

School study finds racial gap in salad bar use

November 23, 2015 9:00 AM Carolyn Scofield

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Most New Orleans students are using new salad bars that have been installed in public school cafeterias since 2011, but African-American students are less likely to dine from them than peers, according to a Tulane University study.

Researchers from the [Tulane Prevention Research Center](#) found that 60 percent of New Orleans students surveyed utilized salad bars in 12 public schools. But white and other minority students were twice as likely to use salad bars as African-American students.

"Knowing there are gaps in how salad bars are used, with some students benefiting more than others, is important because many schools in New Orleans and across the country have started using salad bars in their cafeterias," said Carolyn Johnson, director of Tulane PRC, a unit of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. "With this information we can help schools, and anyone who works with schools, address the gaps so all children are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables."

Researchers also examined students' food attitudes. Students who had a preference for healthy foods encouraged those around them to eat healthy foods, and those who encouraged their family and peers to eat healthy foods were more likely to eat from their schools' salad bars.

"Our findings suggest that schools might benefit from targeting specific factors, such as healthy food preference, to increase the use and success of their salad bars. For example, schools could include more nutrition education for students and increase their exposure to a variety of fruits and vegetables at early ages," said Johnson, a professor in the Department of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences.

The study is based on surveys with approximately 700 students in 7th to 12th grades. The 12 New Orleans schools that participated in the study had received donated salad bar equipment through the national Let's Move! Salad Bars to Schools initiative beginning in 2011.

The study was published recently in the [Journal of School Health](#).