

DESCRIPTION

Serving healthy choices in the lunch room, limiting availability and marketing of unhealthy foods/sugary drinks, and making water available to students throughout the day are some of the ways that schools can help prevent obesity.¹ Paying attention to the food environments children face at school is an important way to help improve population health.

HOW WE ARE DOING

While there are limited data available specific to the school-based food environment in Ramsey County, the Minnesota Student Survey is one source of information about students' consumption of unhealthful foods and sugary drinks (though survey responses are not limited to the school environment). Compared to 2013, 2016 saw a slight decrease in the percentage of Ramsey County students reporting the consumption of 1 or more sugar-sweetened beverages (including pop or soda, sports drinks such as Gatorade or Powerade, energy drinks such as Red Bull or Jolt, and other drinks such as sweet tea, lemonade, coffee drinks or juice drinks), and a slight increase in those consuming water.

In terms of financial availability, the 2017 price per meal at Ramsey County Public Schools averaged \$3.83 for every lunch and \$1.06 for every breakfast. This was 35 cents more expensive than statewide prices for lunch, and 20 cents lower than the state for breakfast meals. The price for breakfast in specific school districts ranged from \$0.64 (White Bear Lake District) to \$1.64 (Saint Paul School District); the price for lunch ranged from \$3.24 (Saint Paul School District) to \$4.40 (Roseville Public Schools).²

DISPARITIES

Research at the national level suggests Hispanic youth are particularly likely to be in schools that are surrounded by convenience stores, fast-food restaurants or snack stores (increasing access to unhealthy options and potentially negating the effects of health education in the classroom).³

For those with soft drinks available at school in a U.S. study, rates of at-school and overall consumption were highest among African-American children, children from low-income households and those who reside in rural areas.⁴

RISK FACTORS

Environments with easy access to unhealthy foods can have a negative impact on health.¹

WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Saint Paul- Ramsey County Public Health works extensively with county school districts to develop initiatives that increase access to healthy foods, including the formation of wellness teams and champions to implement school-specific strategies; adopting policies related to healthier foods at fundraisers, celebrations and in vending machines; and adding water-bottle filling stations to discourage sugar-sweetened beverages. (Enhanced data on schools selling or offering sweetened beverages to students are expected in the near future).

(continued on back)

Information to note

- Limiting the availability of unhealthful foods and sugary drinks in schools can help prevent obesity.
- More work is needed to get a full picture of the food environment in Ramsey County schools.

¹ School Meals, Competitive Foods, and the School Food Environment. Harvard T.H. Chan. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-prevention/schools/school-meals-competitive-foods-and-the-school-food-environment/>. Accessed October 2018.

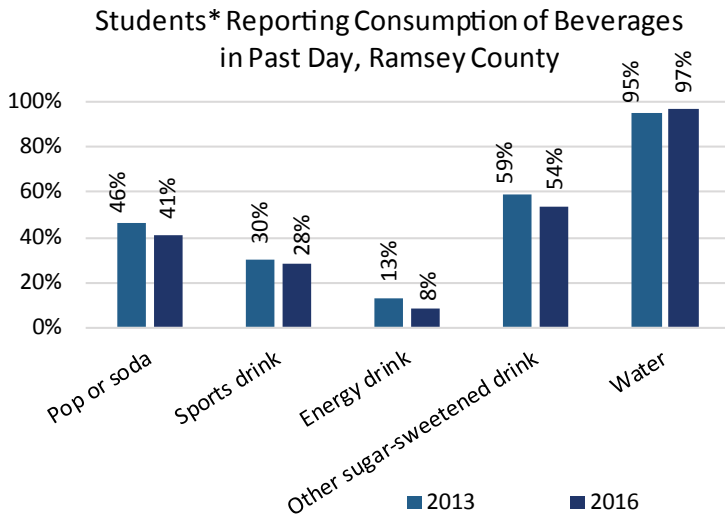
² Food Service Financial Report. Minnesota Department of Education. <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=396>. Accessed October 2018.

³ Sturm R. Disparities in the food environment surrounding U.S. middle and high schools. Healthy Eating Research. 2008. <http://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/disparities-in-the-food-environment-surrounding-u-s-middle-and-high-schools/>. Published July 2008. Accessed October 2018.

⁴ Fernandes MM. The effect of soft drink availability in elementary schools on consumption. Healthy Eating Research. 2008. <http://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/the-effect-of-soft-drink-availability-in-elementary-schools-on-consumption/>. Published September 2008. Accessed October 2018.

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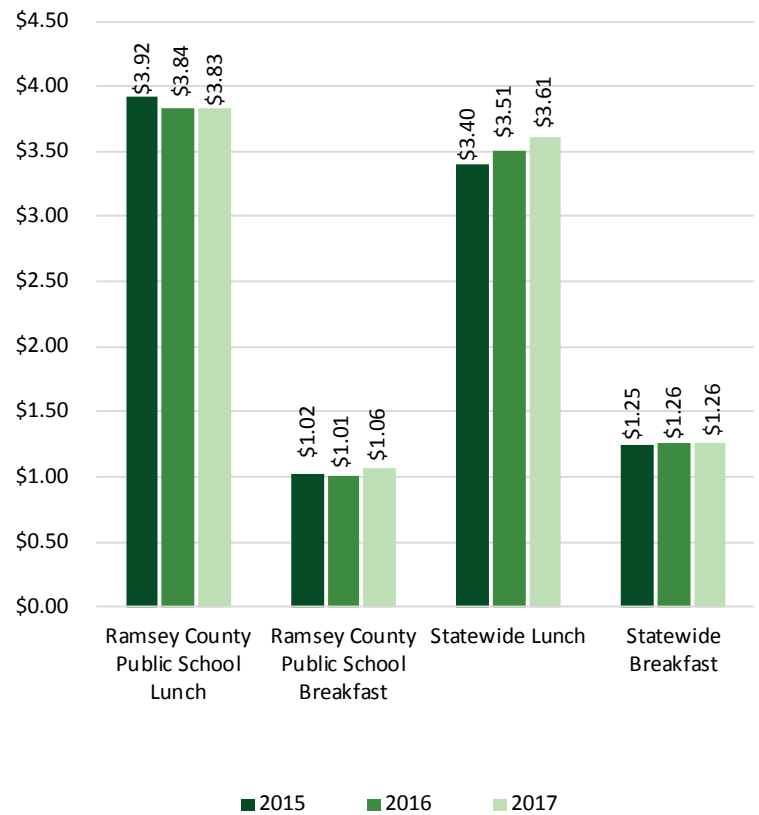
In addition, Ramsey County is engaging in initiatives such as Rethink Your Drink, a tool to educate both youth and adults on (a) how much sugar is consumed in sugary beverages such as soda, juice, energy drinks and sports drinks, (b) alternatives to sugary drinks such as infused water, and (c) the long-term risks from consuming too many sugary drinks such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes.



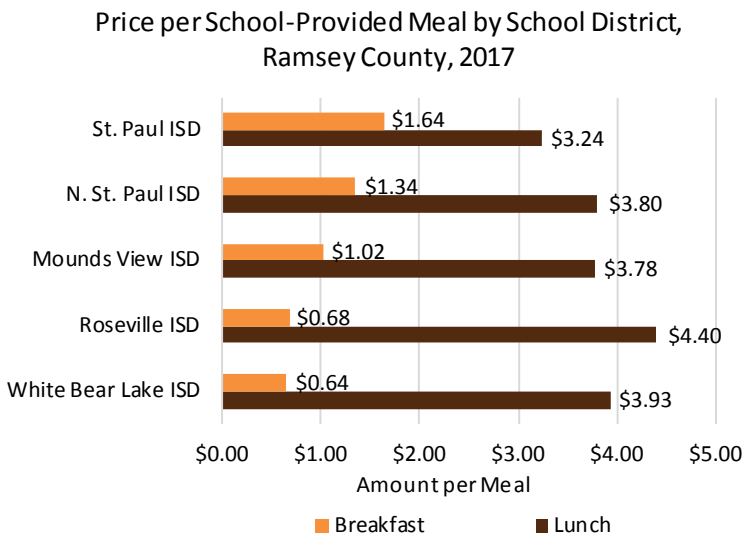
*5th, 8th, 9th and 11th graders.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education.⁵

Cost of Breakfast and Lunch Meal in Public Schools, Minnesota and Ramsey County, 2015-2017



Source: Minnesota Department in Education.⁶



Source: Minnesota Department of Education.⁶

⁵ Minnesota Department of Education. Minnesota Student Survey 2013 and 2016. <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=242>. Accessed November 2018.

⁶ Food Service Financial Report. Minnesota Department in Education Web site. <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=396>. Accessed November 2018.