ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Impact of a Labeling Initiative on the Food Choices of High School Students Aged 18 Years and Older

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Many strategies have been attempted to influence adolescents to make positive food choices in the high school cafeteria. However, no simple, familiar, or easy-to-use strategies were identified in the literature. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if the implementation of a symbol-based nutrition labeling system was associated with an increase in the number of healthy foods purchased by students 18 years of age and older in a high school cafeteria in central Indiana. The researcher hypothesized that students, especially females, would choose a higher number of healthy foods after the implementation of a symbol-based labeling system. Baseline data (e.g., the type of food/drink each student purchased) was collected from 20 volunteers prior to the intervention. During the next four weeks, posters were hung in the cafeteria to explain the new labeling system as it related to nutrition and food choice. During the fifth week of the study, coded foods were sold in the cafeteria and the students’ food purchases were recorded. Only 13 of the original 20 students completed the post-assessment (4=female, 9=male). Results indicated there were no statistically significant changes in the type of foods purchased after the intervention, either overall or by gender.