

## **Appendix C - School Recruitment Letters**

Note: there are three different research scenarios. The variable components are coded in green, red, and blue. The red text will be used in cases where the schools have existing technologies or grab and go lines and the blue text will be cases where the schools will be introducing one or both of the interventions. The green text will go to only those schools where we will be testing taking pictures as a method of capturing items on a tray.



Date

<<Name>>, <<Title>>  
<<School Name>>  
<<Address>>  
<<City, State, Zip>>

Dear <<Name>>:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is working on strategies to increase students' selection of reimbursable meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs while improving the accuracy of school food authority (SFA) claims for USDA reimbursement. FNS has partnered with <<SFA Name>> to identify schools that may be willing to participate in the study, and <<SFA Name>> identified your school as a possible participant.

The reason we developed this study is because our research finds that program errors result from mistakes in identifying meals as reimbursable at the point of sale, referred to as "meal claiming" error. The overwhelming majority of meal claiming errors are "overclaims," when a non-reimbursable meal is recorded as reimbursable. To help counter that problem, we developed this project to test changes in the ways that students select their meals. The study is designed to find an easy way to increase the percent of trays that meet the requirements for reimbursement. Simply increasing reimbursable meal selection will necessarily mean that meal claiming error goes down.

Schools have already identified and started implementing methods to increase the percent of reimbursable meals that are selected and at the same time, help their students move through the cafeteria more quickly. We want to take advantage of the work that these schools have already started. It's important that you know that FNS specifically designed this study to have minimal impact on the schools that have agreed to work with us. Therefore, we are keeping the data gathering components to a minimum. Baseline data will be collected on the number of reimbursable meals served and the total number of meals served. Since schools already collect and report that information, we believe that these numbers should be easy to provide for this study. After the interventions, the same data will be collected again, i.e., data on the number of reimbursable and total meal counts.

We are excited about this project and hope that we will be able to work with you to test strategies to increase the number of reimbursable meals that get to the cashier in your school cafeteria. Specifically, we will work with you to determine the best option or options for <<School Name>>, which may include [\[creating a\]](#) [\[modifying your\]](#) grab and go line and/or [\[instituting a\]](#) [\[modifying your\]](#) school meal pre-ordering system. [\[We have developed a paper-based pre-ordering form that students can use to pre-order their school meals and we are happy to work with you to customize it for your students.\]](#) Some schools may use only the grab and go modifications while others may only work with pre-ordering systems. Still

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other schools may combine some form of grab and go and pre-ordering. We will work with you to determine what the best interventions in your school.

We know that your school uses, or will be using [software name] to allow your students to pre-order their meals. We will work with [vendor] to incorporate the menu options that will be available during the project and to determine how best to de-identify the records that will eventually be sent to FNS. For example, the data that's sent to FNS will not include any identifying information, such as the student's name, student ID number, or eligibility status but will include a randomly assigned ID number.

Our study team is also hoping to test the feasibility of a new method of data collection for studies that rely on recording the content of students' trays. In previous research efforts, meal observations have relied on data collectors to observe and record the names of individual food items on students' trays. The new method will involve taking pictures of only the trays (there will be no pictures with people). At the end of the project, FNS will evaluate the pictures to determine if this is a viable method for collection of information on the number of complete meals served in a given cafeteria line. We will not require any data from the school, nor will we be trying to make any assessment as to whether a meal claiming error might have occurred. This project is simply to determine the viability of using pictures in place of written notes based on observations. Data collectors will be instructed and trained to only take pictures of the trays and to ensure that no students are included in the photographs, even in the background. FNS staff will review the photographs and will delete any that contain identifiable images of children from the data storage device.

Participation in this study is voluntary. The information that we collect from this study will be kept private to the full extent provided by law, as mandated by the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. §552a).

We will have a member of the project team follow up directly with your office to provide more information and to discuss in greater detail how the project will work in <<school name>>. In the meantime, please feel free to contact the team if you have any questions:

USDA: (<<REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT>>) or Edward Harper (FNS, Child Nutrition Programs), who may be reached at (703) 305-2340 or by e-mail at [Edward.Harper@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Edward.Harper@fns.usda.gov).

The food service manager at <<SFA NAME>>, (<<Food Service Manager NAME>>), has already been contacted by the project team and the State CN

Thank you in advance for your help and cooperation. We look forward to working with you on this important project.

Sincerely,

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