

Menu of Actions

Appetizers

COLLECTING INPUT: LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS

Like starting a meal with an appetizer, you can start making your program more culturally inclusive with one of these actions. Each action increases community input and engagement. For an overview of the options below, watch ["Strategies for Engaging School Communities"](#) within OSPI's Recipe Development course.

- ◆ **Learn how students experience mealtime** using No Kid Hungry's [Meal Observation tool](#)
- ◆ **Develop a student or family survey** to assess menu preferences and belonging. You might involve students in the survey design, using EcoLiteracy's [School Lunch Survey tool](#).
- ◆ **Solicit feedback from students, families, and/or the community** through focus groups, interviews, or meetings.
 - [Pages 9-12 of Action for Healthy Kids' \(AFHK\) Collaboration Guide](#) offers helpful guidance. Review [this example](#) to see how you might conduct a focus group and [New York State Education Department's Focus Group Guidebook](#).
- ◆ **Convene a student advisory group** to brainstorm, taste test, and provide feedback.
 - Check out [this Institute of Child Nutrition \(ICN\) resource](#) for Student Nutrition Advisory Council best practices.

Small Plates

PROVIDE EDUCATION: INTRODUCE A SNACK OR SAMPLE

If you're not ready for the full, 3-course meal, try a small plate. You will be hungry for more in no time! Small plates are a meaningful way to provide cultural education and increase belonging.

- ◆ **Plan an educational taste test** that allows students to sample a culturally important food using [Team Nutrition's Taste Testing event resources](#) or [Food Corp's toolkit](#). Consider coordinating an event with a cultural celebration or heritage week ([Heritage Months in 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Introduce mealtime-friendly learning experiences** by bringing in a speaker or building in activities like those included in Pilot Light's [Food Education Lesson Plans](#). While written for the classroom, some activities highlighting cultural foods could work at mealtime.
- ◆ **Use Farm to Child Nutrition Program resources, like** [OSPI's Harvest of the Month](#) to provide education related to local produce items that have cultural significance.
- ◆ **Highlight global flavors in a themed-week using the School Nutrition Association's** ["Taste The World"](#) resources, which include recipe ideas, student activity guides, and social media posts.

3 – Course Meal

INTRODUCE A NEW CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE MENU ITEM

You're hungry for action and ready for the 3-course meal. If you choose this option, you commit to all three steps to introduce a new culturally inclusive menu item.

First Course: Find a Recipe

Option A — Source recipes from your school or afterschool community. Asking your school or afterschool community for recipes is the strategy that is most likely to meet the unique needs and preferences of your students.

- ◆ Consider **holding a recipe competition or recipe submission week** like [West Valley School District's Junior Chef Competition](#) that solicits favorite recipes from staff, families, and students. Use [the Institute of Child Nutrition's \(ICN\) Recipes from Home Template](#) to collect recipes.
- ◆ Work with a **local cultural organization** to source a recipe. See [ICN's Strategies for Soliciting Recipes from the School Community](#) from their [Recipe Standardization Guide](#) which provides tips and tricks for engaging with staff, families, and the community.
- ◆ **Don't forget your staff!** Check out [this story from Napa Valley Unified School District](#) about a staff suggestion that became a lunchtime success!

Option B — Find existing Child Nutrition Program recipe(s) that could be culturally relevant to your students. **You could also start with any recipe you like or find online.** Use OSPI's [Recipe Development Training](#) for step-by-step guidance on adapting recipes.

USDA Standardized Recipes

- ◆ [Child Nutrition Recipe Box - School Meals Recipes](#)
- ◆ [Child Nutrition Recipe Box - Child Care Recipes](#)

Other Recipes and Resources*

- ◆ [Food Hero's Community Collections \(also includes great educational resources!\)](#)
- ◆ [Serving Traditional Indigenous Foods in Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- ◆ [SNAP-Ed Cultural Meals Toolkits \(scroll down\)](#)
- ◆ [Serving Up Tradition - See page 18-27 for recipes](#)
- ◆ [Healthy School Meals Recipes - See filters on left and filter by "cuisine"](#)
- ◆ [Cambridge Schools Culturally Inclusive Recipes](#)
- ◆ [CACFP Cultural Meals and Snacks - National CACFP Association](#)

*As a reminder, Child Nutrition Program sponsors are responsible for ensuring standardized recipes and menus meet meal pattern requirements. The Food Buying Guide (FBG) and Recipe Analysis Workbook (RAW) are tools to help Child Nutrition Programs determine the expected meal pattern contribution for standardized recipes. For more information on how to standardize recipes, visit the Institute of Child Nutrition's USDA Recipe Standardization Guides for the [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) or [School Nutrition Programs](#).

Second Course: Standardize Your Recipe

Whether you source your recipe from the community, develop a new recipe, or identify an existing Child Nutrition Program recipe, **any recipe with two or more ingredients should be standardized**. Utilize these resources to help you standardize your recipe to your program needs.

- ♦ See the [USDA Recipe Standardization Guide](#) for a step-by-step walkthrough of the standardization process.
- ♦ Check out [OSPI's Recipe Development Training](#) for support standardizing recipes.
- ♦ Use the [USDA standardized recipe template](#).

Third Course: Taste Test Your Recipe

Before introducing a new menu item, informal and formal taste tests can ensure the menu item meets student needs. While cultural authenticity can be hard to achieve, culturally inspired menu items still honor the cultures from which they originated. The key is not to assume; the best practice is to let students and families taste test new dishes and provide feedback.

- ♦ **Host a taste test using ICN's resources** to gauge acceptability and gather feedback. Leverage [Team Nutrition posters and graphics](#) to market your taste test.
- ♦ Create **an event that allows families and community** members to sample possible menu item(s) like this event held in [by Loudin County Public Schools in Virginia](#).
- ♦ **Collaborate with staff members, community organizations, or groups with cultural knowledge** to taste test and consider the appropriateness of the recipe in development.

Beverages

MARKETING YOUR EVENT, GROUP, OR MENU ITEM

Whatever your choice in meal, everyone needs a beverage! **Don't forget this marketing** in launching any cultural inclusivity initiative.

- ♦ Use ICN's [Planning for a Successful New Recipe Launch](#). It includes best practices for introducing a culturally inclusive meal with suggestions for staff training, recipe preparation, and marketing.
- ♦ Use the Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition (CICN)'s [Implementing New Items on the Menu Tip Sheet](#) for guidance. Even if you aren't introducing new menu items, many of the suggested activities are relevant to all menu actions.
- ♦ Download this ["Serving Up Tradition" Toolkit from Mass Farm to School](#) for some easy to implement marketing steps (see page 11).

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