

**Title:** Application of the New School Lunch Standards: A Self-Assessment by School Communities

**Authors:** Jessie Curran, Linda Berlin, PhD, Peter Callas, PhD, Amy Nickerson, MS, RD, University of Vermont

**Learning Outcome:** To describe common challenges for school communities in incorporating the national school lunch and breakfast standards.

**Abstract:**

For the first time in more than 15 years, the national nutrition standards for school meals were reformed to more accurately reflect the current obesity epidemic and latest nutrition science. The new standards were met with criticism; skeptics argue the lofty goals are unachievable without additional financial and administrative support. Despite these challenges, Vermont communities are working to create healthier school environments. Supported by a Team Nutrition Training grant, nine school teams, defined as food service personnel, teachers, parents, school administrators, and nurses, were accepted into the Nutrition Education Institute (NEI); an intensive 3-day training program held in June 2012. One of the NEI goals was to help schools succeed at meeting the Healthier US School Challenge (HUSSC) criteria. The objective of the present study was to determine how well the teams were able to assess whether or not they were meeting the HUSSC guidelines. Prior to attending the NEI, the nine participating schools completed a self-assessment rubric where they ranked their perception of progress toward the standards. Their responses were compared to actual progress, determined by a one week menu analysis of whole grain, fruit, and vegetable offerings. The purpose was to determine if the self-assessment tool was a valid proxy for a complete menu analysis. Results and conclusions are pending. Preliminary analysis suggest that self-assessment tool is not a reliable substitution; however, the findings have provided insight into what requirements are most challenging for schools and where future interventions can be targeted.