TACOS (Trying Alternative Cafeteria Options in Schools)

TARGET AUDIENCE

This program is for students in high school.

SUMMARY

The TACOS (Trying Alternative Cafeteria Options in Schools), a school-based program, is designed to increase the availability, selection, and participant purchase of lower-fat food choices in à la carte areas of high school cafeterias.

EVIDENCE

Results from one randomized controlled trial of TACOS in 20 Minnesota schools showed that the intervention had a significant positive effect on sales of lower-fat foods, students’ perceptions of a greater availability of lower-fat food choices in the cafeteria à la carte areas, and greater support for purchasing lower-fat foods at school. However, there were no differences between intervention and control schools in students’ self-reported food choices or behavioral intentions to buy fewer high-fat foods or more lower-fat foods.

COMPONENTS

The TACOS program implements two main components to address the school food environment:

- Food availability in à la carte areas: Increase the availability of lower-fat foods (i.e., 5 grams or less of fat per serving) offered à la carte (i.e., foods sold separately from the federally reimbursable school lunch program and offered at least 3 days per week). The program intends to increase lower-fat food availability to 30% relative to baseline levels assessed at the beginning of the program. The final goal is to have 50% of à la carte products be lower fat.

- Peer promotions: Implement student-led promotional activities, such as media campaigns, taste testings, public service announcements, poster contests, raffle events, and newspaper advertisements to promote awareness and purchase of lower-fat foods.

In order to track à la carte sales, a computerized tracking system could be utilized.

PREVIOUS USE

The TACOS study was implemented in 20 high schools during the 2000 to 2002 school years.
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TRAINING

Current training information was not located. However, in the 2000 to 2002 school years, TACOs staff trained food service staff on how to enter sales of higher-fat and lower-fat à la carte items into the computer. In addition, TACOS staff visited the schools every 3 weeks to ensure accuracy. TACOS staff also met with the food service staff quarterly to assess progress towards meeting the goal of having 50% of à la carte products be lower fat. Training was provided for student groups and faculty advisers for promotional activities.

CONSIDERATIONS

Considerations for implementing this program include acquiring buy-in from school administration, food service staff, and students and making adequate arrangements for and allowing students time to complete promotion activities.

The Clearinghouse can help address these considerations. Please call 1-877-382-9185 or email Clearinghouse@psu.edu

IMPLEMENTATION

If you are interested in implementing TACOS program, the Clearinghouse is interested in helping you! Please call 1-877-382-9185 or email Clearinghouse@psu.edu

TIME

The program is implemented over 2 school years. Each student-led promotion requires approximately 2 to 3 weeks for preparation, and promotions last 1 to 5 days.

COST

Program implementation costs were not located; however, student groups were offered financial incentives ranging from $100 to $300 for completing each promotion. Food service staff received small financial incentives if their accuracy in accounting for the food items was high.

EVALUATION PLAN

To move TACOS to the Promising category on the Clearinghouse Continuum of Evidence, at least one evaluation should be performed demonstrating positive effects lasting at least six months from program completion.

The Clearinghouse can help you develop an evaluation plan to ensure the program components are meeting your goals. Please call 1-877-382-9185 or email Clearinghouse@psu.edu

CONTACT

Contact the Clearinghouse with any questions regarding this program. Phone: 1-877-382-9185 Email: Clearinghouse@psu.edu

You may also contact Simone French by mail University of Minnesota, Division of Epidemiology & Community Health, 1300 South Second St., Suite 300 Minneapolis, MN 55454, phone 1-612-626-8594, or email frenc001@umn.edu

SOURCE

French, Story, Fulkerson, and Hannan (2004).