepare smaller amounts of the hot meal option for the kindergarten, first, and second grade students and have more of it ready in time for the fourth grader's lunch period. When this occurs, the cafeteria staff often put out more of the "Packed Special Entrée," otherwise known as "cold" or

“prepackaged” options for younger students to select. This process intentionally provides older elementary students with more agency, while conveniently removing options from younger students. It is important to note that of the younger elementary students I interviewed kindergarteners neither complained about less food options nor would they have a reason to know that more options exist for the older students.

From observing and interviewing kindergarten students to fifth graders, the observations made and responses I received regarding their lunchtime experiences were scattered along varying segments of attention, detail, and intelligence, rather than a gradient. Older students had much more awareness and confidence in their convictions, whereas kindergarten and first grade interviews were very difficult without the assistance of parents moving the questions along and prodding or teasing their children for answers. Given the age range of students within elementary schools, this is no surprising finding, nevertheless it led me to conclude that elementary schools serve as uniquely diverse research sites. Given students’ varying age ranges, quickly developing cognitive stages, and emerging self-concept, I keenly observed what a behaviorally diverse setting the elementary cafeteria is.

Discussion

The shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture.

(Pollan 2009)

This study highlights various aspects of “cafeteria culture” as students experience it at Pine Hollow Elementary. Aiming to understand how Pine Hollow students experience school lunchtime, my findings, perhaps unsurprisingly, suggest that these

perspectives are heavily subjective. Though variation of practices, attitudes, and beliefs persist among individuals within any cultural group, the public school cafeteria examined in this article arguably stands as a nexus of culturally diverse individuals who join together nutritionally and socially recharge.

Given the cafeteria's educational setting, I find that many of the adults within the cafeteria promote mealtime homogeneity by enforcing rules, walking patterns, and other desired behaviors within the cafeteria structure. Student disciplining and daily routines only just skim the surface of students' physical motions and social interactions within the cafeteria. However, adults within the cafeteria organize students in very controlled ways, similar to the disciplinary biopower discussed by Foucault. In discussing limited food choices, restrictions, and preferences with students interviewed, I notice that students of certain ages or food beliefs are the same students who voice the most contentions. I attach this connection to the concept of students developing self-concept, forming agency, and making meaningful choices in relation to food.

The "Panopticon" in the Room

Students attend school for various reasons beyond simply education. Discipline is an expected part of public education. I was hardly surprised by the presence of order, routine, and cafeteria rules that I observed at Pine Hollow. Having observed different methods of authority, it became clear that the adults inside the cafeteria each have their own approach to how to enforce lunchtime rules and respond to student misconduct. Although my reporting of Mrs. Winter's frequent microphone announcements and role self-established panopticon highlight the more severe and impersonal aspects of cafeteria

discipline, it is important to note since such actions filled up pages upon pages of my field journal. By seeking to gather the daily experiences of all Pine Hollow students, I also experienced the daily auditory beratement that many first and second graders endured each day at lunch.

Foucault's (1979:196) concept of a panopticon as a hidden and disciplinary force is explored by in his writings on punishments and prison development. Unlike this hidden version, Mrs. Winter's established panopticon at the cafeteria podium is entirely visible and, from my perspective, irritatingly constant. As a disciplining force within the cafeteria, she stands fixed at the podium, elevated above the rest of the room, saying, "I'm still here." While this disciplinary effort was forcibly acknowledged by students, it was also met with various forms of resistance.

More frequent resistance is noticed among second graders rather than first graders, and more so in first graders rather than kindergarteners who might still be finishing their lunch periods. Watching older students ignore Mrs. Winter or disobey her orders by whispering jokes or their rolling eyes is one observation that led me to understand how students of different grades and ages variously perceive cafeteria rules. To contextualize this observation, I note that Mrs. Castellano and other adults who covered lunch periods for second to fifth grades rarely use the microphone or stage as a call for inside voices. Instead, they rely on verbal reasoning to instill order. While disciplinary approaches differ depending on the individual, I am reminded of Ms. Elle's knowledge of elementary students' differing levels of identity and social awareness, in what she called their "Age of Independence," which I explore next.

Young Epistemologies and the “Self-Concept”

Based on my everyday observations and interviews with Pine Hollow students, I find that age and established food beliefs largely shape t awareness and engagement with cafeteria food and other people during lunchtime. From student interviews, I note that that older students, those with food restrictions, and those who had friends with belief or allergy restrictions are voice the most complaint about school lunch options. Of the topics discussed with interviewed students (see Appendix F), those about meal options, food brands, and preferences took up much of the allotted discussion.

Such findings are significant in that they illustrate the self-concept introduced to me in my conversations with Ms. Elle. Generally defined, self-concept refers to the way individuals think about or perceive themselves. This definition seems to be an individual’s equivalent to the Geertzian definition of culture, which is “the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves” (Geertz 1973). The self-concept in many ways relates to our sense individual identity and social value. Most important to this study of cafeteria perspectives is the postulation that the self-concepts at a certain age (Trautwein et al. 2009).

In my research, intermediate aged Pine Hollow students (8-11 years) or those who were aware of their peers’ dietary values or restrictions needs within the cafeteria displayed a level of personal mindfulness and social awareness characteristic of this self-concept. This specific approach to self-concept reflects on human’s identities growing to embody social psychologist John Turner’s (1984) take on self-concept theory.

Though self-concept is largely the concern of psychologists rather than anthropologists, it is important to understand the changing lives, beliefs, and identities of

elementary aged children within the cafeteria context, as it is often connected to displays of agency within the cafeteria. This is evidenced by Jennifer's awareness and defense of her friend Teya's limited school lunch options because of her halal lifestyle.

This encounter and others like it demonstrate that particular elementary students have strong, developing self-concepts. By declaring that schools should provide access to inclusive foods, even if they could eat other foods themselves, these students demonstrate a deeper understanding of the social structure of the cafeteria. Through these observations, it is apparent how social conversations with peers and others shapes student lunchtime experiences. Instead of giving responses that show preference for familiar or tasty foods, as is the case for most of the second grade and younger students, these students display social values that influence their own ideas surrounding food.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to understand how elementary students at a local public school cafeteria experience lunchtime. Student study participants who were interviewed provided telling responses that reinforced and contextualized in-cafeteria observations. Among them, the desire to have tasty, recognizable, and plentiful options were the lunchtime priorities most emphasized. This finding only partially confirms my initial hypothesis that students would prefer tasty or familiar foods during their lunchtime selections. In other findings, I outline the daily purview of students' by conveying their regular routines or discipline and socialization that outline further evidence of increased autonomy and value for socialization in older students.

Study Limitations

One of the greatest limitations of this research is its limited access to public schoolchildren as research participants in a highly safeguarded institution. As vulnerable population of study, the limited access to the students in this study participants extends to both the approved methodologies and research feedback. Consent must be granted from parents and the students themselves for interviews to take place. At the start of my fieldwork, I considered that potentially problematic if parents decided to attend the interviews as student answers and behavior may be (un-) consciously guided by their parents' presence. Though parents' presence may have influenced student responses, I overwhelmingly found that student interviews without having parents present (6 out of 16) were those where students provided more vague or timid answers, especially in kindergarten, first, and second grades.

Beyond the ethical aspects of conducting research with children, there are also geographical constraints informing my thesis project. Although this project provides a bottom-up perspective on the NSLP as the authority governing regulated school nutrition, it is still a local ethnography. In this way, the policy implications of this research are limited as the all of schools participating in the NSLP cannot be characterized by the investigations of one Central Florida school. For this reason, it is important to note that any applied findings for this project's data are mostly relevant on the district and state levels. In regard to this study's usefulness, it is important to again note that all directory or otherwise personally identifying information that may otherwise compromise the anonymity of my interlocuters or research site and county has been altered as a stipulation of access to conduct research at Pine Hollow.

Other limitations include the ethnographic present in which this fieldwork was conducted. The 23-day observation and interviewing period spanned over the last six full weeks of the school year, a time where many school administrators, teachers, parents, and students are gearing up for summer and encumbered with end-of-year events. Perhaps related either to the personalities or ages of student participants or to the end-of-year timing, many students would have trouble staying on topics of their ideas, experiences, or thoughts about food or the cafeteria. Many students enjoyed the experience of being interviewed so much that they would go on tangents that derailed limited time for interviewing. I dubbed such tangents as “white noise responses” that were either off-topic or uninterpretable and that I had to erase from the interview transcripts. For this reason, I omitted various valuable and telling quotes and individual students’ perspectives in order to avoid writing pages to reliably contextual each students’ experiences of lunchtime. I propose that scholars interested in utilizing this research for its explorative and expository value consider using more focused research questions that directly cite students’ voices within; case studies offer a suitable avenue, in this regard.

In this study, I wanted to test the approach of ethnographic methods and their potential usefulness in gathering student perspectives, rather than primarily observing and drawing objective claims conclusions. By seeking bottom-up perspectives from students from within the cafeteria, an underlying goal of this study was to gain access and raw information about the culture of education, food, and socialization that are embodied within Pine Hollow students’ daily purview. Given that these students spend the equivalent of 3.12 days every year within the cafeteria, it becomes an important setting

for scholars and policymakers interested in shaping the way students interact with lunchroom authorities, one another, and, of course, their packed and school lunches.

Future researchers interested in gaining qualitative perspectives of students' that construct a given cafeteria's "cafeteria culture" should first address one of this study's major findings regarding the variation in student's socialization practices, food beliefs, and growing self-concept between students of different grades and ages. This is an especially important consideration because culture is learned. As students learn about their daily lunchtime routines, foods, and practices of commensality as they age and continue participate in lunchtime, their cultural perspectives shift. One succeeding avenue of study for research that may deepen understandings of children and school lunch is discerning shifts from primary students to intermediate ones.

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CHAPTER THREE:

FROM POLICY TO PLATE: A TOP-DOWN INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMMING IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

Abstract

In the 2016-2017 school year, 41% of school-aged children participated in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the United States. With both academic and political discourses on public school lunch often emphasizing nutritional standards for children, there has been little discussion over how these meals are constructed and what priorities are weighed in the process. After reviewing a “vertical slice” of NSLP operators on the national, state, and district levels, this article zooms in to ask in detail, “What do school districts prioritize in their construction of NSLP-approved meals?” To answer this question, I highlight insights from a September 2017 unstructured interview with the meal coordinator of a Central Florida public school district. Additionally, I use ethnographic insights gained from an elementary school cafeteria of the same county from May 2017 to better contextualize the reality of the county’s NSLP operations. In so doing, I find that nutritional stipulations and economic costs are the directional priorities in meal construction, with the district’s reasoning connected to its central mission, large size, and rationalized operations. In assessing how the district uses student feedback to revise its menus, I discuss the county’s recognition that students want more meal options and customization.

Key words: National School Lunch Program, menu construction, children, public health, rationalization

Introduction

Feeding hungry children has been a task held by various institutions throughout human history. This mission is contextually pursued from culture to culture, with various factors influencing the business of feeding children in our countries, counties, and communities. In the United States, the most pervasive child welfare program of this sort is the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which served over five billion lunches to American public schoolchildren in nearly 100,000 schools across the country in the 2016-2017 School Year (FY) (USDA Food and Nutrition Services 2017).

Beyond initial childhood hunger, scientifically-backed nutrition has become a vital part of the NSLP as a program to combat childhood hunger; this is owed to the fact that the issue of childhood obesity has most effectively taken place through the institutionalization of American public school lunch menus (Paarlberg 2013:95). Today, this program is central to American gastro-political discourse and to the modelling of nutritional rationalization: the former due to its ubiquitous role in our children's lives and the latter because of its functions through a series of economic incentives to provide food that meets standards from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (or DGA). With public and political aims to feed children in public schools continually impacted by public health aims, it becomes important to study the NSLP's operations on the local level.

In this article, I take a "vertical slice" (Nader 1972) review of NSLP operators and focus on local level NSLP operations. Throughout this article, I use the term *operator* to describe any government entity that participates in the programming of school lunch menus. I also use the terms *district* and *county* interchangeably when referring to this local level NSLP operator. In this study, I focus on a local Central Florida school district,

Gator County. The question I aim to address is: What do NSLP operators prioritize in their construction of NSLP based meals?

To get at this question, I interviewed the Gator County meal coordinator, Mrs. Branson, in September 2017 after conducting a 23-day ethnography at one of the county's local elementary school cafeterias. Mrs. Branson offers insights into how members of her Gator County Food Service team work towards the goal of following NSLP guidelines for nutrition and pricing while also striving for increased palatability and customization. While confirming the nutritional and economic methods enforced by the NSLP on the federal level, I discover more about the often hidden or nondisclosed aspects of school lunch programming on the county level.

Research Site

The main site of this research is the Gator County, Florida, which is a pseudonym for a large, semi-urban county in the region of Central Florida. Focused on the Gator County School District's Food Service Office, I conducted research at both the district offices and one local elementary school, which I refer to as "Pine Hollow Elementary School."

Conducting this research within a Central Florida public school is significant for various reasons. First, Gator County is one of the "Top 10 Largest School Districts" in the United States. As a site of ethnographic research, this fact about Gator County helps contextualize many of operations that I investigate because, even as a local NSLP operator, this county's large size and scope mitigates the way it accomplishes school lunch programming. Another important aspect of studying a Central Florida county is

that this region is home to over one-fifth of all homeless children living in the state (Santich 2015). In 2014, Texas, California, and Florida were the U.S. states that boasted both the highest numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 *and* the highest NSLP participation rates (AHAR 2013). In 2016-2017, when this study was conducted, Florida was again the third largest NSLP participant state in the U.S. with over 1.7 million students served within the state daily (USDA Food and Nutrition Services 2017).

Background

The educational features of a properly chosen diet served at school should not be under-emphasized. Not only is the child taught what a good diet consists of, but his parents and family likewise are indirectly instructed.

(U.S. Congress 1946)

A Brief Review of The National School Lunch Program

Since the ratification of the National School Lunch Act by Congress in 1946, the NSLP has been the governing platform for dietary standards in U.S. public school lunches. This legislation was passed at a time when school lunches were largely supplied by the U.S.'s agricultural surpluses that were economically convenient to the government and recognized by the members of the public and Congress as “nutritionally unbalanced or nutritionally unattractive.” (U.S. Congress 1946). This was an important moment in generating new nutritional regulations and subsidy incentives that came from the top-down, with funding from the Congressional budget trickling all the way down to the school level.

Through the creation of the NSLP and its mandated use of tested nutritional research to guide school meals, Congress set the future of government-funded meals for children to prioritize nutrition and affordability. As indicated in the above quote, legislators intended for this program to articulate what constitutes a healthy diet and for these nutritional lessons to inform personal eating habits in the home and elsewhere.

Since its initial enactment, the National School Lunch Act has been amended many times to update the “dollar-and-cent” amounts of its federal reimbursements to schools, the nutritional standards for meals, and the approved amount of special funds to support Free and Reduced Lunch meal payment options. Several amendments were enacted in 1962, one of which further refined the subsidy amount to be greater for states with overall higher participation rates (U.S. Congress 1962).

Today, this federally assisted meal program maintains overwhelming authority over American public schools as it established the foundation for children’s nutritional standards at school mealtimes on the national, state, and local levels. This program’s influence becomes even more noticeable when considering that some 30.4 million of the 73.6 million children, or 41%, living in the U.S. participate in NSLP lunchtime meals every year (Gunderson 2014). Add to that, it projected that more than one-third of American children’s daily dietary needs come from the NSLP-approved meals consumed during the school week (Burghardt et al. 1995). In the 2016-2017 School Year (SY), Florida ranked as the third state with the highest level of NSLP participants with just over 1.7 million children fed daily (USDA Food and Nutrition Services). This figure assumes even more statewide significance with the U.S. Census Bureau’s (2016) projection that

about 4.1 million children ages 0-17 were living in Florida, making the rate of NSLP participation in Florida also approximately 41% in 2016.

A Vertical Slice of NSLP operators

Given the demonstrated significance of this far-reaching program and its central mission to promote childhood nutrition, it becomes important to understand how the NSLP is implemented from the national level to the more localized contexts. One particularly helpful method for reviewing this downward translation of policy is the “studying up” approach advocated by anthropologist Laura Nader. This approach is particularly useful in understanding how the flow of policies are mandated and enforced at the national, state, and county levels. Capturing this narrative is referred to as taking a "vertical slice" of political measures (Nader 1972).

In this section, I explore how national, state, and county operators guide the construction of lunch programs at Gator County Public Schools in Central Florida. This vertical slice review is conducted by evaluating the online resources provided by the national, state, or county offices associated with NSLP enforcement. This review also considers the recently implemented Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (or HHFKA), which has pushed the NSLP to reform nutritional standards for meals, snacks, and beverages provided in public schools, even more so than amendments to the original National School Lunch Act. In the process, I find that the bulk of responsibility to enforce NSLP nutritional standards is levied by local school districts. These districts also hold the power to set additional dietary initiatives that effectively address health concerns from the local community, parents, and students. Yet, given the top-down nature of

nutritional reform that descends from the national tier of the NSLP, the provisional aim to improve childhood nutrition is almost entirely focused on exacting the nutritional values of such meals.

National Level: The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service

According to their government site (Gunderson 2014), The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) oversees the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services - an office composed of two collaborative departments: The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP). The FNS is the federal office that runs the NSLP and requires that each state-level NSLP office to send them annual reports of student participation rates, statewide initiatives, and districts approved for federal reimbursement. This last point is critical because federal reimbursement is what gives the NSLP power over states and counties that operate public lunch programs. Without meeting the federal requirements mandated by the NSLP, states' individual districts- and by extension the schools within- lose out on federal funding to reimburse them for a proportion of their qualified food purchases. This reimbursement rate varies by each food item's MyPlate food group and the food purchase price (Gunderson 2014).

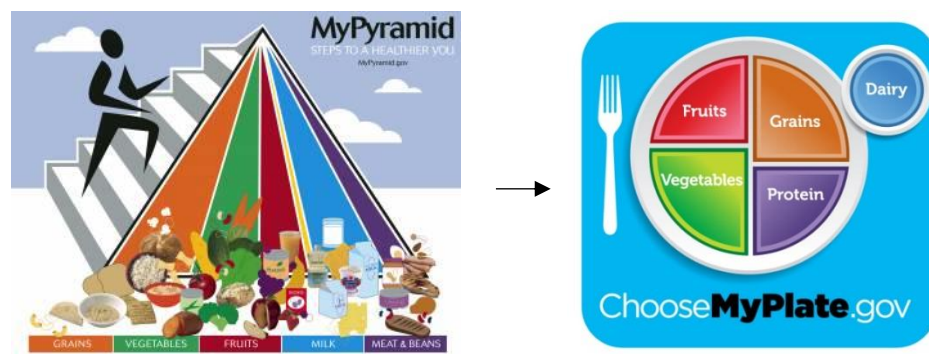


Figure 4: In 2011, MyPlate became the USDA's official nutrition visual

Source: MyPlate 2011

In comparison, the USDA's CNPP is responsible for creating MyPlate (2011, fig 4) and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) in cooperation with the National Institute of Health (NIH), both of which are used to set the nutritional guidelines for the NSLP. These standards are based on scientific data supported by associated organizations, such as the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences. This relationship between the CNPP's scientifically-grounded guidelines for childhood nutrition and the FNS's enforcement of these guidelines provide a hard line for states and counties to follow.

In 2010, President Barack Obama signed the HHFKA into law. This legislation set new goals for children's access to healthy and wholesome food by further tightening the nutritional guidelines of the NSLP. Another stipulation of this law was the forcible reduction of the turnover time between CNPP nutritional findings and subsequent NSLP revisions. This measure was included to ensure the most refined and up-to-date scientific findings could be integrated into schoolchildren's lunchtime meals sooner. By mandating more stringent reforms of the NSLP and expanding the number of children who qualify for school meal subsidies, the HHFKA is generally regarded as the “strongest national legislation currently in place against obesity in the United States” (Paarlberg 2013:95).

State Level: Florida's Division of Food, Nutrition, and Wellness

In Florida, the Division of Food, Nutrition, and Wellness (FNW), an office of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, overlooks the state administration of the NSLP. In their mission statement, the FNW states they are

responsible for advocating state policy changes that "ensure the most nutritious meal is provided to children" (Florida Division of Food, Nutrition and Wellness 2016). Though the meaning of "most nutritious" is not clearly defined, the FNW does provide a clear list of state statutes on their official website. These statutes list the federal and state requirements for school lunch programs, including one that states that each school district in Florida must have a designated food and nutrition department to regulate local aspects of NSLP (Florida State Statute 595.405: 2015). These statutes are available online to inform the public of the updated NSLP regulations along with any proposed changes.

In this way, the FNW oversees and authorizes district school boards to operate public school menus and lunchrooms. As the official administer of NSLP for the state, along with six other federal programs geared towards children's health and nutrition regulation the FNW provides and administers the official documents necessary for district reimbursement through the NSLP. The FNW mitigates financial aspects of school meals from the district to federal level. This office also serves a vital role in helping food sponsors or vendors apply to, train for, and operate within NSLP guidelines. It also serves as a helpful resource for districts' food and nutrition departments by providing them with online tools such as the menu planning resource. The menu planning tool helps districts to schedule meal rotations, organize menus from pre-designed templates, and follow the federal NSLP and HHFKA nutrition regulations (Florida Menu Planning and Service 2016).

District Level: Gator County Public Schools' Food Services

Tasked with enforcing NSLP guidelines is the Gator County Public School District, more specifically their Department of Food Services. This department includes registered dietitians, nutritional analysts, and program administrators that come together to craft and design NSLP-approved meals. It is important to note that while Gator County has successfully qualified for NSLP reimbursement since the passing of HHFKA, not all school districts have been as successful in keeping up with the tightened dietary requirements. Gator County not only boasts success with the new lunch reforms, but it also makes active attempts to educate parents, teachers, and students on how nutritional reforms are reflected in their school lunch menus.

Besides surpassing HHFKA guidelines, GCPS have set their own independent nutritional initiatives for their schools, largely due to the involvement of and feedback from the School Board of Gator County. The GCPS Wellness Policy, which extends into many other non-lunch related health programs, affects the NSLP regulations in a very interpersonal way- through the creation of a "Fit School Squads." These teams are composed of voluntary teachers, concerned parents, and administrators that hope to maintain high levels of nutritional standards for their respective schools. Each team meets three times a year to evaluate their school's food sales, food training needs, and overall progress in completing GCPS wellness goals. These specific objectives are a product of another unique GCPS policy called the Fit Foods Nutrition Standards. These school board guidelines list the allowed serving sizes and dietary stipulations for snacks and beverages provided within the schools' lunch programs. School districts demonstrate the

power to effectively supplement the NSLP’s nutritional stipulations, which are geared towards addressing public health concerns.

Public Health, Nutritionism, and Industry Influences

One interesting finding from this top-down review of the NSLP’s nutritional regulations is that policy development is largely unidirectional, though local level operators of the NSLP are often able to strengthen or mitigate further nutrition-oriented policies and programs. Local school districts are only able to tighten dietary regulations for lunch food rather than loosen them. Such findings highlight how the NSLP’s structure effectively restricts any district feedback. Instead, this restriction further promotes the federal NSLP's ideology that a meal's scientifically-calculated nutritional values serve as the implicit solution to ameliorating childhood health concerns.

At the federal level, the accepted dietary guidelines of public school lunch meals are directed by the CNPP’s MyPlate and Dietary Guidelines for Americans. At the district level, GCPS’s Fit Foods Nutrition Standards equate controlling food portions to the successful regulation of schoolchildren’s health. Accordingly, the multiple levels of NSLP have adopted a somewhat myopic strategy for improving the nutritional health of school-aged children. The term “nutritionism” coined by Gyorgy Scrinis and popularized by Michael Pollan (2009) is useful in labeling the NSLP’s overarching philosophy. Nutritionism is currently defined as the ideology that foods are only as valuable as the scientifically-identified nutrients of which they are composed (Pollan 2009:28-29). In his latest book on nutritionism, Scrinis (2013) argues that this reductionist approach to

balancing meals results in decreased appreciation for food quality, a phenomenon that he suggests aligns with the commercial interests of food manufacturers and corporations.

Prioritizing the nutritional regulation of school lunches in the NSLP has had discernible consequences in the U.S. In 2012, many of the HHFKA nutrition requirements were starting to take root in the reformation of school lunch menus. Soon after, both local and national news outlets began reporting on the rampant food waste occurring in school cafeterias as students began to throw away the healthier food items or otherwise save their lunch money. The students' distaste for these healthy menu revisions resulted in a lowered participation in the NSLP, which effectively diminished the strength and extent of NSLP policies in public schools (Carmen et al. 2014:406; Paarlberg 2013:95).

Another drawback to the NSLP's implicit nutritionism is that its enforcement occurs within a highly politicalized system whereby public health objectives are sometimes undermined by political and industry pressures. Although the CNPP sets the nutritional guidelines, political actors have the power to amend Congressional definitions of items that major food groups. Such top-down flow of nutritional regulations is problematic when nutritional definitions become debated or defined by political actors, who can be more readily swayed by big food lobbyists rather than food scientists. One of the most conspicuous examples of this comes from 2011 when the U.S. Congress approved a list of amendments that allowed the tomato sauce included in frozen pizzas to be considered as a viable vegetable option for NSLP meals. The amendment states that Congress,

Prohibits funds under this Act from being used to implement an interim or final rule regarding certain nutrition programs that: (1) requires the crediting of tomato paste and puree based on volume; (2) implements a sodium reduction target beyond Target I until USDA has evaluated scientific data relevant to the relationship of sodium reductions to human health; and (3) establishes any whole grain requirement without defining “whole grain.”

(U.S. Congress: 2011)

By claiming that the first version of the HHFKA was overly burdensome, proponents of the above amendment argued that it would improve the flexibility for local school districts constructing menus. This ruling came shortly after the enactment of HHFKA, dealing a hard blow to the current effectiveness of the CNPP's nutritional guidelines in school lunches. This type of nutritional technicality, when legalized on the national level, allows for state and district offices of the NSLP to have more options, but also perhaps to garner more criticism if they pursue such options. This 2011 pizza ruling has led to pervasive inclusion as a menu item in public schools because it legally regarded as fitting NSLP nutritional values.

Beyond Nutritionism

Given the incongruity between the NSLP's political structure and its nutritionism ideology, the need to consider a broader definition of nutrition emerges; one that approaches nutrition as both a quantifiable measure and qualitative process of human health. The NSLP can reinterpret nutrition by considering policies that foster healthy eating practices within the space of the school cafeteria. When compared to the regulation of school lunch menus, this new approach considers how social values of food

and cultural practices can transform the way schoolchildren perceive their nutritional practices. With its current heavy-handed focus on supplying nutritional options to schoolchildren, the NSLP eschews opportunities to use their institutional system to cultivate the palatability, presentation, and mealtime experiences that motivate schoolchildren to develop healthy eating practices. At present, the NSLP's dietary regulations fail to account for the complex interrelationship between health, nutrition, and social practices that are at play within the school cafeteria.

It should be noted that this call for incorporating culinary experiences into the public school cafeteria is not particularly new. Since the 1970s, nutritional analyst Dr. Linda Haverburg (1967:225) has advocated for "coordinated programs which consider the interrelationship of health with nutritional and social factors." In her work in international nutritional policies, she argues that nutritional considerations alone cannot ameliorate health problems and calls for policy-makers to realize that in order to build effective nutritional policies, scientific dietary insights must be taken in consideration within their own social contexts (Haverburg 1967:229-230).

The idea that effective food movements occur within sociocultural, rather than overtly scientific contexts, is something also explored by conservative food-policy expert Dr. Robert Paarlberg. He states that even when "the scientific foundation for these modern food rules may at times be weak, but the social value can nonetheless be strong" (Paarlberg 2013:183). This view emphasizes the power that social values, rather than simply scientific merits, can add to the way humans - and by extension children - interact with food. Nutritional concerns are not adopted by children when they are offered healthy food. Rather, it is through the cultivation of healthy food practices and sharing of social

values within these habits that school lunch programs may be able to see a more effective and sustainable change in child nutrition.

Considering that these accounts from Haverburg and Paarlburg were written over 40 years apart, this gap merely adds to their analogous findings that the current institutional approach to nutrition often neglects the other values that inform food choices that take place, both outside and within the school cafeteria. The guiding question of this study seeks to understand how county operators of the NSLP mitigate nutritional, economic, and industry priorities when constructing meals for local elementary schools.

Tools of Meal Construction

As previously noted, much of the available academic scholarship on school lunch programs focuses on the context of nutritional needs to address the current public health crisis of childhood development and obesity. These studies include recommendations to monitor or promote healthier foods by observing and implementing various features of the school lunch programs for students. In the U.S., research on this topic is often conducted using quantitative rather than qualitative methods as well as using satellite data or surveys to gather and assess food selections and participation rates rather than performing in-room data collection. Many of these studies are conducted by public health, nutrition, and applied economics scholars focus on individual aspects of school lunch, such as: the effects of mealtime duration (Zandian et al. 2012), increasing the amount of healthy menu items (Just and Price 2013; Cluss et al. 2014), presentation appeal (Correia et al. 2014), food waste reasoning (Hanks et al. 2014), and choice architecture (Dominuez et al. 2013; Cohen et al. 2015).

One reason why so many of these single aspect studies may exist due to differences between disciplinary approaches or, perhaps more universally, to the difficulty of access to schoolchildren as informants and to public schools as primary research sites. Outside of the U.S., school cafeterias and classrooms are more accessible to researchers. For this reason, there are many more social scientists conducting holistic, multifaceted research projects on school lunch programs, studying aspects such as: learning about taste in language and sensory experiences (Leynse 2006), language socialization of health food teachers and students (Karrebæk 2012), school mealtime as an educational activity (Benn and Carlsson 2014), brand socialization within peer groups (Hemar-Nicolas et al. 2015), and environmental factors of food choice (Henry et al. 2015).

Adopting an Anthropological Approach

In a nation where improving health outcomes are related to healthy food accessibility, it is crucial to understand how institutions prioritize, reform, and enforce nutritional standards. Though scholars have begun to consider school cafeterias as complex intersections of nutritional regulation and influential socialization, more anthropological research is needed to fully understand each individual cafeteria's culture and each student's mealtime experience. Due to a longstanding interest in food culture and childhood, certain anthropological studies may prove insightful in better understanding this issue. Existing socio-cultural literature centered around schoolchildren and lunchtime remains scarce.

Of those guiding the way to adopting holistic frameworks and ethnographic methods to address the topic, Susan Greenhalgh's (2012) "War on Fat" seeks to weigh the socioemotional suffering that obese American students experience on a personal level when confronted with public narratives of nutritionism. Other anthropologists have more recently written on students' experiences using such qualitative methods to observe students' perspectives of food quality (Cohn et al. 2013), how students talk about food (Cavanaugh et al. 2014), and how schools form unique "nutrition environments" for their students (Crooks 2016).

Some of these studies suggest that the key to appealing to more students in the lunch program is improving things such as flavor, aroma, visual appeal, and freshness of foods served (Smith et al. 2015). By looking beyond elementary students as future citizens and rather as "knowledgeable social actors" (Punch et al. 2010) in public health policy, it seems that U.S. national goals towards improved relationships with food may be attained through understanding and cultivating mealtime experiences in a highly personal way. In this article, I utilize this knowledge to merge the top-down perspectives from Gator County with the feedback gained from on-the-ground cafeteria observations and student feedback.

Methodology

My guiding question in assessing the decisions of NSLP operators in constructing school lunches is investigated through this highly-localized study. Having taken a vertical slice of NSLP and having reviewed its guiding policies from the national, state, and district levels, I conducted an unstructured interview with the meal coordinator at the

Gator County School District's Food Service Office in September 2017. Working in the district's Food Service Office, this individual's unique insights form the central findings of this study. This information includes how lunch menus are built, managed, and updated from an institutional standpoint.

To illustrate how some of these operations are communicated and perceived within the school cafeteria, I compare statements from the county meal coordinator with feedback gathered from students, parents, and teachers at one local elementary school in May 2017. These on-the-ground data were gathered using ethnographic methods of semi-structured student interviews, unstructured adult interviews, and a month-long cafeteria observation period. The tools of unstructured observation and limited participation I utilized in gathering my findings were key aspects of gaining reliable information to compare with informants' own perceptions of school lunch experiences. This reserved style of ethnographic research is something that DeWalt and DeWalt (2010:38) has noted as important when gathering ground-level perspectives about the planning and implementation of institutionalized programs such as school lunch. Throughout this study, my school site, Pine Hollow, serves as a comparative setting to assess the results of the county's operational intentions.

In seeking to elucidate the perspectives of the county office and those of the school cafeteria, I also focus on insights from within the Pine Hollow cafeteria, especially those of cafeteria manager, Mrs. Jenkins. Known colloquially as the "lunch ladies," these individuals operate in a unique intermediary space. They are employed as county workers for the Food Service Office but their daily tasks and interactions occur almost completely within the school cafeteria milieu.

With written consent, student and select adult interviews were audio recorded to expedite the capture of information throughout this study. Recorded interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of their collection and then deleted to maximize the protection of my informants' identities. Otherwise, pen and paper were not only the primary tools for taking quick and extended notes but also for all interviews and for my day-to-day observation within Pine Hollow's cafeteria. No payment or compensation was made for any informants as part of this study.

Beyond assessing the similarities and differences between how the county and those at Pine Hollow view school lunch food, I devote part of this study to explore how insights from this county and school level ethnography can help inform NSLP nutritional policies. Though this study can only begin to be considered as statistically relevant to one Central Florida elementary school and, arguably, to the greater Central Florida community, I aim to highlight the benefits of qualitative research on younger children and within public schools that remains woefully underrepresented within the academic and public literature. In many countries, public schools are viewed as centralized regulation centers that are utilized to positively address children's nutritional issues (Fairbrother et al. 2016:56). By documenting student perspectives from within the school cafeteria, this project can help to better contextualize and monitor the progress of such public health initiatives.

Results

In this chapter, I highlight the key findings related to my research question: What do county-level NSLP operators prioritize in their construction of school lunch meals? At the outset of my investigation I hypothesized that nutrition would be the top priority of Gator County as an NSLP operator.

Addressing Haverburg's (1967:255) call for examining the various factors shaping the tone and tenor of programs like the NSLP, I identify four key findings from the county level that illustrate the overlapping priorities informing current school lunch programs. These are (1) how nutrition and NSLP subsidies are program drivers; (2) how student feedback can be conflicting; (3) how the food industry is ingrained in meal programming; and (4) why inclusive meals are not yet part of the county's standard practice?

These findings reflect information and perspectives from my unstructured interview with the Gator County Food Services Office's Meal Coordinator, Mrs. Jo Branson. As the only meal coordinator serving the more than 250 Gator County schools, Mrs. Branson's job is to supervise the county's two dietitians, to push new menu innovations, and to develop food safety and culinary skill training for the county's cafeteria workers. I contextualize each of these findings with my own cafeteria observation and interview responses from Pine Hollow Elementary. Throughout this section, I use the term "county" here to prevent confusion, as both "district" and "county" are interchangeable terms used by Gator County's Food Service office.

“The NSLP is our boss:” Nutrition as the Top Priority

The mission statement of Gator County’s Food Service Office is “to create innovative, nutritious lunches that are appetizing to students and cost-effective.” This guiding principle seems to encapsulate a few of the county’s top priorities including nutrition, cost, taste, and innovation. I asked Mrs. Branson to first walk me through the ways that each school’s lunch menu is created and balanced to meet NSLP nutrition standards. First, she shared two documents with me that she uses regularly to create or revise menus: the “New Menu Pattern” handout and “Federal Register 82.”

The first document serves as a resource for county NSLP operators from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service’s “Fresh for Florida Kids” program (see Appendix H). When revising old school menus, blank menu templates are used along with this resource to better adhere to federal USDA menu pattern standards. Each new meal option is color-coded to represent what food group it will represent on the menu. After a school menu is finalized and posted, parents and students can view this color-coding online. This allows them to see what food groups will be featured in their students’ lunches each day. Beyond its usefulness in meeting NSLP nutrition standards, this color-coding is a functional feature that many Pine Hollow parents told me they appreciated being able to see (See Appendix C). This tool is most helpful for menus that are in the revision stage. However, Mrs. Branson tells me that there is a different process for introducing or testing new food items (see “Industry Influences and Solutions” below.)

The second document mentioned by Mrs. Branson is the “Federal Register 82” (see Appendix I). This is a formal USDA Notice that lists the definitions and

reimbursement rates for free and reduced priced meals and milk provisions. Such guidelines help the county adjust their budget based on how many Gator County students register and qualify to receive free or reduced lunches. Being able to quantify the amount of free and reduced lunches for which they will be reimbursed serves as an important tool for Mrs. Branson as it helps her office anticipate upcoming annual budget costs. The county is next able to take inventory of existing vendor contracts. Vendors are state-approved food manufacturers that produce and source food items to county level NSLP operators. Vendors often include large food corporations such as Kellogg's, Tyson, and Jennie-O that compete for long-term contracts with Florida counties' food or nutritional services offices. As a government entity, the Gator County Food Service Office must negotiate and sign contracts with vendors that are large, capable, and efficient enough to meet the nutritional, cost, and timing needs of the county's lunch programming.

Although varying from county to county, Mrs. Branson states that the Gator County superintendent and School Board members are aware and agree that following NSLP guidelines should remain their top priority. This pragmatic approach is based on the shared goal of Gator County and the NSLP to support student nurturing so they can pursue their education hunger-free. Additionally, the economic objectives of the county are enhanced through NSLP subsidies. This federal support for lunch programs helps shore up the county's overall budget. Accordingly, NSLP's nutrition guidelines and the economic incentives that guide Gator County remain top priorities.

In seeking to understand how these carefully crafted NSLP meals are implemented at the cafeteria level, I rely on insights provided by Mrs. Jenkins, cafeteria

manager at Pine Hollow Elementary. She has been working in Gator County cafeterias for some two decades. When asked about what school lunches provide, she had this to say:

Mrs. Jenkins: Most of the kids like the food. We have some that are real picky and some that prefer to bring their own lunch, but most of them like it, I think.

Author: So, most students like it and generally it depends. Aside from that, what do you think students generally think about school lunch?

Mrs. Jenkins: A lot of them don't like the vegetables, you know. I have to really push the vegetables out. A lot of them also don't like that we switched from regular to wheat. The hamburger buns and hotdog buns had to be whole wheat and the kids really didn't like that change.

The shift towards whole wheat buns and other grain ingredients is one of several HHFKA changes. I ask how such changes enacted since 2012 are received by students:

Mrs. Jenkins: It's about 50/50. Some of the students are picky, like I said, and will argue that they don't want to eat the healthy meal options. But most of them just take it, and I see them eat it or some of them have learned to just pick at it or let it sit there and throw it out.

Author: Since you've worked in Gator County for 19 years, have you noticed difference between Pine Hollow and other elementary schools that you've worked at or managed in the county

Mrs. Jenkins: It's about the same.

"We hear them:" Student Feedback

To elucidate how the nutritional and economic aspects are balanced by other aspects of NSLP operations, I asked Mrs. Branson about how much student feedback informs school lunch menu revisions.

I learned student and parent feedback regarding school lunches is not as frequently volunteered as much as one might think, especially given the proliferation of

public opinions, debates, and news that are almost constantly circulating on the topic.

There are three ways that Gator County students can provide feedback on their school's lunch programming: (1) by leaving a comment in the "Contact Us" section of the GCPS Food Services website; (2) by calling their office directly (their number is listed online); or (3) by talking to their cafeteria manager at school (Mrs. Jenkins for Pine Hollow), who is a Gator County employee rather than school employee.

With voluntary student feedback largely underutilized, the Food Service office has generated new feedback systems to innovate and update their schools' lunch menus with new meal options. Working with the Gator County Marketing Office to select students to test new meal options before they are added to menus county-wide has proven effective. Food Service-hosted events where interested students of select schools (always rotating) participate in surveys, focus groups, and taste tests serve as a viable venue for such efforts. Vendors play a key role in this process by creating and offering samples of potential entrée, fruit, or vegetable options that meet the nutrition and pricing criteria dictated by the county.

According to Mrs. Branson, the top request Gator County receives when reviewing new food options at these events "fresh food." Acknowledging the growing impact of the Slow Food Movement, many in Gator County believe that schools can do a better job at providing fresh fruit and vegetable options. Gator County is continually undertaking measures to make food fresher by incentivizing more of its cafeteria managers and line assistants with culinary classes and buying industry-grade equipment such as robotic culinary devices that help prepare more ingredients at smaller kitchens in middle and elementary schools. Currently, many meals sourced to the county's middle

and elementary schools are prepared at “central kitchens.” These venues are normally located at area high schools and are better equipped to prepare and process meals.

Although “freshness” or “fresh food” remain the buzzwords Mrs. Branson often hears, she tells me this is not really what students want. She explains that at the same events where they receive requests for more fresh food, new entrée and vegetable options are tried and tested by students. For the new food items to pass and be added to county-wide menus, they must score at least 80%. However, the freshest options available—vegetable dishes—only require an overall score of 70% to pass. “If we had the pass rule at 80% [for veggies], we’d never get it.”

With elementary to high school students scoring these “fresh” options lower than expected, Mrs. Branson shares that “fresh food” might be what they are taught to value as “desirable” or “good”, even if it’s not what they really want. Given this challenge, she remarks, “we hear them, and it’s funny.” Even though the student feedback systems in place cannot reliably communicate students’ preferences, Mrs. Branson shares what they are really after- customization.

“Having it their way:” Industry Influences and Solutions

Despite the fact the student feedback for Gator County lunch meals indicate the desired for “fresh” food, Mrs. Branson explains that this isn’t the case, “Students tell us they want fresh, then they tell us to ‘hold the veggies.’” She believes that students associate the idea of “good” with fresh food and what like to eat outside of the school. She gives examples of both Subway or Chipotle and how these chains market their fresh

ingredients. Given this perspective, it seems students liken the term “fresh” synonymously, perhaps because they have unconsciously observed the various features of fast and casual eateries that market both concepts of “fresh” and “made-to-order.” Without much differentiation in students’ minds, they may fail in conveying what they want in school cafeteria cuisine.

Mrs. Branson suggests that what Gator County students really want is customization. Her belief is based on three reasons. First, in feedback events students have mentioned that they [vendors] could modify just one or two things about proposed dishes to improve its taste or appeal. Second, she cites qualitative research conducted by an independent researcher on assignment to increase students’ approval of lunch programming. Third, she points to the generational food culture of her target population whereby kids have been raised to choose, test, and optimize their own meals.

“This is what they see out in the world, in the food industry,” Mrs. Branson says, “They are used to ‘having it their way.’” Though building or preparing your own meals is certainly a given practice in any home kitchen where home-cooked meals are preferred, outside of the home and school students are exposed to various cultural standards for eating that are set by popular restaurants. This “build you own” generation engenders aspects of agency and privilege from a young age which translates into what students expect or actively choose to see on their lunch plate.

The pervasive nature of industry influences is not limited to county operations. When asking students within the Pine Hollow cafeteria what feedback they would relayed to the county, most of male participants voiced their desire for “Pizza Hut” or “Papa Johns” to provide slices of pizza each Friday or “Pizza Day.” Even when asking some

students about their favorite foods, I often received restaurant names instead of actually food. It is important to note that students often understood that many of such fast food options they wanted more of they also recognized as “junk food” or “not healthy.”

Within the cafeteria itself, I witnessed around 26 parental visits in my 23-day observation period. Both mothers and fathers would often come to the cafeteria to eat lunch with their student carrying a fast food bag and/or drink cups (17 out of the 26 observed parent visits.) Some parents brought a home-made lunch to share with their student, but in cases where fast food was brought I heard classmates call out “Lucky!” or “I want that!” A few cases were noted of students who consumed packed lunches each day from lunch boxes or grocery bags that contained leftover fast food takeout bags inside. One student, pointed out to me by one of the cafeteria duty teachers, had a Subway or Wawa brand sub and side packed as his lunch nearly every day. Though these cases of industry influences inside the Pine Hollow cafeteria might represent differences in students’ socioeconomic status or privilege, overall, they highlight the prevailing desirability of such options.



Figure 5: Chick-Fil-A “packed” lunch

Photo Source: Emily Herrington

Customization, alongside food manufacturers able to make custom protein, carb, vegetable, and fruit options, may also serve as an unintended yet helpful solution to the current lack of inclusive menu options offered in Gator County schools. With special regards to dietary restrictions - whether for medical or belief-based reasons - customizing food options at the packaging state or giving students more agency in omitting certain meal items that do not follow their personal dietary criteria.

“Eventually we will get there:” Options for Young, Diverse Students

While customization stands as a viable option for students to better participate in and benefit from the NSLP, taco bars and similar offerings will not be a widespread practice in Gator County schools anytime soon. The reality remains that elementary students represent one of the lowest priorities in innovating Gator County school lunch

menus. Instead, Mrs. Branson states that many of these changes will focus on menus in the county's middle schools and high schools.

Currently, there is only one option in elementary schools like Pine Hollow for students with dietary restrictions. Known as "Packed Special Entrées" (see Appendix C), these cold prepackaged servings are typically available three to four days of the school week and operate as a third entrée options. The Packed Special Entrées give local and in-school cafeteria managers the option to pick between what prepackaged food items are most popular as meal alternatives to their school's elementary students. Their contents are not constructed with the needs of those with restricted dietary needs necessarily in mind. Rather, they provide a better labeled option that students or cafeteria workers can check for ingredients. Though all hot lunches similarly have full Child Nutrition (or CN) labels, they are often only accessed by students if they take time out of their lunch to ask about ingredients. These cold meal options often consist of foods such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cheese sticks, yogurts, diced fruit cups, and Goldfish.

I asked Mrs. Branson if the county receives feedback from students with religiously or medically defined dietary restrictions. She responded with a few guiding explanations that suggest why such feedback is scarce.

Of those students and parents that utilize the feedback options for Gator County lunch menus, most student feedback comes from high school students. This includes requests for t availability of more allergy, belief-based, or health conscious options. It is also common for school districts to provide more lunch options to high school students compared to their and middle and elementary school counterparts. When I asked Mrs.

Branson about this practice, she noted that high schoolers are at very different places in their life both behaviorally and financially.

Creating New Options

The process for creating new menus and meal options occurs once the county determines that certain items are either not well-received or if ingredients become cost prohibitive. Moreover, officials prefer a fair amount of flexibility to ensure that USDA nutrition and meal pattern guidelines are followed. There are three main avenues for creating new meal options: (1) vendors; (2) feedback sessions; and (3) industry emulation.

First, county contracted food vendors can propose new products or ideas that adhere to NSLP criteria. Second, Mrs. Branson and her team can implement the use of suggested ingredients in more of the countywide meals. Often these ingredients reflect modern food trends such as curry, lemongrass, and quinoa. In generating new recipes with such ingredients, the Food Service Office hosts feedback sessions with local high school students. Third, the Food Service Office looks to current industry trends to determine what is working for popular restaurants. This final approach is one of the ways that the county came to embrace its current practice of increasing “build-your-own” meals. Specifically, the idea came from both internal research and the ongoing success of Chipotle and other made-to-order eateries.

Many of the guiding factors of NSLP operations at Gator County reflect the challenge of being one of the nation’s largest school districts. Even with offering more customizable meals, various size, equipment, staffing, and timing restrictions remain for

each school, making this the implementation of this solution difficult. With nutrition and economic priorities guiding the county's core operations, it seems that the contracts and innovative collaborations with food vendors represent the county's best approach to provide students more appetizing and welcoming meal options. Responding to my questions about the potential for more inclusive menu options for all Gator County students, Mrs. Branson states, "Eventually, we will get there."

In conclusion, I find that my original hypothesis that nutrition remains the central priority of Gator County as an NSLP operator is confirmed. Although the role of NSLP subsidies and meal affordability are two of the economic goals entangled through this objective, there are many other moving pieces to what Gator County accomplishes every year as articulated in their mission statement. The work accomplished by Food Service officials each month takes constant teamwork, communication, and an objective setting.

"Things are always changing, it keeps us flexible for sure," Mrs. Branson remarked when I asked about how her office mitigates political and policy changes that shape her institution as an NSLP operator. "These changes help us set the benchmark... the ones set by us, the district, or the higher [federal] level." As a strategic NSLP operator and one of the largest school districts in the United States, Gator County utilizes elements of nutritionism, rationalization, student feedback, and industry forces to accomplish their mission.

Discussion

In learning the ways in which student feedback has been interpreted by Gator County and integrated into pending changes in lunch programming, this study unveils how the county mitigates both NSLP and student interests in a both uniquely formal and informal ways. By discussing this finding, I focus on the county as an institution that functions as both a public government entity within the educational sector but also, as Mrs. Branson puts it, as a business that must sustain its required operational funding to feed hungry students.

In my interview with Mrs. Branson, I confirm that the nutritional guidelines of the National School Lunch Program are like guidelines that take top priority in designing Gator County lunch menus. Having reviewed the public health reasons and subsidized methods in which the NSLP enforces its nutritional standards, I was expecting my interview at the Food Services office to reveal a rigid approach to my investigation and to the topic of how menu construction impacts Gator County students. It was interesting to find Mrs. Branson's down-to-earth attitude and quick-witted responses, as in her discussion students' desire for custom-created meals, "They want to *have it 'their' way*," playing on Burger King's slogan. Further, she often presented students' perspectives as important and valuable in her responses, expressing that she and her team valued student's on-the-ground experiences. What is interesting is that this genuine approach to school lunch by Gator County officials is not something that I only heard from Pine Hollow's administration and cafeteria (county) staff. A majority parents or students I spoke with during interviews did not express support or contentment with the county's present operations.

After this unstructured interview and revisiting the literature on the NSLP and its local operators, along with my own observations at Pine Hollow, I reevaluated how many students and parents, especially, thought about the county as the school lunch authority. In these interactions, themes of doubt and engagement between the county (normally referred to as “they” or “them”) and Pine Hollow students. In the process of revisiting these perspectives, I realized that one key aspects of Gator County’s role in operating school lunches stood out to me as hidden or otherwise undervalued: scope. Though I return to this lack of communication within the Gator County community, it is first important to establish the scope of Gator County’s lunchtime operations and how it accomplished.

Nutritionism meets Rationalization

As one of the top ten largest school districts in the United States, Gator County serves over 200,000 students (ages 4-20) in its over 250 schools each day. These operations require the work of just over 1,500 Food Services workers- cafeteria managers, line assistants, kitchen workers, food drivers, etc.- who run every day of every school year, about 180 days total. From an operational standpoint, the NSLP’s nutritional requirements (Appendix H) can be viewed as just another layer of work requirements to make school lunch on such a large scale possible. By securing NSLP subsidies to pay for more of the districts’ lunch budgets, more children can be fed. To accomplish this task, I argue that Gator County utilizes tools of rationalization.

Rationalization is a concept that was developed by sociologist Max Weber in 1905 to describe the process of removing cultural, emotional, or otherwise inessential

values and replacing them with rational ones (Weber 1946). This concept has largely been used by social scientists to characterize neoliberal authorities who rationalize society, often reducing it to economic values. This reductionist concept is similar to nutritionism, which prioritizes the function of food over its other less calculable values and values technocratic authorities of nutritional science over local cultural practitioners. Tools of rationalization have been increasingly used in Western societies since the 1950s, especially in the manufacturing, production, and serving of meals. This phenomenon has been characterized by George Ritzer (2008) as “McDonaldization.”

This hybridized term was coined by Ritzer to reveal McDonald’s and other large-scale, modern food establishments as key exemplars of rationalization while also better defining how rationalized processes operate by considering four major factors: predictability, efficiency, calculability, and control. I contend that many of these factors are knowingly or unknowingly utilized in Gator County’s lunch program operations.

Various aspects of the Food Services office running such a large scale operation for lunch as well as breakfast to the over 250 schools further reflect the ways in which this local NSLP operator is highly McDonaldized. Despite my findings that elementary, middle, and high school students are offered different county-designed meal options at lunch. However, *predictability* can be recognized in that the food, menus, menu rotations, and steps for preparing these foods that is uniform among schools of the same grade level and region of the county. *Efficiency* is also represented in Gator County’s lunch programming in dual aspects, that of business and government. A high degree of accountability required by Mrs. Branson and her Food Services team in their daily tasks, and in order to organize all the moving parts of school lunch: food sourcing, menu

design, NSLP standardization, food transportation, regional preparation, local preparation, etc. This multifaceted operation cannot take place without valuing efficiency.

Though Gator County does not necessarily compete for its students to participate in school lunch programming, the participation numbers do make a difference in NSLP subsidies. In this way, Mrs. Branson revealed to me two telling reasons for why the Food Service's Mission Statement is "to create innovative, nutritious lunches *that are appetizing* to students and cost-effective" include: (1) to ensure students enjoy lunchtime and eat more of their food, and (2) to entice students who can buy full-priced meals to do so. This later reason illustrates how the rational aspect of *calculability* is present in the drive to create more revenue for lunch programming within Gator County. This connection aligns with Mrs. Branson's characterization of Gator County Food Services operating as a business, even though it is a government institution.

Despite the presence of calculability as a tool for this local NSLP operator, it is important to note the finding that Mrs. Branson and her team have used qualitative research and consulting to provide them with insights into students' preferences. This is significant because calculability is often characterized by quantifiable rather than subjective goals; in many ways, NSLP operators must regard other social values of food rather than rationalized ones. For the various ways that Gator County's large-scale operations are rationalized, it seems to never fully negate or ignore student feedback about potential. As an NSLP operator, the county must pay attention to whom it is serving lunch and how it is received. That said, mitigation of pursuing ideal school lunch programming are hindered by necessary rational considerations.

Though the aspects of Ritzer's four components of McDonaldization are not entirely met, the presence of the rationalized operations to achieve feeding so many children spread across the Central Florida county is apparent. Though my findings indicate that Mrs. Branson's team seeks to integrate student feedback into the county's school lunch menus, there is a limited capacity for this. As an institutional authority of the NSLP and rationalized operator of food contracts and distribution, Gator County Food Services is bound by systematic structures that disable it from becoming truly innovative. I have argued that a large part of this is due to the magnitude of the county's operations. Further, there is the underlying fact that the "NSLP is the boss", and as much the county's lunch programs can only be sustained only so long as participation numbers are maintained and subsidies awarded. In this regard, I believe that Mrs. Branson's statement of "We'll get there" in engaging with students who have dietary restrictions, who are the minority within Gator County, is an ideal that can never be met by the rational and economically-constricted local and large NSLP operator.

Conclusion

Growing rates of obesity in American children and concerns for their future health have led to stricter nutritional regulations and more thorough enforcement of child welfare programs, such as the NSLP (Ogden et al. 2016). This study reviews a vertical slice of NSLP operators to better understand how this tonal shift, increased nutritional priorities, and economic subsidies affect NSLP operations on the local level.

Shifting focus to the county-level, the NSLP is viewed as "the boss" and nutritional regulations assume prominence in menu construction. This supports my

hypothesis that nutrition would play the central role in how the county prioritizes the construction of student lunch menus. However, there were many other rationalized factors entangled within the goal of nutrition such as the focus on economic subsidies and industry contracts, which are features I find embedded in meeting the nutritional requirements of making school lunches. This is accomplished by tools of molecular nutrition and manufactured options that are provided through county collaboration with contracted vendors. Vendors often refers to large food corporations who I find play vital roles in both sustaining county operations and influencing student food preferences.

This research assesses the rationalized operations of Gator County and determines that the successful large-scale programing of lunch meals to over 200,000 students a day requires key factors of McDonaldization to meet these goals. Despite this “business-like” approach to school lunches, as self-described by the Meal Coordinator, I maintain that the county as an NSLP operator is not entirely rationalized as it integrates qualitative feedback and innovative industry resources to make healthy meals that are palatable to students. These actions respond to the challenge raised by extensive school lunch scholar and sociologist Janet Poppendieck (2010: 259) to challenge old lunch program standards to push forward health as a priority while also view students as valuable.

Though she admits this is done with the rational intent to have more full-paying students purchase their school lunches, the resulting developments in Gator County include aspects of re-skilling kitchen workers and providing students with new build-your-own options for future school years. Given this interesting development in county NSLP operations, I posit that future research regarding county level NSLP operators should ask questions about what student feedback calls for and what industry-related

innovations they are adopting to either supplement or soften the NSLP nutrition guidelines that largely shape student lunch meals.

Study Limitations

Permission to conduct interviews within Gator County's Food Services Office was not approved until August 2017. With the original intent of the research timeline allowing for overlap between Pine Hollow's observation period (May 2017) and access to interview Mrs. Branson, this study uses the ethnographic findings from Pine Hollow in retrospect. This limitation should also note that given the three month period in between school level and county level research, a new school year had begun; in some ways, this research may not account for shifts in Gator County lunch programming or operations, though none were directly noted in this study.

A major methodological implication of this research, which was a stipulation of its approval, is its limited ability to name, identify, or otherwise characterize the county and school studied. In seeking to both truthfully depict NSLP operations in Gator County and protect its identity in the process, I have attempted to make significant figures, numbers, and statistics that describe the county both correct and appropriately vague, as to fit other counties with similar demographics.

There are notable geographical constraints informing this project, given that this highly localized study. Although this project provides a bottom-up perspective on the NSLP as the authority governing regulated school nutrition, it is still a local ethnography. In this way, the policy implications of this research are limited as the all of schools participating in the NSLP cannot be characterized by the investigations of one Central

Florida county and school. For this reason, it is important to note that any applied project findings are mostly relevant at the district and state levels.

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CHAPTER FOUR: SYNTHESIS

Food has a unique political power, for several reasons: food links the world's richest consumers with its poorest farmers; food choices have always been a potent means of social signaling; modern shoppers must make dozens of food choices every week... food is a product you consume, so eating something implies a deeply personal endorsement of it.

(Standage: 2009:196)

In this research, I have applied ethnographic methods to better understand how students experience lunch in a Central Florida public elementary school. Within this investigation school-provided meals assumed prominence despite the presence of other aspects of the cafeteria culture including daily routines and Foucauldian-style discipline. I found students believe that school food choices should improve and increase was the related insight that commensality and socialization play key roles in student opinions about food and cafeterias. In these conversations, many study participants revealed social reasons for not wanting to eat certain options. In my student interviews, many cite opinions, rumors, or otherwise subjective ideas shared by their friends that guide their thoughts about food.

The social influence of peers within the cafeteria was not the only factor that informed student perspectives on cafeteria food. Familiarity and taste were also important in how students viewed the items offered. Even students interviewed who did not participate in school lunch felt able to discuss how the food tastes or had suggestions for improvement. In light of these perspectives, I highlight the significance of student social lives play in shaping opinions of lunch food and lunchtime. As such, there is no singular “cafeteria culture” that all elementary students experience in Central Florida, let alone

Pine Hollow. I find that this socialization plays a key role in how the highly structured meals of the NSLP are mitigated by students in unregulatable ways. The agency that students demonstrate through their choices suggest that they have the power to resist at any age.

Structuration: Integrating Micro- and Macro- Level Perspectives

Given the theoretical implications of self-concept and rationalization, many ways emerge to understand the political, social, and economic priorities occurring through various levels of the NSLP. As much of the background of this thesis has covered such discourse, I focus now on Giddens's (1984) "Structuration Theory." This postmodern concept can prove useful in reconciling the subtle student discontent and conflicting feedback received by Gator County. It does this by capturing the social reflexivity that exists from the local and federal levels of the NSLP and within all societal institutions involved.

In this synthesis, I cite my interview with Mrs. Branson that suggests that the Gator County NSLP operators display agency and evade complete rationalization in school lunch programming. Gator County make strides by giving students a voice in meal construction. This emphasizes structural duality of Gator County as a NSLP operator by utilizing its power to both enforce nutritional standards and incorporate students' feedback. Mrs. Branson and her team have accurately perceived not just top-down needs of students (NSLP nutrition standards) but their true desires (customization). Mrs. Branson and the Gator County Food Services office not only prioritize student feedback but also read between the lines to discover how customization can improve student experiences.

This suggests that although Gator County lunch programming's first priorities remain nutritional and economic ones, giving students what they want is still taken into account. The process of making meals more student-approved and palatable is partially self-serving. In some ways, it shows that Gator County officials recognize students as social actors.

The Omnipresence of Industry

From snacks sold within the cafeteria to vendors who are deeply involved in school lunch programming, the food industry seems to play a pivotal role in helping students and NSLP operators achieve their respective goals of having tasty and nutritious food. For students, purchasable snacks within the cafeteria serve as something like social items that have great negotiating value despite the prohibition of sharing. Their chief appeal to students seems to be that they include products such as brownies, rice crispy treats, and granola bars that are otherwise unavailable to Pine Hollow elementary students.

Given the role of industry lobbyists in federal rulings on the NSLP, their impact on nutritional standards and what foods qualify for use under these categories becomes apparent. On the local district level, contracts with school district's food services and/or nutrition offices play key operational roles in how lunch food is engineered, sourced, and designed. On the state level, there exists a list of resources from the Florida Department of Agriculture, which are skewed towards larger vendors who operate with an economy of scale to sustain the considerable demands of school districts.

Such considerations illustrate how powerful and embedded they are within public school cafeterias. In this regard, both county level operators and schoolchildren have two

separate challenges with a similar solution. As county NSLP operators seek to make food more appealing to students in terms of customization, they further partner with food manufacturers. Within the cafeteria, branded food items provide an opportunity for student agency among those who have the financial means to purchase snacks. Snack options are lobbied, state-registered, and provided as auxiliary food options available during lunchtime. They act as tools for resistance and support student ability to resist the NSLP's structured meals.

Though much research exists regarding the marketing, branding, and otherwise industry-related methods of food consumption (Enax et al. 2015; Cluss et al. 2014; Hanks et al. 2014; Elliot et al. 2013), I believe more research on industry influences is needed to understand how particular products shape students' experiences within the cafeteria and how long these relationships between child and product last. Though political lobbying already addressed in this research is likely a factor, I believe that NSLP operators on all levels must recognize the affected nutritional potency of their programs when industry actors maintain their place in the cafeteria, even if now it's for a charge.

Ground-up Public Health

All humans have the capacity to act and make their own individual choices within the concept of agency (Barker 2005:448). Students that rely on free- or reduced-price lunches have their options constrained in the name of public health. Given that public health policies aimed at U.S. children rely on limiting their food choices, various unintended consequences potentially emerge.

Though Poppendiecks (2010) and others have called for a renewed engagement with studying the NSLP to improve the health of American children, I contend that it is

also important to learn more how students learn about and build expectations for food and mealtimes. While top-down public health policies, such as the HHFKA, certainly enable quick structural treatments to concerns for student welfare, they often leave little room for county and schools to deal with the local backlash. As one of the top 10 largest U.S. districts, Gator County cannot provide meals for students without relying on industry manufacturers or sequestering meal items from select schools. In my study, I learned that these surprise deficits often mean elementary schools implement “surprise” menu changes the day, before this happens middle or high schools across the district (fig. 6).



Figure 6: Day 11- Alternative food option

Photo Credit: Emily Herrington

Given the institutional structures identified in this research and the lack of parallel studies from within U.S. public elementary schools, future research could focus on young children and the role social lessons or incentives play in their formative mealtime experiences. Since research is often informed by public health aims and gaining access to

public school children is challenging, child-focused research often overlooks that they are still in a state of developing identity and agency. To better understand features of children's unique daily routines and developing food expectations, more must be done to understand aspects of children's relationships with food and their development of autonomy (Schwartz et al. 2011). By learning more about how children perceive, prefer, and choose their food better understandings of the social translations that bring people together or accentuate differences emerge (Appadurai 1981).

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is not only the convergence of agendas and the addition of new voices that make this the time for school food reform. It is also the urgency of the underlying concerns to which school meals addressed. Hunger is on the rise. Our children's health is deteriorating. The environment is under assault. School food reform holds the promise of addressing all of these issues. That is why it cannot wait.

(Poppendieck 2010:7)

Considered together, these two studies show how students come to experience lunchtime in a Central Florida cafeteria. I had initially hypothesized that since I focus on elementary schoolchildren, I would find a strong value associated with food that is familiar and tasty. Based on interviews and observation, I did find taste and familiarity did play a significant role in students' preferences. Through interviewing, however, I found that this regard for taste and familiarity were values held by all student. Older students and those with established food beliefs or restrictions value food available in the cafeteria. I discovered that inclusivity as well as taste dominate the change students want to see within the cafeteria. Improved taste and increased options are two factors students often mention. In these telling interactions, manifestations emerge of the self-concept as it relates to these emerging narratives of personal and social values surrounding my young participants and food.

By interviewing the county's Meal Coordinator, I gained new insights into how various aspects of school lunch programming throughout the school district are prioritized. My hypothesis that nutrition would be the top priority of the county's Food Services office was confirmed by Mrs. Branson. As a school lunch operator, the county views the NSLP as "the boss," since without its subsidized meals, the county would be

unable to feed all students. Given this value on nutrition, various features of the county's operations rationalized and how the county's successful large-scale delivery of daily lunch meals to over 200,000 students reflect factors of McDonaldization to meet its goals.

In the second article, I also highlight the various systems of student feedback and organized operations that the county has established. Integrating the findings from both chapters, I investigate the ways in which social, economic, and industry pressures emerge within local cafeteria and governmental contexts (Chapter 4). To better understand perspectives within the highly institutionalized culture of the school cafeteria, I adopt the concepts of structure and agency. Using these concepts, I discuss how school lunch experiences are understood through Giddens's (1984) "Structuration Theory." That is, I use it to understand how more social reflexivity exists on the county and student levels than the "other" realizes. I characterize how better understandings of individual structuration at the school, county, state, and federal level can address parental school lunch concerns and transform students' experiences with food. Because of the pervasive industry forces present in student lives and the county operations, I note the limitations of this concept in understanding the industry influences with the cafeteria.

Future Directions

Throughout my research at Pine Hollow, I came across many adults who expressed their interest in wanting to hear more about my study and its local focus of Central Florida. As I spoke with them, they wanted to talk about these issues and understand how the NSLP works. There were also parents of student who hoped to get a better picture of cafeteria culture. These were parents who worked rigid hours or

otherwise had reasons for being unable to visit or dine with their children at school. Those parents who packed lunch expressed their desire to understand how the county operates. In seeking to expand school lunch discourse beyond recent school lunch debates, this research aspires to be useful by instigating public discourse using student, parent, and county perspectives gathered that shed light on unspoken misunderstandings between home, school, and county priorities.

This project has important policy implications. It suggests somewhat new approaches to manage public health initiatives. I will send published copies of this thesis to Gator County School District with the hopes that it may provide insights or new solutions for the county's school lunch programs.

My ethnographic findings from Pine Hollow and Gator County also highlight various understudied cultural and political realities of children vis-a-vis food that could benefit from future academic research. Seeking to address these ideas, I call for more research that investigates public health programs from the ground-up, the pervasive operations of food industries, and the ways children are viewed in society. Adding to its repertoire as a vehicle for public health aims, school lunch research in the U.S. has also been highly focused on how school lunch can combat childhood obesity. Expanding on this explorative study, I argue we need such research to gain greater understandings of how we study children and food, in general. In American studies of food and children, I call for a heightened focus on students as social actors during school mealtimes.

Most American NSLP research that I have explored here does not squarely focus on student perspectives, especially those of younger, elementary-aged students. The American focus on research can be contrasted with school lunch research conducted by

social science researchers in other Western countries, where access to young children for qualitative research is more accessible. There is also an enhanced focus here on gaining the daily purview of students and their developing ideas about lunch food. Many of such foreign scholars have independently called for research that focuses on understanding children's own values and priorities as social actors (Pike 2010; Punch 2010), rather than focusing on the healthfulness of foods and children as future consumers—a viewpoint often adopted in U.S. research (Wingert et al. 2014).

I advocate for children not to be regarded only as future citizens nor the “ultimate ‘Other’” (Cannella 2000:36) when considering priorities or negotiation the politics of children's health and future wellbeing. Rather, I believe that students are worthy and valuable study participants. They should be regarded as “knowledgeable social actors” (Punch 2010:229).

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Emily Patricia Herrington

Date: February 21, 2017

Dear Researcher:

On 02/21/2017 the IRB approved the following human participant research until 02/20/2018 inclusive:

Type of Review: UCF Initial Review Submission Form
Expedited Review
Project Title: Cafeteria Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Lunchtime
in a Central Florida Elementary School
Investigator: Emily Patricia Herrington
IRB Number: SBE-16-12806
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 02/20/2018, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewska, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Kamille Chap

Signature applied by Kamille Chaparro on 02/21/2017 03:33:21 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL OF STUDY MODIFICATIONS



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Emily Patricia Herrington

Date: April 14, 2017

Dear Researcher:

On 04/14/2017 the IRB approved the following minor modifications to human participant research until 02/20/2018 inclusive:

Type of Review: IRB Addendum and Modification Request Form
Expedited Review
Modification Type: Sample size was increased from 20 to 600. Per [REDACTED] PS request, an Adult consent was submitted for the unstructured interviews. A revised Protocol was uploaded and a revised parental consent was approved for use.
Project Title: Cafeteria Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Lunchtime in a Central Florida Elementary School
Investigator: Emily Patricia Herrington
IRB Number: SBE-16-12806
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

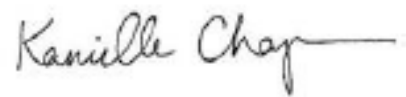
If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 02/20/2018, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewska, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kamille Chaparro". The signature is written in black ink and includes a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Signature applied by Kamille Chaparro on 04/14/2017 09:07:58 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX C: PINE HOLLOW LUNCH MENU

Pine Hollow Cafeteria Menu

Day 1- Day 23 Observation Period

Key:	Observation Day Day of the Week
	Entrée
	Vegetable and Fruit Options
	Packed Special Entrée

Week 1:

Day 1 Tuesday	Day 2 Wednesday	Day 3 Thursday	Day 4 Friday
Nachos w/ Tortilla Chips, or Turkey & Provolone Sub	Cheese Calzone, or Chicken Fajita Wrap	Ham-/Cheeseburger, or BBQ Chicken Salad w/ Garlic Toast	Cheese Pizza, or Deli Box
Lettuce & Tomato (3/4 c), Charro Style Pinto Beans, or Diced Peach Cup	Marinara Sauce, Italian Blend Vegetables, or Apple Slices	Broccoli, Seasoned Corn, or Orange Wedges	Deli Roasted Potatoes (1/2 c), Fresh Green Beans, or Pineapple Tidbits
Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	None

Week 2:

Day 5 Monday	Day 6 Tuesday	Day 7 Wednesday	Day 8 Thursday	Day 9 Friday
Chicken Tenders, or Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich	Chicken Fajita Bowl w/ Rice, or Taco Salad w/ Tortilla Chips	Stuffed Shells w/ Garlic Toast, or Turkey and American Cheese Sub	Egg & Cheese Omelet w/ Bagel, or Disney Frozen Yogurt Cool Pack	Cheese Pizza, or Chicken Tender Wrap
California Veggie Blend, Peas and Carrots, Orange Juice, or Apple Juice	Pico de Gallo w/ Cucumber, Seasoned Cuban Black Beans, or Diced Pear Cup	Sweet Plantain, Broccoli, or Tangerine	Hash Brown Patty, Carrot Dippers w/ Ranch, or Apple	Italian Blend Vegetables, Cream Coleslaw, or Diced Peach Cup
None	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	None

Week 3:

Day 10 Monday	Day 11 Tuesday	Day 12 Wednesday	Day 13 Thursday
Pierogi Dumplings w/ Gravy, or Deli Box	Soft Tacos w/ Cilantro Lime Rice, or Turkey Ham & Swiss Sub	Pizza Crunchers, or Popcorn Chicken Salad w/ Garlic Toast	Hot Dog, or Chicken Caesar Wrap
Cauliflower, Broccoli, or Diced Pear Cup	Pinto Bean Salsa, Lettuce & Tomato (3/4 c), or Mixed Fruit Cup	Marinara Sauce, Corn on a Cob, or Apple Slices	California Veggie Blend, Sweet Potato Fries, or Blueberries
None	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus

No School

Week 4:

No School	Day 14 Tuesday	Day 15 Wednesday	Day 16 Thursday	Day 17 Friday
	Nachos w/ Tortilla Chips, or Turkey & Provolone Sub	Cheese Calzone, or Chicken Fajita Wrap	Ham-/Cheeseburger, or BBQ Chicken Salad w/ Garlic Toast	Cheese Pizza, or Deli Box
	Lettuce & Tomato (3/4 c), Charro Style Pinto Beans, or Diced Peach Cup	Marinara Sauce, California Veggie Blend, or Apple Slices	Broccoli, Deli Roasted Potatoes (1/2 c), or Orange Wedges	Seasoned Corn, Peas or Carrots, or Pineapple Tidbits
	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	None

Week 5:

Day 18 Monday	Day 19 Tuesday	Day 20 Wednesday	Day 21 Thursday	Day 22 Friday
Chicken Tenders, or Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich	Chicken Fajita Bowl w/ Rice, or Taco Salad w/ Tortilla Chips	Stuffed Shells w/ Garlic Toast, or Turkey and American Cheese Sub	Egg & Cheese Omelet w/ Bagel, or Disney's Frozen Yogurt Cool Pack	Cheese Pizza, or Chicken Tender Wrap
California Veggie Blend, Peas and Carrots, Orange Juice, or Apple Juice	Pico de Gallo w/ Cucumber, Seasoned Cuban Black Beans, or Diced Pear Cup	Sweet Plantain, Broccoli, or Tangerine	Hash Brown Patty, Carrot Dippers w/ Ranch, or Apple	Italian Blend Vegetables, Creamy Coleslaw, or Diced Peach Cup
None	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	Peanut Butter Jelly Uncrustable Sandwich Box	None

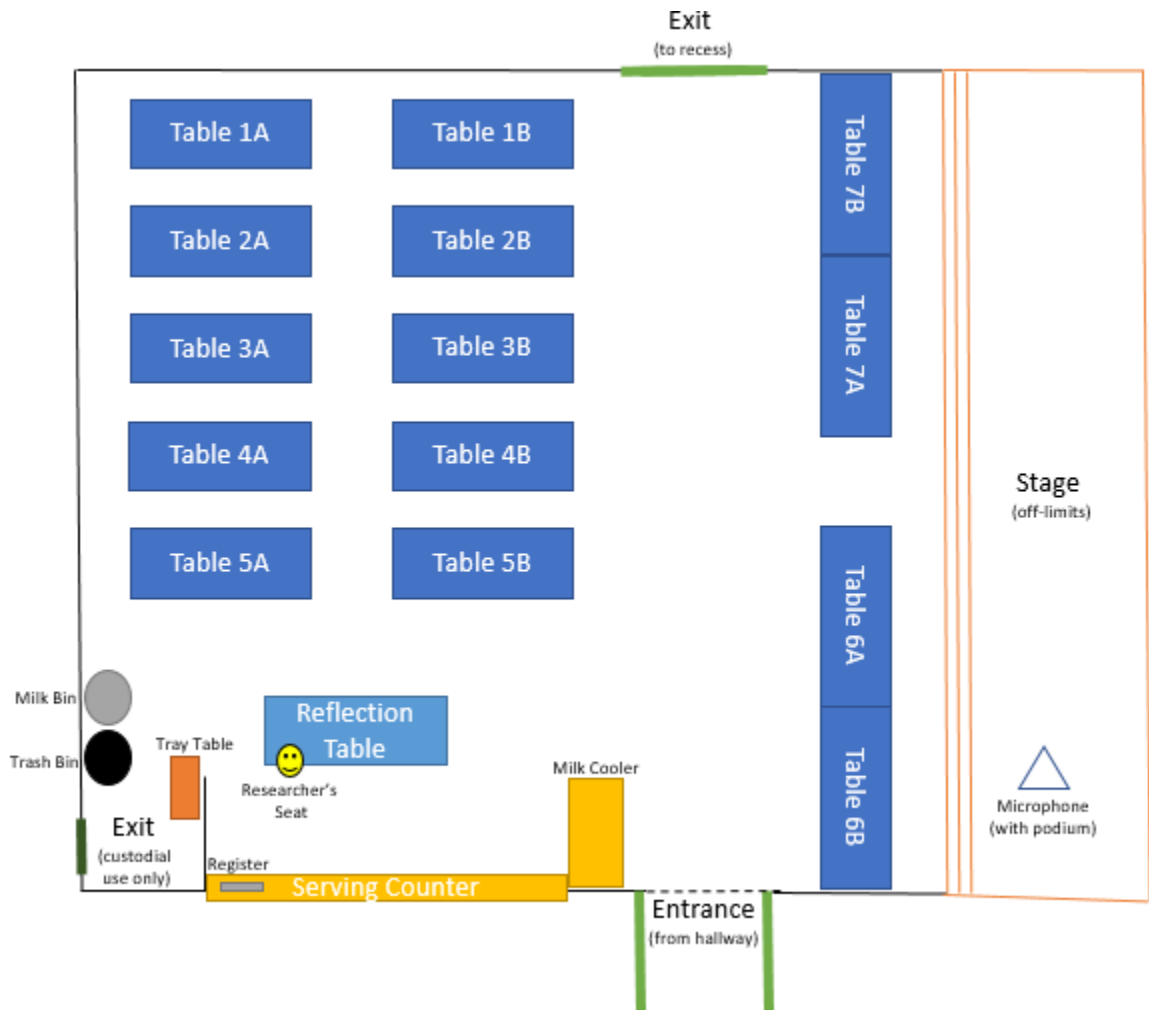
Week 6:

No School	Day 23 Tuesday
	Soft Tacos w/ Cilantro Lime Rice, or Deli Box
	Pinto Bean Salsa, Broccoli, or Mixed Fruit Cup
	Yogurt Cool Pack Plus

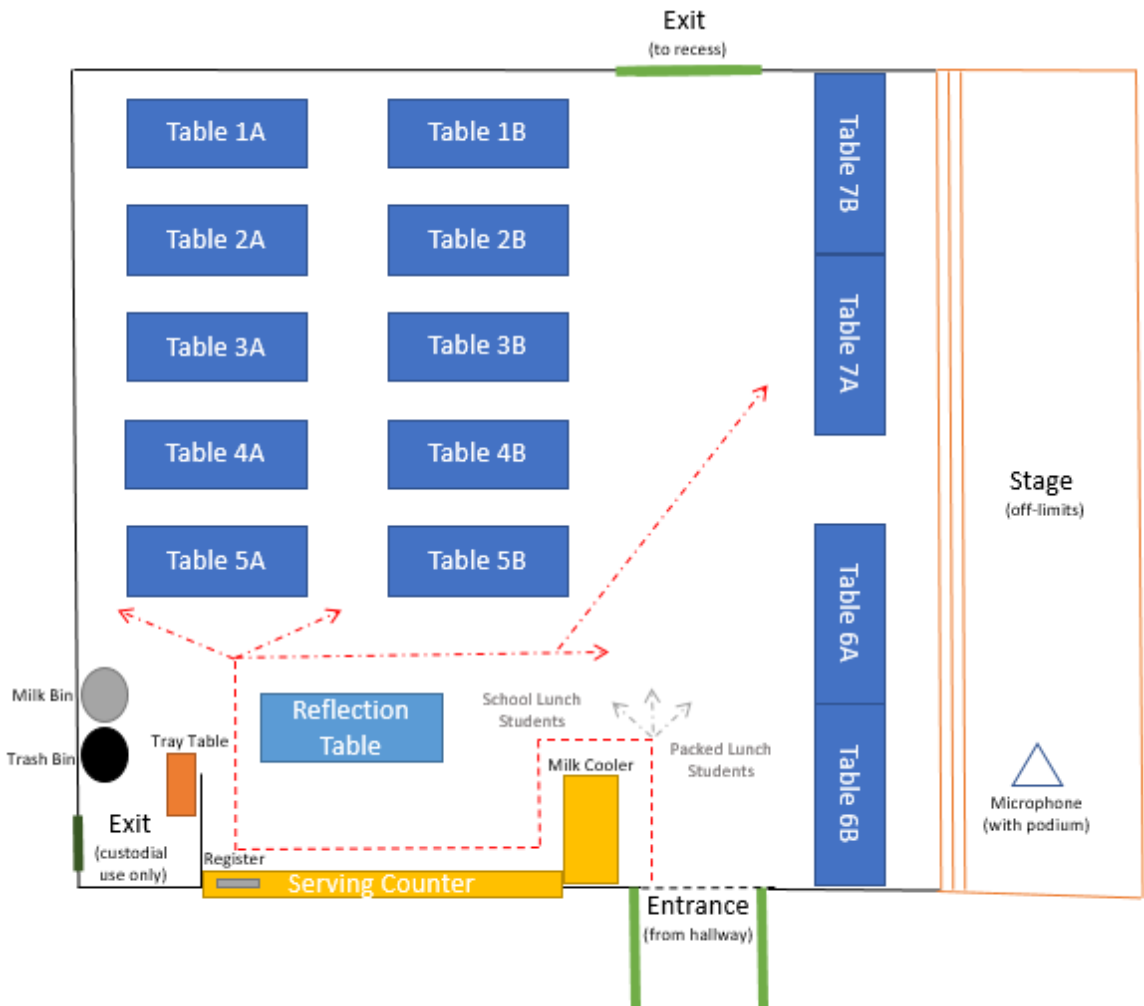
APPENDIX D: DIAGRAMS OF PINE HOLLOW CAFETERIA

Cafeteria Diagram 1

General

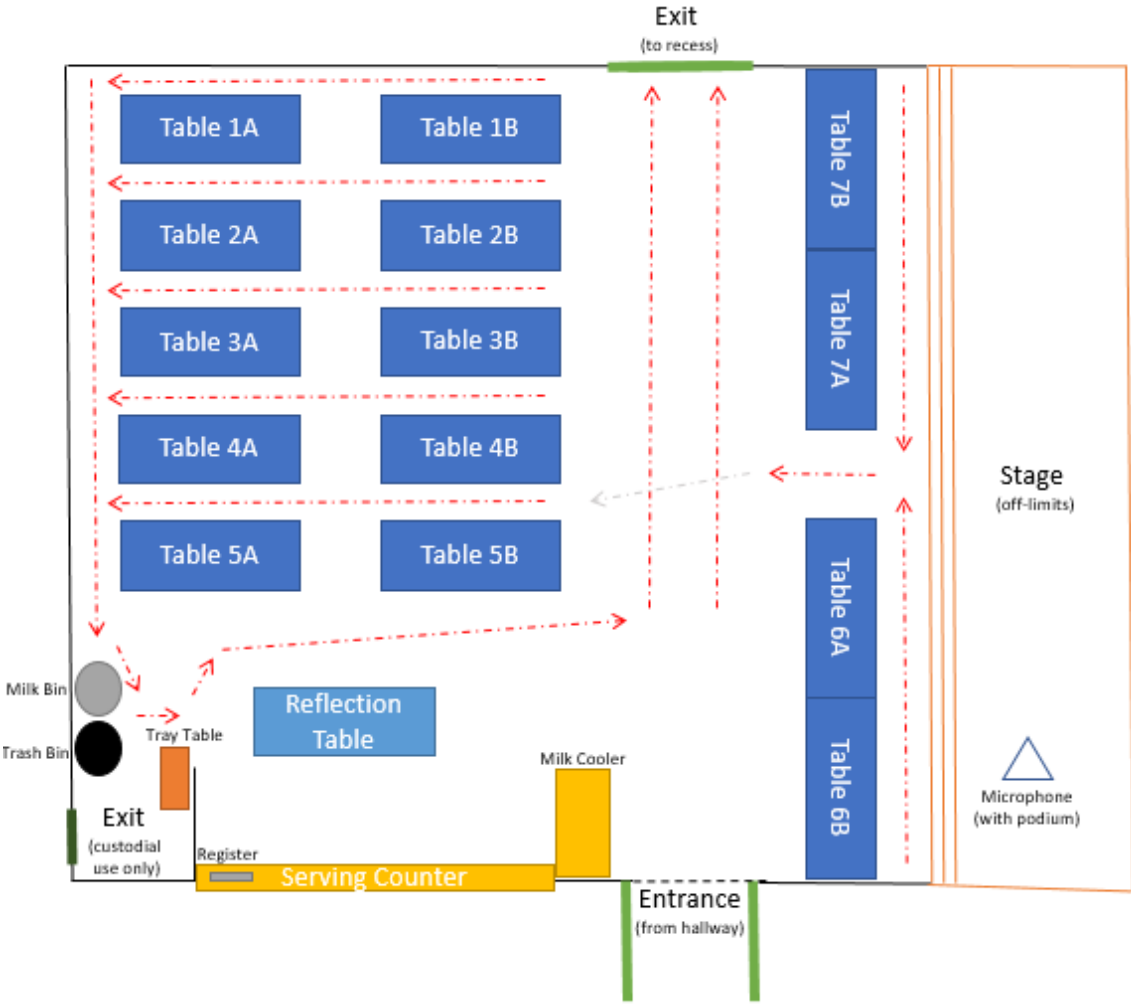


Cafeteria Diagram 2 Student Entrance Pathways

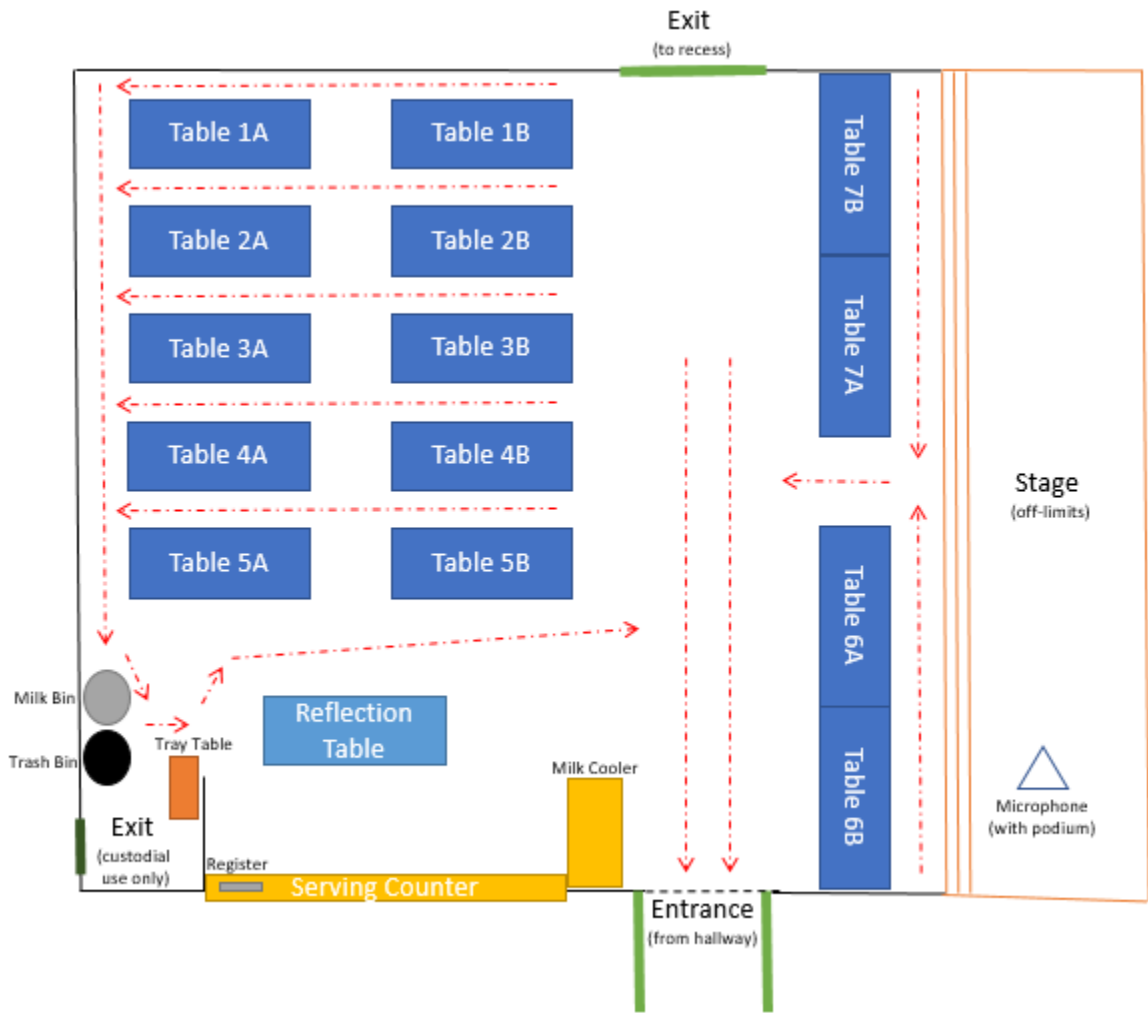


Cafeteria Diagram 3

Student Exit Pathways



Cafeteria Diagram 4 Student Exit Pathways (Wednesdays)



APPENDIX E: CAFETERIA OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**Observation Protocol for
“Cafeteria Culture: An Anthropological Approach to
Lunchtime in a Central Florida Elementary School”**

(for in-cafeteria, ethnographic observations)

This protocol outlines the steps that will be taken to observe the setting of the public school cafeteria. The protocol for this cafeteria observation of this ethnographic study includes:

- 1) Written notes on the physical space of the cafeteria and student-food interactions that occur during lunchtime,*
- 2) Photography of cafeteria food, icons, and objects, &*
- 3) Record adult unstructured interviews (informed conversations) that are volunteered during the observation period.*

1. Guidelines for note-taking:

Goal: To quietly observe and document student’s interactions within the school cafeteria.

- **Tools:** Use a blank composition book and pen to record observations
- **Protection:** Do not record student directory or otherwise identifiable information; use randomized (Student A, Student B, etc.) pseudonyms in any remarks that are recorded.
- **Step 1:** Attend the school’s lunch period(s) for a 1-month period
- **Step 2:** Use jot notes (free-hand pen and paper) to document general events, interactions, and details that occur in the cafeteria.
- **Step 3:** After the observation period has concluded, connect patterns from each day’s month-long observation:
 - Examples of daily observations: student’s behaviors in lunch line ordering/seat selection/commensality practices, socialization, popular food choices of the day, time dedicated to eating vs. talking, and common leftover meal items
 - Were there any trends that emerged over the observation period?
 - Were there any noticeable changes over the observation period on certain meal days or over time?

2. Guidelines for photography:

Goal: Take non-human photos that demonstrate images from the observed space (cafeteria) visual significance, making it easier

- Tools: Nikon COOLPIX L27 16.1-Megapixel Digital Camera
- Protection: Only photos of non-human items with no school/district names will be taken. Students will not be approached or hovered over in this process. All photos taken will be issued in the final GCPS Research Report.
- Step 1: Photograph non-human items, foods, and objects that will help record/characterize the cafeteria from students' perspective.
- Step 2: Focus on imagery that uses "close ups" of these objects so that:
 - Intimate detail from the students' scope is shown
(Ex. <http://www.spaceist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/virtuemart/product/spaceist-recent-project-english-heritage-close-up.jpg>)
 - The cafeteria room will not be fully portrayed and identified as the research site.

3. Guidelines for audio recording:

Goal: To record adult unstructured interviews that may occur in the observed space (cafeteria). NOTE: Not to be used for the observation process itself.

- Tools: Composition book and pen and/or Youthink Digital Voice Recorder
- Protection: (See Step 2)
- Step 1: *Only if approached by adults*, ask if they'd like to volunteer their thoughts on school lunch, food, etc.
- Step 2: Provide both the "Explanation of Research" Form and the "Adult Written Consent" Form and to secure written consent to audio record this informed conversation (i.e. unstructured interview)
- Step 3: With the permitted method, record adult interlocutor's perspectives.
- Step 4: Thank and give contact information (UCF card) if they have further questions about the study.

Table 1: Demographics of Students Interviewed **3. Guidelines for audio recording:**

Goal: To record adult unstructured interviews that may occur in the observed space

APPENDIX F: STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide for
“Cafeteria Culture: An Anthropological Approach to
Lunchtime in a Central Florida Elementary School”
(for semi-structured interviews with student participants)

1. How often do you eat the school’s lunch food?
2. What did you eat today? (Note: School-provided or home-provided)
 - Did you like it? Why or why not?
3. How do you choose or order the lunch food you will eat?
4. Are there rules at lunchtime? Explain.
5. Do you like the cafeteria food?
 - If yes: What are some of your favorite meals or food items?
 - If no: What do you not like about it?
6. Is there a certain meal or food item that you the do not always finish?
 - If yes, explain.
7. Besides eating, what do you do during lunchtime?
8. Is this school food different from the food you would eat at home?
9. Do you like food or eating with others, in general?
10. Are there any other things within the school cafeteria that would help me understand how you experience lunchtime?

Additional Impromptu (Emerging) Questions

- (Definition) What does the word “nutrition” mean?
- (Definition) What does the word “healthy” mean?
- Given the purpose of this study, are there any questions, thoughts, or ideas you would like me to share with the county or school lunch officials about your experience?

APPENDIX G: DEMOGRAPHIC TABLES AND CHARTS

Table 1:Demographics of Students Interviewed

Student	Grade	Age	Ethnicity	Sex
Tyler	K	5	White	M
Sasha	K	5	Asian	F
Lionel	1	7	White	M
Rachel	2	7	Hispanic	F
Shana	2	8	Multiracial	F
Lisa	2	8	Hispanic	F
Alexandra	3	9	Hispanic	F
Angela	3	9	White	F
Alvaro	3	9	Hispanic	M
Kevin	3	10	Black	M
Jessie	3	10	White	F
Naomi	4	10	White	F
Matthew	4	10	White	M
James	5	11	White	M
Elizabeth	5	11	White	F
Jennifer	5	11	Hispanic	F

Table 2: Interviewed Students by Lunch Source

Frequency of Lunch Source	Number of Participants
Always Packed Lunch	4
Mostly Packed Lunch	4
Even Mix	1
Mostly School Lunch	4
Always School Lunch	3

PROPORTION OF INTERVIEWED STUDENTS BY LUNCH SOURCE

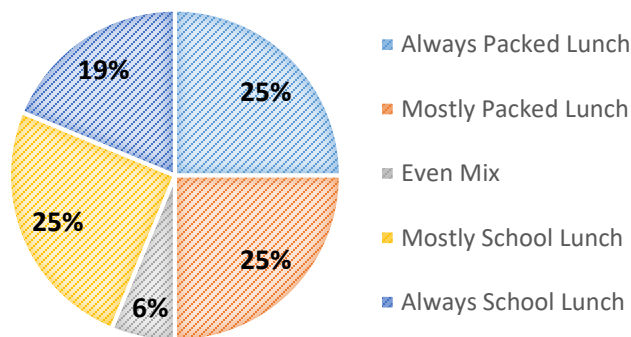


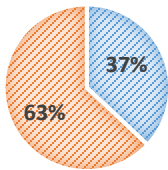
Table 3: Multilevel Demographics (by percent)

		Demographic Level		
		Participants	School	County
Sex	Male	37%	44%	Not listed
	Female	63%	56%	Not listed
Ethnicity	White	50%	47%	62%
	Black	6%	17%	29%
	Hispanic	32%	27%	Not listed
	Native American/ Alaskan Native	0%	>1%	>1%
	Asian/ Pacific Islander	6%	4%	5%
	Multiracial	6%	4%	3%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	31%	27%	42%
(Hispi/Non-Hisp)	Non-Hispanic	69%	63%	58%
Grade Level	Kindergarten	12%	17%	15.6%
	1st Grade	6%	15%	15.7%
	2nd Grade	19%	16%	16.6%
	3rd Grade	31%	19%	18.3%
	4th Grade	13%	16%	16.2%
	5th Grade	19%	17%	17.6%

Pie Charts Related to Table 3

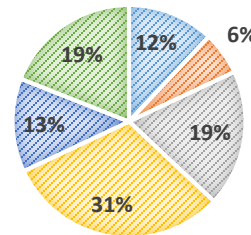
PROPORTION OF INTERVIEWED STUDENTS BY SEX

■ Male ■ Female



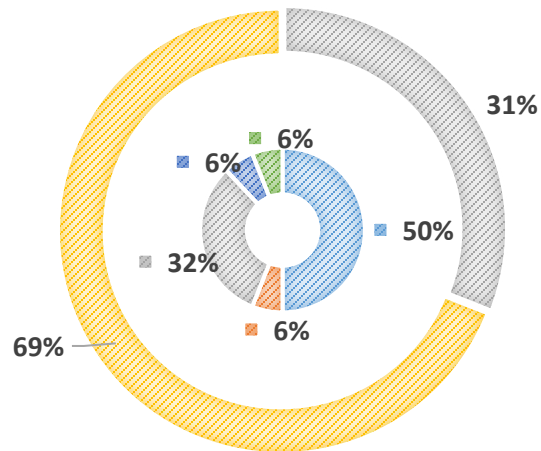
PROPORTION OF INTERVIEWED STUDENTS BY GRADE

■ Kindergarten ■ 1st Grade ■ 2nd Grade ■ 3rd Grade ■ 4th Grade ■ 5th Grade



PROPORTION OF INTERVIEWED STUDENTS BY ETHNICITY SOURCE

■ White
 ■ Black
 ■ Hispanic
 ■ Native American/ Alaskan Native
 ■ Asian/ Pacific Islander
 ■ Multiracial



APPENDIX H: FLORIDA DACS NEW MEAL PATTERNS



New Meal Pattern

Breakfast Meal Pattern



AT A GLANCE

	Grades K-5 ^a	Grades 6-8 ^a	Grades 9-12 ^a
	Amount of Food Per Week ^b (Minimum Per Day)		
Fruits (cups)^{cd}	5 (1) ^e	5 (1) ^e	5 (1) ^e
Vegetables (cups)^{cd}	0	0	0
Dark green ^f	0	0	0
Red/Orange ^f	0	0	0
Beans/Peas (Legumes) ^f	0	0	0
Starchy ^f	0	0	0
Other ^g	0	0	0
Additional Vegetables to Reach Total ^h	0	0	0
Grains (oz eq)ⁱ	7 (1) ^j	8 (1) ^j	9 (1) ^j
Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq)	0 ^k	0 ^k	0 ^k
Fluid Milk (cups)^l	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week			
Min-Max Calories (kcal)^{mno}	350-500	400-550	450-600
Saturated Fat (% of total calories)^{no}	<10	<10	<10
Sodium (mg)^{np} Target 1, 2014-2015	≤540mg	≤600mg	≤640mg
Target 2, 2017-2018	≤485mg	≤535mg	≤570mg
Final Target, 2022-2023	≤430mg	≤470 mg	≤500mg
Trans Fat^{op}	Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of <u>trans</u> fat per serving.		

Lunch Meal Pattern



	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
	Amount of Food Per Week ^b (Minimum Per Day)		
Fruits (cups)^{cd}	2 1/2 (1/2)	2 1/2 (1/2)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups)^{cd}	3 3/4 (3/4)	3 3/4 (3/4)	5 (1)
Dark green ^f	1/2	1/2	1/2
Red/Orange ^f	3/4	3/4	1 1/4
Beans/Peas (Legumes) ^f	1/2	1/2	1/2
Starchy ^f	1/2	1/2	1/2
Other ^g	1/2	1/2	3/4
Additional Vegetables to Reach Total ^h	1	1	1 1/2
Grains (oz eq)ⁱ	8 (1)	8 (1)	10 (2)
Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq)	8 (1)	9 (1)	10 (2)
Fluid Milk (cups)^l	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week			
Min-Max Calories (kcal)^{mno}	550-650	600-700	750-850
Saturated Fat (% of total calories)^{no}	<10	<10	<10
Sodium (mg)^{np} Target 1, 2014-2015	≤1230mg	≤1360mg	≤1420mg
Target 2, 2017-2018	≤935mg	≤1035mg	≤1080mg
Final Target, 2022-2023	≤640mg	≤710mg	≤740mg
Trans Fat^{op}	Nutrition label or manufacturer specifications must indicate zero grams of <u>trans</u> fat per serving.		

a In the SBP, the above age-grade groups are required beginning July 1, 2013 (SY 2013-14). In SY 2012-2013 only, schools may continue to use the meal pattern for grades K-12 (see § 220.23).
 b Food items included in each food group and subgroup and amount equivalents. Minimum creditable serving is ½ cup.
 c One quarter-cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit; 1 cup of leafy greens counts as ½ cup of vegetables. No more than half of the fruit or vegetable offerings may be in the form of juice. All juice must be 100% full-strength.
 d For breakfast, vegetables may be substituted for fruits, but the first two cups per week of any such substitution must be from the dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes) or "Other vegetables" subgroups as defined in § 210.10(c)(2)(ii).
 e The fruit quantity requirement for the SBP (5 cups/week and a minimum of 1 cup/day) is effective July 1, 2014 (SY 2014-2015).
 f Larger amounts of these vegetables may be served.
 g This category consists of "Other vegetables" as defined in § 210.10(c)(2)(ii)(E). For the purposes of the NSLP, "Other vegetables" requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans/peas (legumes) vegetable subgroups as defined in § 210.10(c)(2)(ii).

h Any vegetable subgroup may be offered to meet the total weekly vegetable requirement.
 i At least half of the grains offered must be whole grain-rich in the NSLP beginning July 1, 2012 (SY 2012-2013) and in the SBP beginning July 1, 2013 (SY 2013-2014). All grains must be whole grain-rich in both the NSLP and the SBP beginning July 1, 2014 (SY 2014-15).
 j In the SBP, the grain ranges must be offered beginning July 1, 2013 (SY 2013-2014).
 k There is no separate meat/meat alternate component in the SBP. Beginning July 1, 2013 (SY 2013-2014), schools may substitute 1 oz. eq. of meat/meat alternate for 1 oz. eq. of grains after the minimum daily grains requirement is met.
 l Fluid milk must be low-fat (1 percent milk fat or less, unflavored) or fat-free (unflavored or flavored).
 m The average daily amount of calories for a 5-day school week must be within the range (at least the minimum and no more than the maximum values).
 n Discretionary sources of calories (solid fats and added sugars) may be added to the meal pattern if within the specifications for calories, saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium. Foods of minimal nutritional value and fluid milk with fat content greater than 1 percent milk fat are not allowed.
 o In the SBP, calories and trans fat specifications take effect beginning July 1, 2013 (SY 2013-2014).
 p Final sodium specifications are to be reached by SY 2022-2023 or July 1, 2022. Intermediate sodium specifications are established for SY 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. See required intermediate specifications in § 210.10(f)(3) for lunches and § 220.8(f)(3) for breakfast.

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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services • Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner

APPENDIX I: FEDERAL REGISTER 82 USDA NOTICE



or by phone to respond. It is envisioned that the contractor would then conduct the web based survey and interviews thereafter.

Estimate of Burden: NIFA used burden estimates administered through contractor led web based survey to estimate the burden for SBIR, but anticipates the transactions for project

initiation may be reduced because grant application information will be used to prepopulate many fields. The total annual burden for the SBIR Program collection is 2500 hours.

Types of respondents	Number of respondents	Frequency of response	Average time per response hours	Annual burden hours requested
USDA SBIR Phase II Grantees	500	1	5	2500

Comments: Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request to OMB for approval. All comments will become a matter of public record.

Obtaining a Copy of the Information Collection: A copy of the information collection and related instructions may be obtained free of charge by contacting Robert Martin as directed above.

Done at Washington, DC, this 23rd day of March, 2015.

Catherine E. Woteki,
Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics.

[FR Doc. 2015-07373 Filed 3-30-15; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food and Nutrition Service

Child Nutrition Programs—Income Eligibility Guidelines

AGENCY: Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: This notice announces the Department's annual adjustments to the Income Eligibility Guidelines to be used in determining eligibility for free and reduced price meals and free milk for the period from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. These guidelines are used by schools, institutions, and facilities participating in the National School Lunch Program (and Commodity School

Program), School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program for Children, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program. The annual adjustments are required by section 9 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act. The guidelines are intended to direct benefits to those children most in need and are revised annually to account for changes in the Consumer Price Index.

DATES: *Effective Date:* July 1, 2015.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Vivian Lees, Branch Chief, Operational Support Branch, Child Nutrition Programs, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA, Alexandria, Virginia 22302, or by phone at (703) 305-2322.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This action is not a rule as defined by the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601-612) and thus is exempt from the provisions of that Act.

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3507), no recordkeeping or reporting requirements have been included that are subject to approval from the Office of Management and Budget.

This notice has been determined to be not significant and was reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

The affected programs are listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under No. 10.553, No. 10.555, No. 10.556, No. 10.558 and No. 10.559 and are subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. (See 2 CFR 415.3-415.6).

Background

Pursuant to sections 9(b)(1) and 17(c)(4) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(1) and 42 U.S.C. 1766(c)(4)), and sections 3(a)(6) and 4(e)(1)(A) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1772(a)(6) and 1773(e)(1)(A)), the Department annually issues the Income Eligibility Guidelines for free and reduced price meals for the National School Lunch Program (7 CFR part 210),

the Commodity School Program (7 CFR part 210), School Breakfast Program (7 CFR part 220), Summer Food Service Program (7 CFR part 225) and Child and Adult Care Food Program (7 CFR part 226) and the guidelines for free milk in the Special Milk Program for Children (7 CFR part 215). These eligibility guidelines are based on the Federal income poverty guidelines and are stated by household size. The guidelines are used to determine eligibility for free and reduced price meals and free milk in accordance with applicable program rules.

Definition of Income

In accordance with the Department's policy as provided in the Food and Nutrition Service publication *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*, "income," as the term is used in this notice, means income before any deductions such as income taxes, Social Security taxes, insurance premiums, charitable contributions and bonds. It includes the following: (1) Monetary compensation for services, including wages, salary, commissions or fees; (2) net income from nonfarm self-employment; (3) net income from farm self-employment; (4) Social Security; (5) dividends or interest on savings or bonds or income from estates or trusts; (6) net rental income; (7) public assistance or welfare payments; (8) unemployment compensation; (9) government civilian employee or military retirement, or pensions or veterans payments; (10) private pensions or annuities; (11) alimony or child support payments; (12) regular contributions from persons not living in the household; (13) net royalties; and (14) other cash income. Other cash income would include cash amounts received or withdrawn from any source including savings, investments, trust accounts and other resources that would be available to pay the price of a child's meal.

"Income," as the term is used in this notice, does *not* include any income or benefits received under any Federal programs that are excluded from consideration as income by any statutory prohibition. Furthermore, the

value of meals or milk to children shall not be considered as income to their households for other benefit programs in accordance with the prohibitions in section 12(e) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and section 11(b) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1760(e) and 1780(b)).

The Income Eligibility Guidelines

The following are the Income Eligibility Guidelines to be effective from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. The Department's guidelines for free meals and milk and reduced price meals were obtained by multiplying the year 2015 Federal income poverty guidelines by 1.30 and 1.85, respectively, and by

rounding the result upward to the next whole dollar.

This notice displays only the annual Federal poverty guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Human Services because the monthly and weekly Federal poverty guidelines are not used to determine the Income Eligibility Guidelines. The chart details the free and reduced price eligibility criteria for monthly income, income received twice monthly (24 payments per year), income received every two weeks (26 payments per year) and weekly income.

Income calculations are made based on the following formulas: Monthly

income is calculated by dividing the annual income by 12; twice monthly income is computed by dividing annual income by 24; income received every two weeks is calculated by dividing annual income by 26; and weekly income is computed by dividing annual income by 52. All numbers are rounded upward to the next whole dollar. The numbers reflected in this notice for a family of four in the 48 contiguous States, the District of Columbia, Guam and the territories represent an increase of 1.7 percent over last year's level for a family of the same size. The income eligibility guidelines table follows below.

INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES
[Effective from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016]

Household size	Federal poverty guidelines	Reduced price meals—185%					Free meals—130%				
		Annual	Monthly	Twice per month	Every two weeks	Weekly	Annual	Monthly	Twice per month	Every two weeks	Weekly
48 Contiguous States, District of Columbia, Guam and Territories											
1	11,770	21,775	1,815	908	838	419	15,301	1,276	638	589	295
2	15,930	29,471	2,456	1,228	1,134	567	20,709	1,726	863	797	399
3	20,090	37,167	3,098	1,549	1,430	715	26,117	2,177	1,089	1,005	503
4	24,250	44,863	3,739	1,870	1,726	863	31,525	2,628	1,314	1,213	607
5	28,410	52,559	4,380	2,190	2,022	1,011	36,933	3,078	1,539	1,421	711
6	32,570	60,255	5,022	2,511	2,318	1,159	42,341	3,529	1,765	1,629	815
7	36,730	67,951	5,663	2,832	2,614	1,307	47,749	3,980	1,990	1,837	919
8	40,890	75,647	6,304	3,152	2,910	1,455	53,157	4,430	2,215	2,045	1,023
For each additional family member add	4,160	7,696	642	321	296	148	5,408	451	226	208	104
Alaska											
1	14,720	27,232	2,270	1,135	1,048	524	19,136	1,595	798	736	368
2	19,920	36,852	3,071	1,536	1,418	709	25,896	2,158	1,079	996	498
3	25,120	46,472	3,873	1,937	1,788	894	32,656	2,722	1,361	1,256	628
4	30,320	56,092	4,675	2,338	2,158	1,079	39,416	3,285	1,643	1,516	758
5	35,520	65,712	5,476	2,738	2,528	1,264	46,176	3,848	1,924	1,776	888
6	40,720	75,332	6,278	3,139	2,898	1,449	52,936	4,412	2,206	2,036	1,018
7	45,920	84,952	7,080	3,540	3,268	1,634	59,696	4,975	2,488	2,296	1,148
8	51,120	94,572	7,881	3,941	3,638	1,819	66,456	5,538	2,769	2,556	1,278
For each additional family member add	5,200	9,620	802	401	370	185	6,760	564	282	260	130
Hawaii											
1	13,550	25,068	2,089	1,045	965	483	17,615	1,468	734	678	339
2	18,330	33,911	2,826	1,413	1,305	653	23,829	1,986	993	917	459
3	23,110	42,754	3,563	1,782	1,645	823	30,043	2,504	1,252	1,156	578
4	27,890	51,597	4,300	2,150	1,985	993	36,257	3,022	1,511	1,395	698
5	32,670	60,440	5,037	2,519	2,325	1,163	42,471	3,540	1,770	1,634	817
6	37,450	69,283	5,774	2,887	2,665	1,333	48,685	4,058	2,029	1,873	937
7	42,230	78,126	6,511	3,256	3,005	1,503	54,899	4,575	2,288	2,112	1,056
8	47,010	86,969	7,248	3,624	3,345	1,673	61,113	5,093	2,547	2,351	1,176
For each additional family member add	4,780	8,843	737	369	341	171	6,214	518	259	239	120

Authority: Section 9(b)(1) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(1)).

Date: March 26, 2015.
Jeffrey J. Tribiano,
Acting Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service.

[FR Doc. 2015-07358 Filed 3-30-15; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3410-30-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food and Nutrition Service

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC): Income Eligibility Guidelines

AGENCY: Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA.

ACTION: Notice

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture ("Department") announces adjusted income eligibility guidelines to be used by State agencies in determining the income eligibility of persons applying to participate in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC). These income eligibility guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the WIC Regulations.

DATES: Effective Date July 1, 2015.

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