

Menu of Actions

Posters and Signs: *Make Nutrition Visible and Vibrant*

Use colorful posters, bulletin boards, or digital signs to encourage healthy choices and highlight nutritious foods. Posters that connect to classroom lessons or events can generate even more interest.

- **Download or order free posters** from [Team Nutrition's Resource Catalog](#) and refresh posters regularly.
- **Invite students to create nutrition-themed posters** for your cafeteria or meal program. You can partner with a classroom teacher or consider hosting a school or organization-wide contest. Inspire students' art by sharing information about the foods or messages that you would like to promote. [The Lunch Box](#) offers ideas for poster themes, art contest tips, and templates.

Focus on Food Groups: *Show Students How to Build a Balanced Meal*

Whether you operate Offer Versus Serve (OVS), family style, or serve-only meal service, the USDA Child Nutrition Program meal patterns help students learn the components of a healthy meal. Teaching students about food groups reinforces what makes a healthy plate.

- **Use [food group graphics](#), labels, or signage** to show how menu items contribute to a balanced meal. Team Nutrition's [Today's Breakfast](#), [Today's Lunch](#), or [Offer Versus Serve](#) posters show how school meal components align with the five food groups.
- **Offer classroom visits, cafeteria tours, or other hands-on practice building a balanced meal** outside of busy meal periods. Roleplay how students select meals with reminders about commonly missed components.

Nudges and Prompts: *Make the Most of Mealtime Interactions*

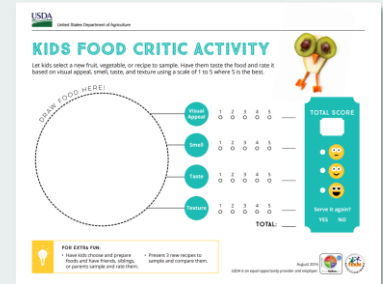
The way you offer menu items can help students learn about and get excited to try nutritious foods. [Research](#) shows both verbal and visual prompts encourage students to choose foods. For example, students were more likely to eat a fruit serving when asked, "Would you like an apple with your lunch?"

- **Craft quick prompts or enticing labels** to promote foods. Highlight the food's cultural connections or how it is prepared. Mention its health benefits or sensory qualities. Your enthusiasm can inspire students' curiosity: "I love how roasting carrots makes them sweeter. Would you like to try them?"
- **Using fixed options can guide choices while maintaining students' autonomy:** "Would you like the spinach salad or stir-fried broccoli?"
- **Iowa State University's [Cafeteria Coaching Toolkit](#) offers examples of messages** to encourage healthy choices without pressuring (pg. 5) and to promote fruits and vegetables (pgs. 11-13).

Taste Tests: *Explore New Foods and Flavors*

Taste tests can engage students of all ages, provide exposure to new foods and flavors, and support the success of new menu items. Taste tests pair well with other nutrition education strategies and can be an exciting way to connect to what students are learning in the classroom.

- Team Nutrition's [Ingredients for a Successful Taste Test Event](#) and [Taste Testing Resources](#) offer a **taste test how-to guide, posters, stickers, and ballots**. Sharing results with students shows that you value their opinions and may increase their interest in giving foods another try.
- Seeing, touching, and smelling foods can increase students' willingness to accept new foods. **Incorporate sensory education** by encouraging students to compare the appearance, texture, and flavor of foods. Use the USDA's [Kids Food Critic Activity Sheet](#) or include sensory qualities on your taste test ballot (like this [sample ballot](#) shared by a Wisconsin Team Nutrition project) to encourage students to use all their senses.



Promotions & Events: *Turn to the Calendar for Inspiration*

Heritage months, holidays, and calendar observances provide fun nutrition education opportunities throughout the year. National School Breakfast Week in March, Earth Day in April, or Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May are a few of the events that can inspire menu items, taste tests, engaging activities, and community connections.

- Check out the **School Nutrition Association's annual Promotion Calendar** for a wide variety of special days, weeks, and months that can inspire activities throughout the year.
- **Celebrate National Nutrition Month® in March.** Visit the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website](#) for ideas and resources. Completing the Academy's quick [permission form](#) permits use of the copyrighted campaign name, theme, and images on menus, bulletin boards, and materials.
- **Plan for National Farm to School Month, Farm to CACFP Week, and Taste of Washington Day** in October.

Modeling: *Involve Staff, Families, or Student Leaders*

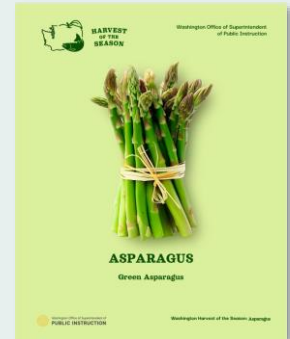
[Research](#) shows that children are more willing to try new foods when they see their peers or adults eating them. Adults or older students can help model adventurous eating and their involvement can encourage participation in meal programs.

- **Ask staff, volunteers, or families to participate** in meals, taste tests, or events to show students how enjoyable nutritious foods can be.
- Peer influence is powerful! **Engage student leaders as role models** for their peers or younger students. Iowa State University's free [Cafeteria Coaching Toolkit](#) offers a how-to guide for engaging middle and high school student volunteers as meal program mentors.

Farm to Child Nutrition Programs: *Feature Washington Grown Foods*

Locally grown and farm-raised products are nutritious and delicious. Featuring Washington-grown foods in your menus or taste tests can entice students to try new foods, teach about food systems and agriculture, and strengthen family and community connections.

- **Participate in *Harvest of the Season*.** OSPI's [Harvest of the Season toolkits](#) feature 24 foods available throughout the year from Washington farmers, ranchers, and fishers. Each toolkit includes a poster, family newsletter, classroom activities, recipes, crediting information, and more.
- **Invite farmers to join students for a meal or taste test.** You can also help teachers connect with farmers for classroom visits, field trips, or virtual tours.
- **Afterschool Programs, check out this quick (15 minute) training:** [Fresh from the Farm: Farm to School and Out-of-School Time Programs](#). Create a free Alliance for a Healthier Generation [Action Center](#) account to access.



Gardening: *Get Hands-on with Food from Seed to Table*

Whether students have access to a school or community garden or start seeds in containers on a windowsill, gardening activities offer impactful, hands-on learning for all ages. Growing food promotes positive attitudes about fruits and vegetables and increases students' willingness to try them.

- **Explore [Team Nutrition's Garden Resources](#).** [The Great Garden Detective Adventure](#) (grades 3-4) or [Dig In](#) (grades 5-6) curriculum kits incorporate gardens with lesson plans, activities, and materials for use in the cafeteria, classroom, and at home.
- **Partner with teachers to make the garden a learning laboratory.** Gardens of any size are ripe with opportunities to teach math, science, social studies, and more. Check out [The Edible Schoolyard Project's Resource Library](#) for free lesson plans and materials.
- **Feature garden-grown produce in meals or taste tests.** USDA's fact sheet, [Using Gardens to Grow Healthy Habits](#) and OSPI's [School Garden Reference Sheet](#) cover some basics. The [Garden to Cafeteria Toolkit](#) from Whole Kids offers a detailed guide to get started.

More Washington & Northwest Grown Resources

[Washington Farm to School Network](#): Join the statewide network or the [School Agriculture & Garden Education \(SAGE\) Community of Practice](#).

[Northwest Youth Garden Network](#): For programs serving middle and high school youth in food, farm, and garden education programs.

[Washington Grown Food & Recipe Kit](#): This section of WSDA's [Farm to School Toolkit](#) includes educational materials, recipes, and facts for 50 different locally grown or produced foods.

[Washington Agriculture in the Classroom](#): WAIC publishes [Ag@School](#), a free student magazine for Washington 4th grade classrooms.



Culinary Activities: *Encourage Cooking Confidence*

Cooking activities engage students and support the skills needed to confidently select, prepare, and enjoy a variety of foods. Children are more willing to try foods they help prepare.

- **Plan a chef demonstration** using [The Lunch Box's toolkit](#).
- **Choose a lesson plan that includes hands-on activities with food** such as one of Pilot Light's large collection of [Food Education Lesson Plans](#).
- **Invite students to develop new meal or snack recipes** for your program. Partner with a culinary class or consider hosting a [cooking competition](#). [How School Lunch Is Made and How You Can Help](#) provides an excellent overview of the school lunch program and requirements.

Afterschool Programs: *Build Life-long Skills with Engaging Activities*

Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to offer fun and engaging enrichment activities that build real-world skills. While many of the actions on this menu are perfect for afterschool, the resources below were developed specifically for out-of-school time.

- [Food and Fun After School](#) offers 11 lessons to pick from with activities for children, recipes and taste tests, and ways to connect with parents. The curriculum was developed by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in partnership with YMCA of the USA.
- The National Recreation and Park Association's [Commit to Health: Foods of the Month](#) curriculum includes lesson plans for grades K-2 and 3-5, posters, activity pages, experiential activities, and family newsletters to build food literacy.
- [Team Nutrition Cooks!](#) features cooking-based nutrition activities for afterschool programs.

Classroom Connections: *Promote Your Program as a Learning Resource*

Collaborating with teachers promotes your meal program as a learning laboratory and extension of the classroom. Many of the actions in this menu can be bridges to the classroom. Look for opportunities to share resources, link to the classroom curriculum, or support nutrition education activities.

- **Talk with teachers about upcoming lesson plans and ways you can support students' learning.** For example, what regions or cultures are students learning about? Is there a culturally important food you can feature in a taste test or on your menu? Are there messages from health class you can reinforce with visual prompts or posters? Reach out early to support advance planning.
- **Choose a tried and tested event from the [Team Nutrition Popular Events Idea Booklet](#).** Each event includes ideas for teachers, child nutrition staff, and other partners to team up.
- **Consider co-creating nutrition education activities tailored to your students.** The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's [Creating Collaborative Nutrition Education](#) tool is designed to foster nutrition services and classroom collaboration. Create a free Action Center account to download.
- **Provide or partner on nutrition and food education in the classroom.** The next page highlights several resources. Your capacity, the class's interests and needs, and partner involvement can all influence the best fit. Start with conversations to help find the right choice.

Selected Curriculum Resources

USDA Team Nutrition

- **[The Great Garden Detective Adventure \(3-4\) and Dig In! \(5-6\)](#)**
Connects the school garden to the classroom, cafeteria, and home while encouraging students to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- **[How School Lunch Is Made and How You Can Help \(6-8\)](#)**
Inspired by questions from students, this guide provides information about what's in a school meal, who decides what's on the menu, and how students can have a voice in the process.

Child Nutrition Sharing Site

- **[Forecasting Your Future - Nutrition Matters: A Curriculum for Nutrition and Wellness \(9-12\)](#)**
Designed as a collaboration between teachers and school nutrition professionals, this curriculum includes three units: "Dietary Guidelines Through MyPlate;" "Implementing Food Policy through the School Meal Program;" and "Factors Affecting Fruit and Vegetable Consumption." The Indiana Department of Education developed the curriculum as part of a Team Nutrition Training Grant.
- **[Food Activities for Tight Teaching Schedules \(1-2\)](#)**
Through a Team Nutrition Training Grant, the Iowa Department of Education developed a collection of [food-related learning activities that take 10-20 minutes](#). The activity sheets can be used to educate students about foods that are found in school lunch and breakfast menus. The activity sheets provide physical activities, learning activities, and taste testing activities that can be implemented in classrooms to teach students about 12 different foods.

Additional Sources

- **[Pilot Light Food Education Center - Lesson Plan Library \(K-12\)](#)**
Create a free account to explore Pilot Light's large library of food education lessons that connect to a range of content areas. Examples include "Salad: Solutions & Mixtures" and "Map Your Meal."

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