



Balanced Menu REPORT CARD

SUMMARY

El Segundo Unified School District menus succeed in offering daily meatless meals, including warm meatless meals at lunch. However, the menus fail to restrict high-cholesterol red meats, offer diverse vegetables and fresh fruit, emphasize 100% whole grains, provide plant-based meals and legumes daily, and advertise non-dairy milk alternates. In addition, processed meats should be eliminated from the menus, and the menus should be more transparent about items offered. Due to these deficits, the menus at El Segundo USD for the 2019-2020 year earn an "F" score.



STRENGTHS



Dark green leafy vegetables offered regularly



Warm, meatless meals offered daily at lunch

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



Offer all classes of vegetables at least twice per week



Diversify menu by offering warm entrees centered around plant-based proteins daily



Immediately remove processed meat (chicken nuggets, hot dogs, bacon, pepperoni, lunch meat)



Restrict high-cholesterol foods like red meat and eggs



Emphasize 100% whole grains and restrict ultra-processed products heavy in refined grains and sugars



Serve water or plant-based milk options and restrict sugar-added varieties of all milk



Add portion sizes of all meats to the menu to improve transparency



Offer legumes in some form every day



Offer fresh fruit daily

BALANCING MENUS

Given that a significant and increasing proportion of children today show signs of metabolic syndrome, including high blood cholesterol, and diabetes or pre-diabetes, focusing menu reforms on three dietary components—saturated fat, cholesterol, and fiber—is a particularly high-impact way to improve food environments so that they will promote children's long-term health.

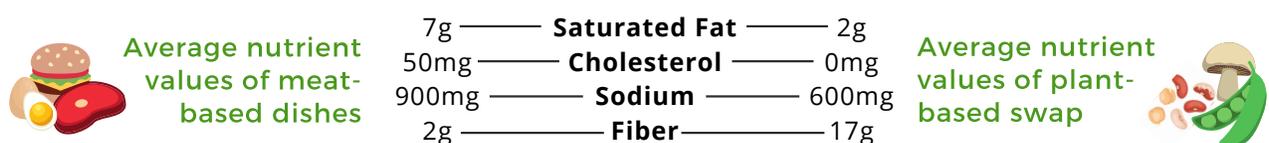
There is a robust causal link between saturated fat intake and elevated LDL cholesterol levels, a well-established marker for risk of heart disease and cardiovascular events. In addition to increasing risk for cardiovascular diseases, higher saturated fat intake is a significant risk factor for systemic inflammation, insulin resistance, and obesity.

Furthermore, the oxidation of dietary cholesterol, found only in animal products, poses significant potential health risks. Cholesterol oxidation products (COPs) are likely involved in both initiation and progression of chronic diseases, including atherosclerosis, neurodegenerative disease, kidney failure, and diabetes.

Regrettably, less than 3% of American children meet or exceed the minimum adequate intake of fiber per day, which may constitute the most widespread nutrient deficiency in the United States. This profound lack of dietary fiber—found in phytonutrient-rich, whole plant foods but not highly refined foods or animal products—combined with general overconsumption of saturated fats and cholesterol is a clear indicator of the imbalance of our food environments and the need for change.

ENHANCING HEALTHFULNESS

School districts like El Segundo USD have improved the healthfulness of their menus by balancing their menus to feature more fresh, whole-food plant products and fewer meat and ultra-processed food products. An example of one simple change that accomplishes both is below. The following information assumes the serving size for each entree is 3 ounces. For a custom assessment, please contact us at menus@balanced.org.



Replacing one meat-based entree per week with a plant-based entree would:



Replacing one chocolate chip cookie dessert with 1/2 cup of strawberries would **eliminate**:

