

# HOW TO BUILD A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

The Healthy Choice, the Easy Choice

---



## WELCOME

### Greetings!

We at the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement National Office are pleased to share with you this updated National Smarter Lunchrooms Handbook. As with the previous version, this Handbook, available for free to download from [SmarterLunchrooms.org](http://SmarterLunchrooms.org), provides schools with the knowledge, motivation, and support needed to build lunchroom environments that make the healthy choice the easy choice for all students.

This book includes many of our most important tools, including a recruitment flyer, the 60-point Scorecard for assessing lunchrooms, and a detailed explanation of why each strategy is effective and how to implement it. The 60-point Scorecard can also be utilized digitally using our online Scorecard Tracker. This convenient online tool can be used to assess schools in real time, to store records and photographs, and to compare multiple assessments over time. Paper versions of the Scorecard and the link to register for the online Scorecard Tracker can be found at [SmarterLunchrooms.org/scorecard](http://SmarterLunchrooms.org/scorecard). The Scorecard is also available for download in Spanish and 508-compliant versions.

Two strategies have been updated in response to the conclusion of the HealthyUS School Challenge program. Within the School Community section, the action item regarding connections to food programs has been split and expanded into two items. Involvement with one or more national food promotion programs such as Fuel Up to Play 60 still counts for one item, and now involvement with local business, including Farm to School and farmers' markets, counts as a separate item. This minor change ensures that schools do not lose a point as a result of the conclusion of the HUSSC program, while further incentivizing schools to reach out to local organizations to be partners in their Smarter Lunchrooms initiatives. The corresponding sections of the Handbook have been updated to match.

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement continues to expand its reach throughout the 50 states, now reaching 35,000 schools. These versatile, simple, low- or no-cost strategies can help every school promote healthy choices and nudge students to select, eat, and enjoy healthy foods in school. We appreciate your efforts to bring this message to schools and schoolchildren throughout America.

We look forward to supporting your efforts in 2019. We will continue to bring you new and improved tools and resources to make your work in schools easier and more effective. Visit [SmarterLunchrooms.org](http://SmarterLunchrooms.org) frequently and subscribe to our social media channels to stay connected to new content, news, webinars, and training opportunities.

In good health,

Dr. David Just, Director  
Adam Brumberg, Deputy Director  
Erin Sharp, MS, MAT, Curriculum designer  
Smarter Lunchrooms Movement National Office



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics is funded in part by U.S.D.A. E.R.S/F.N.S grant 59-5000-5-0110.

Additional support for the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement has been provided by The Cornell Food and Brand Lab and the Target Corporation.

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement National Office Team thanks Heidi Kessler for her vision and leadership in the creation of this handbook and Katie Baildon, Smarter Lunchrooms Communication Specialist, Erin Sharp, Smarter Lunchrooms Curriculum Developer, Lauren Gabuzzi, Smarter Lunchrooms Coordinator, Heather Hodson, Smarter Lunchrooms Research Assistant, Adam Brumberg, Deputy Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab, and Sandra Cuellar, Director of eXtension CoP Healthy Food Choices in School for their content contributions.

### Rules of Use:

This project was funded at least in part by the U.S.D.A. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

© 2019, Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (B.E.N. Center)

The contents of this book are the intellectual property of the Smarter Lunchrooms National Office and the B.E.N. Center. **You may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for training, provided it is credited "courtesy of the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement National Office and the B.E.N. Center."** These materials may not be sold.

For more information, please contact [smarterlunchrooms@cornell.edu](mailto:smarterlunchrooms@cornell.edu).

All rights reserved.

### Updates to this handbook:

Initially released in winter 2017, this handbook is a living document that will be updated online as new research and ideas are collected. Updates to the print version will be made in January and June. You can always find the latest content on our website at [www.smarterlunchrooms.org](http://www.smarterlunchrooms.org).



# THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS MOVEMENT



## NUDGING KIDS TO EAT HEALTHIER

Smarter Lunchrooms is a nationwide movement based on proven strategies for nudging students to select and eat the healthiest foods in the school lunchroom. To date, nearly 30,000 elementary, middle and high schools have successfully used Smarter Lunchroom strategies. Smarter Lunchrooms is dedicated to providing schools with the knowledge, motivation, and resources needed to build a lunchroom environment that makes *the healthy choice the easy choice*.

### The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement...

- Is easy and inexpensive to implement
- Grows school meals participation
- Increases student satisfaction
- Uses simple evidence-based strategies to gently nudge students to make healthy choices
- Empowers, energizes, and engages school nutrition staff
- Increases the amount of healthy food students eat and reduces waste



### 5 Easy Smarter Lunchroom Changes

- Offer sliced or cut fruit
- Offer fruits and vegetables in all service lines
- Keep milk coolers full throughout meal service
- Offer at least 2 types of fruit and 2 types of vegetables
- Offer pre-packaged salads or a salad bar to all students



**IT'S NOT NUTRITION UNTIL IT'S EATEN!**

# THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS MOVEMENT - IT WORKS!



↑40%

Offering vegetables in two locations can result in students taking up to **40%** more



↑54%

Holding recess before lunch can increase vegetable and fruit consumption by **54%**



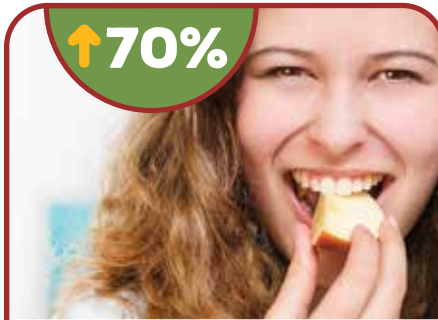
↑100%

Moving fruit from a stainless steel tray to a colorful fruit bowl can **double** sales



↑30%

Giving healthy food choices fun, descriptive names - for example, calling green beans "supercharged green beans" - can increase consumption by over **30%**



↑70%

Offering sliced fruit can increase student consumption by over **70%**



↑70%

Suggesting students take a fruit can increase the number of students eating (not just taking) a fruit by as much as **70%**

"I really appreciate the partnership with the B.E.N. Center and the work Smarter Lunchrooms has done across this country to encourage children to eat healthier meals. What's really beneficial is that the whole entire initiative has science to back it up."

**Katie Wilson**  
Deputy Under Secretary  
for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services

"Strategies like Smarter Lunchrooms give schools simple, actionable, low-cost steps that help make sure that the healthy food on kids' plates ends up in their stomachs."

**Tom Vilsack**  
United States Secretary  
of Agriculture

"We started implementing the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement techniques and we saw an increase in our fruit selections by putting those fruits at the point of sale. We've also seen an increase in the white milk ... so we are seeing choices made by the students have improved drastically."

**Melinda Bonner**  
Director of Child Nutrition  
Hoover City Schools



**VISIT SMARTERLUNCHROOMS.ORG TO GET STARTED!**





# THE SMARTER LUNCHROOM SCORECARD

---

The Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard contains 60 simple, no-cost or low-cost strategies that lunchrooms can use to increase participation, improve consumption of healthy food, and reduce food waste. The strategies are based on research from the Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs and partners. Thousands of schools across the country use the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard to assess and implement evidence-based strategies that make the healthy choice the easy choice. Public health professionals, including those at SNAP-ED agencies, health departments, education departments, universities, extension, and obesity prevention programs use the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard to measure improvements to the school nutrition environment.

There are three parts to the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard:

**The Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard:**

The nation's premier tool to assess the use of evidence based and best practices strategies in lunchrooms

**Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard Summary:**

Complete this page alongside the scorecard to provide a quick snapshot of the results

**Frequently Asked Questions**

about the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard: review this before you complete your first scorecard



# SMARTER LUNCHROOMS SCORECARD

Date \_\_\_\_\_ School Name \_\_\_\_\_ Completed by \_\_\_\_\_

The Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard is a list of simple, no-cost or low-cost strategies that can increase participation, reduce food waste, and increase selection and consumption of healthy school food.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Review the scorecard before beginning.
2. Observe a lunch period. Check off statements that reflect the lunchroom.
3. Ask other school nutrition staff, teachers, or administration about items that have an asterisk.\*



4. Tally the score.
5. Discuss the results with stakeholders. Choose unchecked strategies to implement in the lunchroom.

[SmarterLunchrooms.org](http://SmarterLunchrooms.org)

## FOCUS ON FRUIT

- At *least* two kinds of fruit are offered.
- Sliced or cut fruit is offered.
- A variety of mixed whole fruits are displayed in attractive bowls or baskets (instead of stainless steel pans).
- Fruit is offered in at least two locations on all service lines, one of which is right before each point of sale.

- At *least* one fruit is identified as the featured fruit-of-the-day and is labeled with a creative, descriptive name at the point of selection.
- A fruit taste test is offered at least once a year.\*

Focus on Fruit Subtotal \_\_\_\_ of 6

## VARY THE VEGETABLES

- At *least* two kinds of vegetables are offered.
- Vegetables are offered on *all* service lines.
- Both hot *and* cold vegetables are offered.
- When cut, raw vegetables are offered, they are paired with a low-fat dip such as ranch, hummus, or salsa.\*
- A serving of vegetables is incorporated into an entrée item at *least* once a month (e.g., beef and broccoli bowl, spaghetti, black bean burrito)\*.



- Self-serve spices and seasonings are available for students to add flavor to vegetables.
- At *least* one vegetable is identified as the featured vegetable-of-the-day and is labeled with a creative, descriptive name at the point of selection.
- A vegetable taste test is offered at *least* once a year.\*

Vary the Vegetables Subtotal \_\_\_\_ of 8

## HIGHLIGHT THE SALAD

- Pre-packaged salads or a salad bar is available to all students.
- Pre-packaged salads or a salad bar is in a high traffic area.
- Self-serve salad bar tongs, scoops, and containers are larger for vegetables and smaller for croutons, dressing, and other non-produce items.

- Pre-packaged salads or salad bar choices are labeled with creative, descriptive names and displayed next to each choice.

Highlight the Salad Subtotal \_\_\_\_ of 4

## MOVE MORE WHITE MILK

- Milk cases/coolers are kept full throughout meal service.
- White milk is offered in *all* beverage coolers.
- White milk is organized and represents at least 1/3 of all milk in *each* designated milk cooler.
- White milk is displayed in front of other beverages in *all* coolers.



- 1% or non-fat white milk is identified as the featured milk and is labeled with a creative, descriptive name.

Move More White Milk Subtotal \_\_\_\_ of 5

## BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS

- Cafeteria staff politely prompt students who do not have a full reimbursable meal to select a fruit or vegetable.
- One entrée is identified as the featured entrée-of-the-day, is labeled with a creative name next to the point of selection, *and* is the first entrée offered.
- Creative, descriptive names are used for featured items on the monthly menu.
- One reimbursable meal is identified as the featured combo meal *and* is labeled with a creative name.
- The combo meal of the day or featured entrée-of-the-day is displayed on a sample tray or photograph.

- A (reimbursable) combo meal is offered as a grab-and-go meal.
- Signs show students how to make a reimbursable meal on *any* service line (e.g., a sign that says "Add a milk, fruit and carrots to your pizza for the Power Pizza Meal Deal!")
- Students can pre-order lunch in the morning or day before.\*
- Students must use cash to purchase à la carte snack items if available.
- Students have to ask a food service worker to select à la carte snack items if available.\*
- Students are offered a taste test of a new entrée at least once a year.\*

Reimbursable Meals Subtotal \_\_\_\_ of 11

## LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE

- Cafeteria staff smile and greet students upon entering the service line and throughout meal service.
- Attractive, healthful food posters are displayed in dining and service areas.
- A menu board with today's featured meal options with creative names is readable from 5 feet away when approaching the service area.
- The lunchroom is branded and decorated in a way that reflects the student body.
- Cleaning supplies or broken/unused equipment are not visible during meal service.

- All lights in the dining and meal service areas work and are turned on.
- Compost/recycling and trash cans are at least 5 feet away from dining students.
- There is a clear traffic pattern. Signs, floor decals, or rope lines are used when appropriate.
- Trash cans are emptied when full.
- A menu board with *tomorrow's* featured meal with creative names is readable from 5 feet away in the service or dining area.

Lunchroom Atmosphere Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_ of 10

## STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

- Student artwork is displayed in the service area or dining space.
- Students, teachers, or administrators announce today's menu in daily announcements.\*
- Students are involved in the development of creative and descriptive names for menu items.\*
- Students have the opportunity to volunteer in the lunchroom.

- Students are involved in the creation of artwork or marketing materials to promote menu items.\*
- Students provide feedback (informal – “raise your hand if you like...” or formal - focus groups, surveys) to inform menu development.\*

Student Involvement Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_ of 6

## SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- A monthly menu is posted in the main office.
- A menu board with creative, descriptive names for today's featured meal options is located in the main office.
- A monthly menu is provided to students, families, teachers, and administrators.\*
- Information about the benefits of school meals is provided to teachers and administration at least annually.\*
- Nutrition education is incorporated into the school day.\*
- Students are engaged in growing food (for example, gardening, seed planting, farm tours, etc.).\*

- Elementary schools provide recess before lunch.\*
- The school participates in one or more food promotion programs such as Chefs Move to Schools, Fuel Up to Play 60, Share Our Strength, etc.\*
- The school has a partnership with Farm to School, local business(es), or a farmer's market.\*
- Smarter Lunchrooms strategies are included in the Local School Wellness Policy.\*

School Involvement Subtotal \_\_\_\_\_ of 10

## SMARTER LUNCHROOMS SCORECARD TOTAL

Focus on Fruit _____	of 6
Vary the Vegetables _____	of 8
Highlight the Salad _____	of 4
Move More White Milk _____	of 5
Reimbursable Meals _____	of 11
Lunchroom Atmosphere _____	of 10
Student Involvement _____	of 6
School Involvement _____	of 10

Scorecard Total \_\_\_\_\_ of 60

## AWARD LEVEL



### Bronze 15-25

Great job! This lunchroom is off to a strong start.



### Silver 26-45

Excellent. Think of all the kids that are inspired to eat healthier!



### Gold 46-60

This lunchroom is making the most of the Smarter Lunchroom Movement. Keep reaching for the top!

For Scorecard FAQs visit:

[SmarterLunchrooms.org](http://SmarterLunchrooms.org)

The asterisk \* indicates items that may need input from other school nutrition staff, teachers, or administration.

Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard 2.0

© Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, Cornell University 2019  
Funded in part by USDA FNS/ERS



## DEFINITIONS

**Point of Sale (POS):** Anywhere students leave the line with food and are charged or counted, such as at a register, check-out, or PIN pad

**Point of Selection:** Anywhere students select food or drink

**Service Line:** A designated line for meal selection—deli bar, salad bar, hot lunch line, snack window, etc.

**Grab-and-Go:** A pre-packaged reimbursable meal

**Reimbursable Meal/Combo Meal:** Any meal that meets all the USDA meal requirements and is priced as a unit

**Featured Items:** A fruit, vegetable, milk, or entrée that has been identified for promotion





# SMARTER LUNCHROOMS SCORECARD SUMMARY

Date \_\_\_\_\_ School Name \_\_\_\_\_ Completed by \_\_\_\_\_

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

When I walk into this lunchroom, the first thing I notice is...



## STRENGTHS

This lunchroom is doing a really good job at...



## OPPORTUNITIES

This lunchroom could be an even Smarter Lunchroom by...



## NEXT STEPS



**SMARTER LUNCHROOMS  
SCORECARD TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_ of 60

**AWARD LEVEL**  
Bronze 15-25 Silver 26-45 Gold 46-60



# SMARTER LUNCHROOMS SCORECARD FAQs

## **WHY SHOULD I USE THE SCORECARD?**

It offers research-based strategies that can increase participation in school meal programs, reduce food waste, and increase consumption of healthy foods. It provides a snapshot of how many strategies are currently in place in a lunchroom and which ones the lunchroom can work toward. The Scorecard can be filled out repeatedly to measure improvement over time.

## **WHO SHOULD COMPLETE THE SCORECARD?**

The Scorecard is a valuable tool for school nutrition professionals to use in their own lunchroom(s). School nutrition professionals are encouraged to welcome stakeholders such as students, administrators, PTO members, and outside professionals to complete a Scorecard to give diverse perspectives. Always ask permission before completing a scorecard in a lunchroom that is not your own and always provide results and feedback to the lunchroom leaders afterwards.

## **HOW CAN I MAKE THE SCORECARD WORK FOR MY SCHOOL?**

Each school is unique and may not be able to implement all the items on the Scorecard – that's OK! Mark off items that currently reflect the lunchroom and use the Scorecard as a list of items to consider for the future.

## **WHAT IF A STRATEGY IS ONLY HALF TRUE FOR THE SCHOOL?**

Only mark an item if it is completely true for the school. Consider partially true strategies to be prime candidates to implement first!

## **IS THE SCHOOL NUTRITION STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING ALL OF THE STRATEGIES ON THE SCORECARD?**

The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement was designed to include support from students, administrators, and the wider school community. These stakeholders can assist with some strategies, especially those in the Student Involvement and School Community Involvement sections.

## **THE SCORECARD ITEMS WITH ASTERISKS \* ARE NOT OBSERVABLE. HOW DO I KNOW IF I SHOULD CHECK IT OFF OR NOT?**

Check in with the school nutrition director, teachers, or administrators for input on items that are not easily visible.

## **HOW LONG SHOULD I OBSERVE WHEN COMPLETING THE SCORECARD?**

Arrive 20 minutes before the first meal service begins and plan to stay for at least one entire lunch period. The best practice is to stay for at least two lunch periods.

## **MY SCHOOL DOESN'T HOLD RECESS. HOW WILL THAT AFFECT MY SCORECARD TOTAL?**

Recess before lunch results in kids eating more fruits and vegetables! However, many middle and high schools don't have recess. If your school doesn't hold recess, do not check off this box. It will not prevent the school from achieving the gold award level.

## **WHAT IF ONLY HALF OF THE STUDENTS GO TO RECESS BEFORE LUNCH AND THE OTHER HALF GO AFTER?**

Only check off a strategy if it is completely true for all students. If only half the students get recess before lunch, do not check off the strategy.

## **WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A GRAB-AND-GO MEAL?**

A grab-and-go meal at an elementary school might consist of a turkey sandwich, apple, carrots and ranch, and milk. A grab-and-go meal at a middle or high school might include a grilled chicken salad with whole grain crackers, an orange, and milk. The grab-and-go meal should be pre-packaged for quick service and, ideally, be branded with a creative name and/or image. These meals may be served from a special line, window or cart for added speed and convenience.



# THE SMARTER LUNCHROOM STRATEGIES

---

There are 60 strategies on the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard. Get the details on why and how to use each one! The more strategies you implement, the more improvements in revenue, participation, and healthy eating you will see.



## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### FOCUS ON FRUIT

Fruit can be easily overlooked in the lunchroom. Move it to the spotlight! Here are some strategies that a Smarter Lunchroom uses to nudge students to take and eat more fruit:

#### **At least two kinds of fruit are offered.**

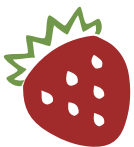
Think beyond apples, bananas, and oranges. Smarter Lunchrooms expose students to a wide variety of fruits including grapes, watermelon, mandarin oranges, peaches, berries, and kiwi. Make sure to offer at least two kinds each day. Fresh, frozen, dried, and canned all count!

#### **Sliced or cut fruit is offered.**

Students are more likely to eat fruit that is convenient and easy to eat. When schools slice the fruit, students eat up to two-thirds more! Slice that fruit and watch consumption soar.



South Fork Elementary School, Idaho





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### FOCUS ON FRUIT - Continued

**A variety of mixed whole fruits are displayed in attractive bowls or baskets (instead of stainless steel pans).**

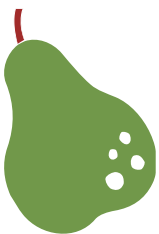
Offering a beautiful variety of colorful fruit prompts students to take more. Place whole fruits in colorful bowls or baskets to make them look more appetizing and double the amount of fruit students take! Use bowls or baskets that contrast with the color of the fruit such as brightly colored ceramic or plastic mixing bowls, woven baskets, or tiered fruit stands. Mix different whole fruits together such as apples with oranges, bananas with pears, peaches with plums to emphasize variety.

**Fruit is offered in at least two locations on all service lines, one of which is right before each point of sale.**

Place fruit in two different locations on the service line to increase the likelihood that students will see it, take it, and eat it. You can do this by repeating options or by offering two or more fruit options in different places. Some possible locations to place fruit are: on a salad bar, in a cooler, on a snack rack, and of course, always beside the register!



South Fork Elementary School, Idaho







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### FOCUS ON FRUIT - Continued

**At least one fruit is identified as the featured fruit-of-the-day and is labeled with a creative, descriptive name at the point of selection.**

Make it easy for students to wade through all the choices by choosing one fruit to be the fruit-of-the-day. Give it a fun, catchy name and put a sign next to it on the service line. Featuring a fruit increases its visibility and makes it more attractive to students. Using a creative, descriptive name enhances taste expectations. If it looks delicious and sounds delicious, it **MUST BE** delicious! Smarter Lunchrooms offer orange squeezers, juicy grapes, slurpy watermelon, sweet tropical pineapples, sweet sugar berries, monkey phones (bananas), and snappy apples!

**A fruit taste test is offered at least once a year.**

Taste testing exposes kids to the smell, texture, and flavor of a new fruit. Kids need to be exposed to food several times before deciding if they like it. Taste testing fruits prior to offering them will create satisfied customers and help to save money by reducing waste. Offer free fruit tastings at least once a year. Use the Smarter Lunchrooms taste test template to gather feedback.



Photo copyright © Cornell BEN Center 2017





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### VARY THE VEGETABLES

Did you know that 9 out of 10 kids don't eat enough vegetables? A Smarter Lunchroom addresses this challenge by making it easy and convenient for kids to take and eat vegetables. Schools meals are the perfect opportunity to expose kids to new and exciting vegetables that they may not get at home.

#### **At least two kinds of vegetables are offered.**

Kids are more likely to select and consume a vegetable when they have the power to choose from different options. More options will also increase the chances that each student can find at least one vegetable appealing. Each additional fruit or vegetable offered increases the number of children eating a fruit or vegetable. Make the vegetable choices impossible to miss! Use brightly colored trays, tongs, linens, or labels to add interest and visual appeal.

#### **Vegetables are offered on all service lines.**

Convenience counts! Students are far more likely to take a vegetable if it is within arm's reach than if they have to travel to a second serving line or station to get it. Make room for vegetables in each service line. Be creative! If counter space is limited, consider making room in each cooler for veggie cups or bagged raw veggies (ex.: cherry tomatoes, sliced peppers, etc.). Snack windows without coolers can be accommodated by storing chilled veggies in portable cooler bags. Offer vegetables at every service area so students can easily grab them and go.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### VARY THE VEGETABLES - Continued

#### **Both hot and cold vegetables are offered.**

When it comes to kids' tastes, one size does not fit all. Some students may like their vegetables fresh and crunchy, while others might prefer them roasted or seasoned. Providing choices that appeal to all tastes can increase sales and student satisfaction and even prompt students to try new things. Offer hot vegetables alongside entrees, and provide cut, raw vegetables on the salad bar or along the service line. Another prime location for portioned cut vegetables is in a rack or cooler by the point of sale.

#### **When cut, raw vegetables, are offered, they are paired with a low-fat dip such as ranch, hummus, or salsa.**

Raw vegetables have many qualities that students find appealing: they are easy to hold and eat, fun to dip, crunchy, cold, colorful, and sweet. Dips can also offset some stronger flavors, such as bitterness in a cut pepper, which may be intimidating for younger children. Pre-portion dips and serve alongside the raw, cut vegetables. Add a colorful sign showing the items together, along with a fun, catchy slogan such as "Dip in! Veggie crunchers + hummus!" or "Cucumber scoops <3 salsa!" Put hummus or dip in the bottom of a small cup and stand up veggie sticks in it.







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### VARY THE VEGETABLES - Continued

**A serving of vegetables is incorporated into an entrée item at least once a month (e.g. beef and broccoli bowl, spaghetti, black bean burrito).**

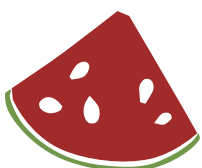
Most kids take the daily entrée, so smuggle some veggies into that entrée and watch them disappear into little kid bellies! Think Beef and Broccoli Rice Bowl, Mouthwatering Chili, Sizzlin' Stir-fry, or Cheesy Bean and Quesadillas. Try adding mushrooms, peppers, zucchini or onions into pasta sauces, casseroles, soups, and chili.

**Self-serve spices and seasonings are available for students to add flavor to vegetables.**

Let kids spice up lunch! A flavor station with herbs and spices allows students to personalize their meal and offers a way to experiment with different flavors. Spice or flavor stations make school lunch fun! Flavor stations can be as simple as offering spices at the end of the serving line or can go as far as providing a designated flavor station table in the cafeteria. Keep your spices and flavors calorie and sodium free. Consider including lemon juice or slices, parsley flakes, garlic powder, cinnamon, chives, vinegar, and hot sauces. Go the extra mile and add labels with suggestions for what items they taste good on: cinnamon on sweet potatoes or applesauce, oregano on cooked carrot medley, garlic powder on green beans etc.



A veggie filled lunch at Oyster River School District, New Hampshire





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### VARY THE VEGETABLES - Continued

**At least one vegetable is identified as the featured vegetable-of-the-day and is labeled with a creative, descriptive name at the point of selection.**

Featuring a vegetable increases its visibility and makes it more attractive to students. Using a creative, descriptive name enhances taste expectations. If it looks delicious and sounds delicious, it **MUST BE** delicious! Prime students' appetites by choosing one vegetable to be the vegetable-of-the-day. Give it a fun, catchy name and put a sign next to it on the service line. Try offering cool-as-a-cucumber slices, carrot crunchers, juicy cherry tomatoes, power peas, sweetie pie sweet potatoes, crunchy carrots, and protein-rich chickpeas.

**A vegetable taste test is offered at least once a year.**

Kids may be hesitant to select a vegetable if they've never tried it, but taste testing allows them to take a bite without the commitment of getting a whole serving. Even if they have tried it in the past, repeated exposure can help them decide whether they like it or not. Adding something new to the menu? Make an event of it to increase your customer base and save money by reducing waste. Offer free vegetable tastings at least once a year, and use the Smarter Lunchrooms template to gather feedback.



Cincinnati Public Schools, Ohio







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### HIGHLIGHT THE SALAD

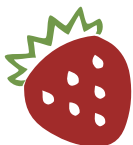
The research is clear - salad bars in schools increase children's consumption and are a great option for meeting the meal pattern requirements, especially the vegetable subgroups. Salad bars can be successful at all grade levels in rural, urban, and suburban districts. Financial support for salad bars can be obtained through [www.saladbars2schools.org](http://www.saladbars2schools.org) or through partnerships with school-based or community stakeholders. Details on how to plan and implement an effective salad bar can be found in The Lunch Box Salad Bars Guide at [www.thelunchbox.org](http://www.thelunchbox.org). If a salad bar is not an option, pre-packaged salads are a great second choice.

#### **Pre-packaged salads or a salad bar is available to all students.**

Did you know? Students eat more vegetables when offered premade salads or a self-serve salad bar. Salads feature colorful, cold, crunchy raw vegetables that appeal to kids; some also include healthy seeds, dried fruit, or other add-ons. Salads can be offered either on a freestanding cart or on the regular service line. Service line salad bars can be made with a simple collection of cold chopped vegetables and tongs; use signage and a sample plated salad to advertise the salad bar and demonstrate appropriate portion size.

#### **Pre-packaged salads or a salad bar is in a high-traffic area.**

Convenience counts! Pre-packaged salads are neat and easy to grab-and-go. Place pre packaged salads and salad bars in high-traffic, high-visibility areas in the normal flow of lunch traffic, turned so students can easily see the food items. Double-check the line of sight for smaller students, adding signage to help them see what is available, as needed. Offer pre-packaged salads in all service areas; use portable cooler bags if fixed/plug-in coolers are not available. Placing a salad bar in a high-traffic area means students do not have to make an extra trip for vegetables. In a study conducted by the Smarter Lunchrooms team, simply moving the salad bar into a higher traffic area tripled salad sales!





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### HIGHLIGHT THE SALAD - Continued

**Self-serve salad bar tongs, scoops, and containers are larger for vegetables and smaller for croutons, dressing, and other non-produce items.**

Big spoons = big servings! While salad bars are a great way to provide students with fresh fruits and vegetables, the fat and calories from salad dressing and other “extras” add up quickly. Setting out utensils that are the right size for each item makes it easy for students to select healthy amounts of food without a second thought. Use larger tongs and spoons for fresh produce to boost consumption and smaller tongs and scoops for less-healthy “extras” to minimize over-serving. Place appropriately-sized utensils on the service line, as usual. You can also add suggestion signs as needed: “Please use tongs!” or “Take what you want! Eat what you take!”

**Pre-packaged salads or salad bar choices are labeled with creative, descriptive names and displayed next to each choice.**

What’s the only thing better than a salad bar? A FUN, colorful salad bar! Using creative names is an effective attention grabber and places healthy options in the spotlight. If it looks delicious and sounds delicious, it **MUST** be delicious!

When it comes to naming salad bar items, think outside the box! Are you featuring foods that are regional or seasonal? How could you incorporate your school colors or mascot into the names? Give items fun, catchy names and post labels near each item on the service line or bar. Make the salad bar fun with turbo tomatoes, sweet corn, immune-boosting cucumbers, celery swords, x-ray vision carrots, and power peas.



Corvina-Valley Unified School District, California



## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### MOVE MORE WHITE MILK

Milk contains important nutrients for growing kids. Both white and flavored milk are good options available at school. Some communities express concern about the sugar in flavored milk. Rather than taking away flavored milk, the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement believes in preserving freedom of choice and recommends adjusting the way milk is displayed in order to nudge more students to select white milk. Make sure white milk is available in all coolers and is promoted with signs.

#### **Milk cases/coolers are kept full throughout meal service.**

Fully-stocked displays make milk easier to find and pick up, especially for shorter students. As the lunch period progresses, keep an eye on the coolers and refill when it appears that levels are getting low.

#### **White milk is offered in all beverage coolers.**

White milk in every cooler increases the likelihood that students will see it, take it, and drink it! Prominently featuring white milk in every location promotes it as the normal, default beverage of choice. Friendly reminder: add white milk to the juice and water beverage coolers.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### MOVE MORE WHITE MILK - Continued

**White milk is organized and represents at least 1/3 of all milk in each designated milk cooler.**

Think strength in numbers! The most highly represented choice sends the message that it is also the most normal choice, so make sure white milk represents at least 1/3 of all milk in each beverage cooler. An organized display is neater and more calming. Take care when loading the crates or cartons.

**White milk is displayed in front of other beverages in all coolers.**

When it comes to food selection, students usually opt for what they see first. If white milk is more visible and convenient than other beverages, students will take it! Place milk in the front or most easily-accessible section of every beverage cooler.

**1% or non-fat white milk is identified as the featured milk and is labeled with a creative, descriptive name.**

Using a creative, descriptive name raises taste expectations and students' interest in white milk. Use fun, catchy names or appealing nutritional information ("Contains Calcium for strong bones!") and post labels (with pictures for developing readers) on coolers. Try these fun labels for milk: Ice Cold White Milk, Moo Milk, Real Cold Cow's Milk, Dairy Fresh White Milk, Mighty Milk, Snowy White Milk, Bone-protecting White Milk, 1% Creamy White Milk, and 1% White Moo Milk.



LeGore School in El Monte City School District





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS

Serving a full reimbursable meal means that students are getting a complete, balanced, and nutritious meal. It also means that the school nutrition program is getting the maximum reimbursement leading to greater program revenue. Make it easy and natural for students to select the reimbursable meal by having clear signage with fun descriptive language and by using gentle prompting.

#### **Cafeteria staff politely prompt students who do not have a full reimbursable meal to select a fruit or vegetable.**

Use suggestive selling to encourage students to “complete their meal” with a fruit or vegetable. Be polite and cheerful, make eye contact, smile, and be patient, especially with younger students, shy students, and those with developing language skills.

Word choice counts! For example, say “Would you like carrots or an apple?” rather than “Do you want a fruit?” or “You have to take a vegetable!” It helps when the prompted items are within arm’s reach (convenience is key!). Keep grab-and-go fruits and veggies by the register.

#### **One entrée is identified as the featured entrée-of-the-day, is labeled with a creative name next to the point of selection, and is the first entrée offered.**

Take note! There are three things to do to achieve this Smarter Lunchroom strategy. Start by choosing the entree you most want to promote, then, give it a creative name to spark interest, and finally, make it the first entree in the service line. Research shows that students take the first entrée significantly more than the third entrée in line. When the healthy choice is the highlighted choice, students will be more willing to buy it and eat it. Try out some of these creative names for common entree items: Fish Sticks of the Sea, Kickin’ Chicken Nuggets, Hot Cheesy Pizza, Rockin’ Broccoli Rice Bowl, or New Orleans Chicken with Rice.







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

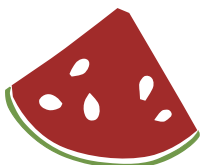
### BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS - Continued

#### **Creative, descriptive names are used for featured items on the monthly menu.**

What would you rather eat: Rice with Vegetables or Zesty Fiesta Rice Bowl? If students are making the choice between packing a lunch versus buying at school, presenting meals in an exciting, descriptive way will encourage them to leave the lunchbox at home and opt for school lunch. Brainstorm creative, descriptive names for featured entrees. Think outside the box—how could you relate entrée names to the school mascot, school colors, favorite teacher, or community? How about Vikings' Veggie-loaded Pizza, Bulldogs' Big Bad Bean Burrito or Mrs. Harwood's (favorite teacher) Famous Baked Beans?

#### **One reimbursable meal is identified as the featured combo meal and is labeled with a creative name.**

Make choices easy. Even though several items are offered, pick the ones that go together best and make it a combo meal! Feature it as one complete reimbursable meal and add special branding to make it more visible and attractive to students. Place a sign advertising all components of the combo meal next to the selected entrée on the service line. Give the meal a special name such as the Brain Boosting Meal, the Athlete's Meal, or the Focus Feast.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS - Continued

#### **The combo meal of the day or featured entrée-of-the-day is displayed on a sample tray or photograph.**

Complete meals are more appealing than individual items, especially when the sides are thoughtfully paired with entrees. Also, plating clears up confusion about what is included in the meal and is easier for developing language users than worded menus. It also saves time! Students can point and say, "I want that!"

Plate the reimbursable meal of the day and prop it so it is easily visible to students in the line (be aware of line-of-sight for younger students). Direct lunchroom staff to point it out to students for the first week or two, so students get accustomed to looking for it. Secondary option: take color photographs instead and display in clear photo displays

#### **A (reimbursable) combo meal is offered as a grab-and-go meal.**

Time is precious! Many school lunch periods are short – often as little as 20 minutes, including transition time. Students want to spend as much of the time as possible eating or socializing with their friends. Leverage speed and convenience by offering a grab-and-go reimbursable meal. Pre-pack reimbursable meals in quick-service grab-and-go bags. Brand them with a name, logo, or sticker for easy identification and fun. Offer them in a speed line for faster service. This is a great way to repurpose a snack window or cart!





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

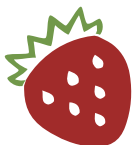
### BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS - Continued

**Signs show students how to make a reimbursable meal on any service line (e.g., a sign that says “Add a milk, fruit and carrots to your pizza for the Power Pizza Meal Deal!”).**

In many schools, students can create a reimbursable meal with a wide variety of entrees. Make it crystal clear what students need to do to make a complete meal. Use signage to nudge students to make a reimbursable meal out of any entrée choice.

**Students can pre-order lunch in the morning or day before.\***

Students order healthier foods when they pre-order because they are in a rational, more health-conscious “cold state,” compared to when they order in a rushed, hungry, impulsive “hot state” in the service line. This also reduces waste because lunchroom staff can prepare exact amounts of foods. Pre-ordering can be done in many ways: online (at home, a day/week/month at a time) or on paper or via smart board in the morning classroom.



Culver City Unified School District, California





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS - Continued

**Students must use cash to purchase à la carte snack items if available.**

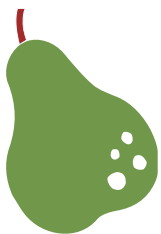
Cash is more valuable to students than credit on a swipe card; they are more willing to spend their parents' money (via credit swipe) than their own cash. Leverage this to nudge students to increase purchases of healthier foods (with their swipe cards) over less-healthy snacks (with cash). Allow credit purchases of target foods: reimbursable meals, milk, fruit, and vegetables. Establish a cash-only policy for a la carte snacks.

**Students have to ask a food service worker to select à la carte snack items if available.**

Time is money! When less healthy snacks cost time or effort, a student is more likely to default to a healthier snack such as a piece of fruit that they can simply grab and go without waiting around for it. Move displays of cookies and chips behind the counter and out of students' line of sight and/or reach. They can still have the foods, but they must ask first. Cover ice cream cooler windows so they are opaque. Out of sight, out of mind.

**Students are offered a taste test of a new entrée at least once a year.\***

Kids tend to stick to what they already know they like, so they may be hesitant to branch out and try new menu items. Taste testing lets them experience the smell, texture, and flavor of new foods, which will create satisfied customers and help save money by reducing waste. Offer free entree tastings at least once a year and use the Smarter Lunchrooms template below to gather feedback.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE

The lunchroom offers students a place to socialize, fill up, and rest their active minds. The school lunchroom can be an industrial, institutional feeding place, or it can be friendly, clean, bright, and fun. Use Smarter Lunchrooms strategies to make sure the lunchroom is a place where kids want to be.

#### **Cafeteria staff smile and greet students upon entering the service line and throughout meal service.**

Happy staff = happy students! Smiles are contagious, lead to a better experience for both servers and students, and can generate purchases. Our research shows that students who perceive the food service staff as “always smiling” are more likely to purchase school lunch than those who perceive the staff as “never smiling.” Train and encourage service staff to use a positive customer service approach, which includes greeting each student with a smile, using a friendly voice, and making eye contact.







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE - Continued

#### **Attractive, healthful food posters are displayed in dining and service areas.**

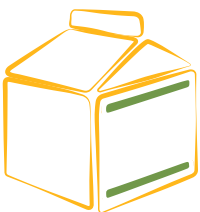
Suggestive selling works! Hang appealing, age-appropriate signage in high-traffic areas where students can read them from 5+ feet away. Choose colorful, neat images and words that encourage students to try, select, and enjoy the healthy food options that make up a reimbursable meal.

Free or inexpensive signs are available online through federal and nonprofit organizations. Posters are also easy to make. Consider collaborating with classroom teachers and/or school clubs or organizations to generate lunchroom-themed artwork by students. They can be artists and their art appeals to their peers!

#### **A menu board with today's featured meal options with creative names is readable from 5 feet away when approaching the service area.**

We tend to judge books by their covers! Notice the effort coffee shops and sandwich restaurants put into their artistic, colorful, thoughtful wall menus. They do this because it enhances taste expectations and boosts sales. The menu board is the school lunch's "cover." A stylish, neat, colorful, appealing menu board communicates that the food is also appealing.

Place a clean menu board (a whiteboard works well) at every location where students line up. Write the menu options in clear, attractive handwriting large enough to be easily seen from 5 feet away. Highlight feature items (veggie and fruit of the day, special entrees, named reimbursable meals such as the "Bobcat Meal" or "Athlete's Special", etc.) with colorful ink colors, icons or borders. If staff members feel uneasy about writing out the menu, ask a reliable student with artistic talent to volunteer to write it (ask a trusted teacher or guidance counselor for recommendation). Lunchrooms TVs or screens are also the perfect place to highlight the features of the day.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE - Continued

#### **The lunchroom is branded and decorated in a way that reflects the student body.**

Make your lunchroom a place where students want to be! Branding the lunchroom to reflect the student body makes students feel like it's their space and fosters a sense of community within the school. Use school colors on signage and hang student artwork. Give bulletin board space to the student council or other school groups. Post school awards and recognitions where everyone can see them.

#### **Cleaning supplies or broken/unused equipment are not visible during meal service.**

Nobody wants to eat next to a dirty, dusty fan or a wet and stinky mop bucket. An attractive, neat, and orderly eating environment enhances students' eating experience and shows them they are valued. A Smarter Lunchroom is a clean, clutter-free cafeteria that is welcoming and fun. When a piece of equipment is no longer in use, move it out of the cafeteria and into a storage closet or unused room. If you can't move it out of the cafeteria, consider other options to hide the items such as a moveable bulletin board or wall.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

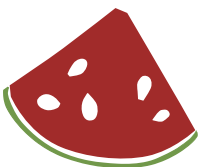
### LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE - Continued

**All lights in the dining and meal service areas work and are turned on.**

Research shows that we make healthier foods choices in well lit spaces. Be sure to turn on all lights, including in the display coolers, before students enter the service and dining area. Contact the school facilities manager as soon as you notice the need for a light bulb repair.

**Compost, recycling and trash cans are at least 5 feet away from dining students.**

What do students see when dining at their tables? A Smarter Lunchroom makes sure that it's not the trash cans! Make sure all disposal stations are far enough from tables that students cannot see inside or smell the contents.







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE - Continued

**There is a clear traffic pattern. Signs, floor decals, or rope lines are used when appropriate.**

An orderly traffic pattern is an important quality of a stress-free lunchroom and highlights that the cafeteria is a safe, controlled environment. Use signs, floor decals, or rope lines to make it crystal clear where to enter and exit the lines.

**Trash cans are emptied when full.**

Let's face it: overflowing trash cans are not appetizing! Keeping the dining environment attractive, clean, and orderly is a simple way to show students they are valued and that they are in a clean, inviting space. This is especially true as the day progresses; students in the last lunch period should be greeted with the same beautiful, inviting, and clean environment as their peers in the first lunch period. Ask lunchroom aides, staff or custodial employees to keep an eye out for full cans and empty them as needed.

**A menu board with tomorrow's featured meal with creative names is readable from 5 feet away in the service or dining area.**

Advertising the next day's meal excites students about what is to come! Not all students check the school lunch menu, so this is an easy way to increase awareness and boost sales. Write the creative name of tomorrow's featured meal in large, legible font, and use color and images to make it "pop." This can be done on a whiteboard or even a lunchroom TV if your school has one.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

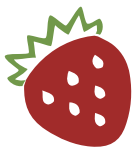
The cafeteria is the school's largest classroom! Getting students involved in the lunchroom fuels student pride and excitement as well as provides important insights into student's preferences and needs.

#### **Student artwork is displayed in the service area or dining space.**

Kids love seeing their artwork on the walls! Student artwork on display shows students they are welcome. Donate cafeteria wall space or a lunchroom bulletin board to art or media teachers to fill with student work. Ask students to design and create posters to decorate the lunchroom.

#### **Students, teachers, or administrators announce today's menu in daily announcements.**

Morning announcements offer an opportunity to prime student appetites. Enhance taste expectations by letting the whole school know that Asian Beef and Broccoli Bowl, Rainbow Crunch Salad, Snappy Apples, and Moo Juice are on the menu today. Make it a special job for a student to go to the office and read the day's menu over the announcements every morning. If a student isn't able to do it, ask the front office staff or a cafeteria staff member to take on this fun role.







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT - Continued

#### **Students are involved in the development of creative and descriptive names for menu items.**

Students know what their peers like! Inviting their input into naming foods will result in names which genuinely attract their peers. Seeing their ideas come to life will give them a sense of pride and connection to the school meal program. Students come up with names that adults never would imagine! Fun student created names have included Monkey Phones (Bananas), Sauna Carrots (Steamed Carrots), and the Cheesy Squeazy Burrito.

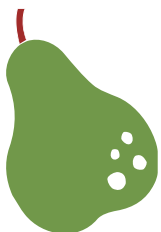
There are numerous fun and easy ways to entice students to come up with fun names. During lunch, offer students a sample of a new entree and ask them to put ideas for what to call it into a hat so you can choose one later. Or, go to a classroom with a list of the vegetables that are offered and ask students to brainstorm names on the spot. Even better if you can offer them some carrots or pepper slices to munch on while thinking.

#### **Students have the opportunity to volunteer in the lunchroom.**

Get students involved in the in's and out's of the school meals program! Invite students to lead taste tests, create posters and signs, decorate the serving line, help younger students with lunch line selection, or to keep an eye on the recycling and compost stations. Reach out to student leaders and ask if they would be interested in volunteering during their lunch period or study hall. For older students, offer to sign off on their participation as volunteer or community service hours.



Culver City Unified School District, California





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT - Continued

#### **Students are involved in the creation of artwork or marketing materials to promote menu items.**

Students know how to market to students! Invite art and photography teachers to incorporate food and lunchroom themes into lessons, then choose student works to exhibit in the lunchroom. You can also reach out to clubs or start a school-wide lunchroom art competition by advertising it on the daily announcements and in school newsletters.

#### **Students provide feedback (informal - ‘raise your hand if you like...’ or formal - focus groups, surveys) to inform menu development.**

You won't know until you ask! Genuine feedback is very helpful in figuring out what aspects of school lunch service students like and what they could do without. It will save you time and money if you can find out ahead of time that students want Lo Mein instead of Shepherd's Pie. Keep it light and easy by going into the dining space and asking "hey, raise your hand if you liked the creamy alfredo pasta sauce better than the turbo tomato pasta sauce". Up the ante by hosting a regular menu development feedback group after school. Invite parents to attend too. Bring samples of potential new foods.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

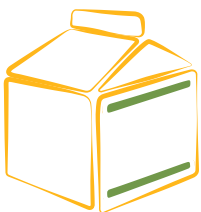
A school nutrition program needs and deserves the support of the whole school community. School staff may base their impression of school lunch on their experiences 15 years ago. Let's get them in the cafeteria to see that school lunch has changed! School staff can contribute to students feeling like school meals are delicious, nourishing, and a great choice for growing, active kids..

#### **A monthly menu is posted in the main office.**

The main office is the brain center of the school building. If a parent is going to a school, they are sure to be stopping by the front office. Place an attention-grabbing, up-to-date menu in an easily-seen, high-traffic area to keep students and staff up-to-date on what's being served. Posting the menu in the office to avoid the dreaded scenario where a parent asks 'what's for lunch today' and the office staff say 'oh, the menu is online.' That's a missed marketing opportunity. Make life easy: place a stack of printed menus on the counter for parents to take on their way out the door.

#### **A menu board with creative, descriptive names for today's featured meal options is located in the main office.**

A monthly menu is small and hard to read. Big, bold words grab attention! While displaying the monthly menu in the office is a great start, the words may be difficult to read from far away. Creating an additional space to list the highlighted meal of the day generates excitement without requiring visitors to step up close to read the menu. Use designated wall space, a menu board, or bulletin board in the front lobby or main office to highlight today's featured meal choices.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - Continued

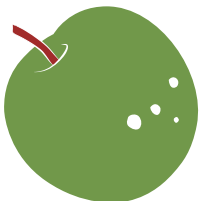
#### **A monthly menu is provided to students, families, teachers, and administrators.**

Some students may be hesitant to buy school lunch if they aren't sure that they'll like what's being served. Making a menu available allows them to plan ahead and get excited about meals they know they enjoy or think they might want to try. The monthly menu can be distributed to individuals in paper form or through email, as well as posted on the school website.

#### **Information about the benefits of school meals is provided to teachers and administration at least annually.**

Students are very perceptive of their teachers' opinions. Unfortunately, many school staff members may have inaccurate or negative views of school food. Correct these misconceptions! Let faculty and staff know about all of the benefits of school food to help them start to see school food in a positive light and encourage them to promote healthy options to students.

Keep teachers and administrators informed about the benefits of school meals at least annually. Present information at a yearly meeting, such as during back-to-school planning week or on a professional work day or provide a handout on the nutrition standards of school meals. Bring attention to the health benefits of school meals and the positive educational outcomes that come from full bellies.







## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

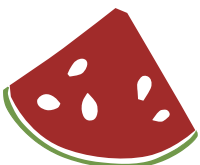
### SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - Continued

#### **Nutrition education is incorporated into the school day.**

When students learn how to make healthy choices and understand the positive outcomes of healthy eating, they will be well equipped to make healthy choices inside and out of the school building. Nutrition education can be incorporated into almost any classroom. Health, physical education, and science courses seem like the most obvious settings, but math classes can mix in serving size and calorie calculations and social studies classes can feature variations of diet patterns and recipes in different cultures. Newsletters, bulletin boards, and gardening all count towards nutrition education.

#### **Students are engaged in growing food (for example, gardening, seed planting, farm tours, etc.).**

To increase student vegetable consumption in schools, serve vegetables in the cafeteria that were grown in the school garden. If kids grow vegetables, they're more likely to eat them! The gold standard is to have a school garden where kids can plant, weed, water and taste, but there are alternatives for schools when having a garden isn't an option. Some schools have small table sized greenhouses or planters. Planting beans in soil in plastic cups by the window also gives a hands-on experience! Trips to a local farm or books about gardening and farming can take the place of hands-on growing if necessary.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

### SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - Continued

#### **Elementary schools provide recess before lunch.**

Schools who have placed recess before lunch have noticed that children eat more and behave better when they get the wiggles out before lunch. After running around, kids are hungry. Providing recess before school lunch is especially helpful because it removes the incentive for children to rush through or skip eating in order to play sooner. Recess before lunch is an excellent strategy to reduce food waste.

#### **The school participates in one or more food promotion programs such as Chefs Move to Schools, Fuel Up to Play 60, Share Our Strength, etc.**

Numerous programs want to help support school nutrition programs, healthy eating, and increased physical activity for youth. Garner all the support you can get! Many programs provide free posters and materials, grants, creative ideas, and ongoing support. Keep your program current, trendy, and full of best practices by staying connected to multiple programs that support your cause.





## THE SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

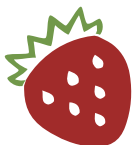
### SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - Continued

#### **The school has a partnership with Farm to School, local business(es), or a farmer's market.**

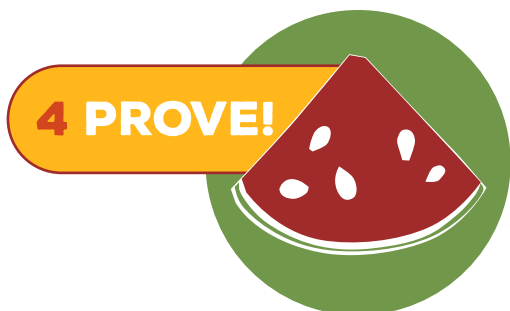
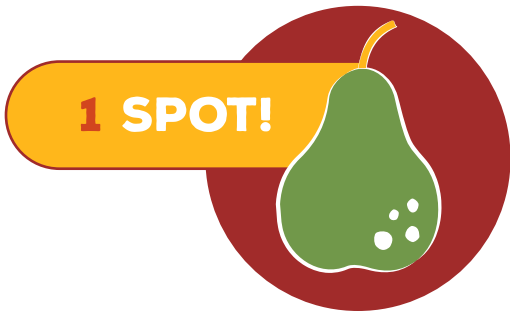
Local businesses and nonprofits, including those associated with agribusiness, can be valuable allies in your work with lunchrooms. These leaders and experts can partner with you on many types of projects: nutrition education (field trips, guest speakers, and school gardens), highlighting local and seasonal foods (taste tests and Harvest of the Month), sponsoring lunchroom changes (providing a salad bar, utensils, signage, mural, branding, or incentives for staff), and making introductions to other potential allies in the community. These leaders know that a strong school and student body benefit the whole community, their civic-mindedness and financial support can magnify the impact of your work in school lunchrooms.

#### **Smarter Lunchrooms strategies are included in the Local School Wellness Policy.**

All districts that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program are required to have a Local School Wellness Policy that guides the district's efforts to promote student wellness. Writing Smarter Lunchrooms strategies into the Wellness Policy helps ensure that all students have access to a healthy school nutrition environment that makes the healthiest food the most convenient foods. Find sample language for your Wellness Policy at the Smarter Lunchrooms website.







# THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

---

Discover 4 simple steps to building  
your own Smarter Lunchroom.





## THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

### 1 SPOT!



### STEP 1: SPOT!

Are you and your team getting ready to become a Smarter Lunchroom? Excellent! Before you make any changes, take a close look at your cafeteria to Spot what changes you need to make.

It is important to know where your lunchroom stands before any changes are made, in order to later determine how things have changed. The information you gather before you begin will vary by school. Pick and choose the methods that work for you.

#### Ways to Spot changes you may want to make:

- Complete the Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard
- Take Photographs

#### COMPLETE THE SMARTER LUNCHROOM SCORECARD

Before you make any changes, complete a Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard! The Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard is a list of 60 strategies that can be easily incorporated into the lunchroom. Completing a Scorecard will uncover what the school is already doing to be a Smarter Lunchrooms and will clearly identify the areas that can be focused on next.

#### Completing the Scorecard:

- Record date, school, and name of person completing the Scorecard.
- Review each Scorecard item before beginning.
- Get started at least 20 minutes before students arrive for lunch. Look at the lunchroom with fresh eyes. Take notice of the entrances and exits. Identify the serving and dining areas. Notice where the trash, tray return, and recycling bins are located. Pay attention to any decorations on the walls, tables, or service lines.
- Before the students come walk through the lunchroom following the same path they use. Look around attentively, smell the air, and try to get a sense of the students' experience in the space. Walk through again, this time making a check mark in the box beside each item on the Scorecard that you observe. Write any additional notes in the margin.
- Watch as students enter the cafeteria. Continue to make observations about the items on the Scorecard and check off items that you see.



## THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

### 1 SPOT!

Continued

- Continue to observe while the first lunch period ends. Note how the serving area is cleaned and replenished for the next period.
- Use the second lunch period to continue observing and checking off items on the Scorecard.
- Review the Scorecard one more time to make sure you have checked off everything you have observed. You may need to check in with other school nutrition staff, teachers, or administration to confirm if all statements on the Scorecard appropriately reflect the school.
- Tally the check marks and write the total score.

This total score is your baseline. It's your starting point. Everything you didn't check off is a strategy to think about for the future.

**TIP:** Engage others! Are other people always asking about your cafeteria? Wanting to make changes or always offering suggestions? Pull them in the loop! Invite other key stakeholders to complete the Scorecard with you or for you. It's a great discussion starter and relationship builder.

Examples of people to ask to complete a Scorecard include:

- School Nutrition Director
- School administrator
- Lunchroom staff member
- Teacher or other school staff member
- Parent (or PTA member)
- Student (student council member)

Give each person the Scorecard ahead of time so they can read it and ask any questions before they begin. The observation period goes by quickly so, before they start, help them become familiar with the Scorecard so they can spend most of the observation period looking at the lunchroom, not searching for items on the Scorecard! If more than one person completes the Scorecard, be sure to resolve any discrepancies. You may need another observation period or may need a conversation with an administrator or director to work out any differences in results. Ultimately, there should be only one baseline score that everyone agrees on.



## THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

### 1 SPOT!



### TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS

**1. Take photographs during the observation.** If possible, have teams of two observers go through the lunchroom together: one will complete the Scorecard while the other takes photographs.

- Plan to take 25-30 photos.
- Take photographs when food is on the line.
- Make sure to take them from students' eye level, especially in elementary schools.
- For legal reasons, avoid photographing students or collect signed consent forms. Ask before photographing adults.

Key items and locations to photograph:

- Overall view of area, 'first glance'
- Hot food serving area
- Cold food serving area
- Any decorations, signs, or posters
- Posted menus or promotions
- Wall space – used or unused
- Lighting
- Walls, especially where students line up
- Registers and surrounding view
- Milk serving area
- Tray storage
- Cutlery storage
- Condiments
- Salad bar
- Beverage coolers – open and closed
- Ice cream cooler – open and closed
- Trash, compost, and recycling areas
- Tray return
- Cleaning items – mops, brooms, buckets, cloths, if visible to students



## THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

### 1 SPOT!



**2. Make a folder for the photos.** Label each with location (Smith Elementary School), description (tray storage; salad bar), and date. Put the photos into a slide presentation for a group review.

**3. Get a group together to review the photos.** The group may include school meals staff, administration, parents, students, or other stakeholders. What looks great? Where is there room for improvement? Take notes.

Some schools may want to use production records, sales records, or plate waste data to help identify changes to make. For more information, see the Smarter Lunchrooms website.





# THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

## 2 PLAN!



### STEP 2: PLAN!

Once you have completed the Scorecard and reviewed the photos, it's time to move on to step 2: Plan!

To develop your Smarter Lunchroom Action Plan:

1. Review your Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard results and closely examine the photos of the lunchroom.
2. Choose 3-5 Smarter Lunchroom Strategies to try.
3. Create a plan for each strategy like in the example shown below

### Example Completed Smarter Lunchroom Action Plan (Blank on next page)

Focus Area	Smarter Lunchroom Strategy	Permission Needed? Whose?	Tasks	Person Responsible	Due by
Fruit	Fruit is offered in at least two locations on all service lines, one of which is right before the point of sale.	Yes, Sally, School Nutrition Director	Purchase a colorful bowl to put bananas and oranges in. Place next to cash register daily.	Kathy, manager	9/1/18



# THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

## 2 PLAN!



### SMARTER LUNCHROOM ACTION PLAN

1. Review your Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard results and closely examine the photos of the lunchroom.
2. Choose 3-5 Smarter Lunchroom Strategies to try.
3. Create a plan for each strategy. Use the Smarter Lunchrooms Action Plan templates provided below:

Focus Area	Smarter Lunchroom Strategy	Permission Needed? Whose?	Tasks	Person Responsible	Due by



# THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

## 2 PLAN!



### SMARTER LUNCHROOM ACTION PLAN

1. Review your Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard results and closely examine the photos of the lunchroom.
2. Choose 3-5 Smarter Lunchroom Strategies to try.
3. Create a plan for each strategy. Use the Smarter Lunchrooms Action Plan templates provided below:

Focus Area	Smarter Lunchroom Strategy	Permission Needed? Whose?	Tasks	Person Responsible	Due by



## THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

### 3 DO!



#### **STEP 3: DO!**

You have spotted what needs to be done by completing a Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard and taking a close look at the photos of the lunchroom. You've taken the time to build a plan, so NOW is the time to **Do it!**

1. Be sure everyone on the lunchroom staff is aware of the changes that are going to be made. Give them a chance to ask questions and offer suggestions to the plan, it helps create buy-in.
2. If the change is big, such as only accepting cash for a la carte options, go back and make sure communication and training is a part of your plan!
3. Make the changes!
  - Small changes can be made overnight or over the weekend.
  - Larger changes are better made over the summer or after a vacation.





## THE 4 STEP PATH TO BUILDING A SMARTER LUNCHROOM

### 4 PROVE!



#### **STEP 4: PROVE!**

Now it's time to evaluate the impact of your changes. You spotted what needed to change, you made a plan, and you did it! It's time to show off your improvements!

##### **1. Complete a new Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard**

- Get your new Smarter Lunchroom score by repeating the instructions in Step 1 on how to complete the Scorecard.

##### **2. Take your after-photos**

- A picture is worth a thousand words. Take photos of the areas that changes. Try to take them from the same location/angle as your pre-photos, to make comparisons easy.
- Date, label and save your photos.

After all the planning and doing, your Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard score increased and your photos visually show your improvements. Give yourself and your staff a pat on the back. Your lunchroom now uses evidence-based research to help 'nudge' kids to make healthy choices. Share your successes with school administration and parents!

#### **KEEP UP THE GREAT WORK!**



