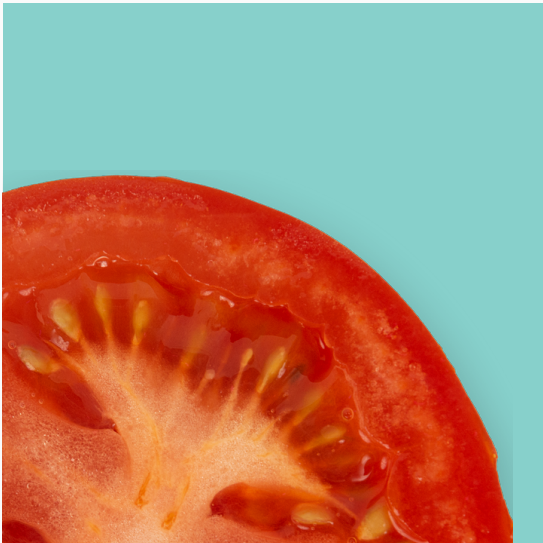
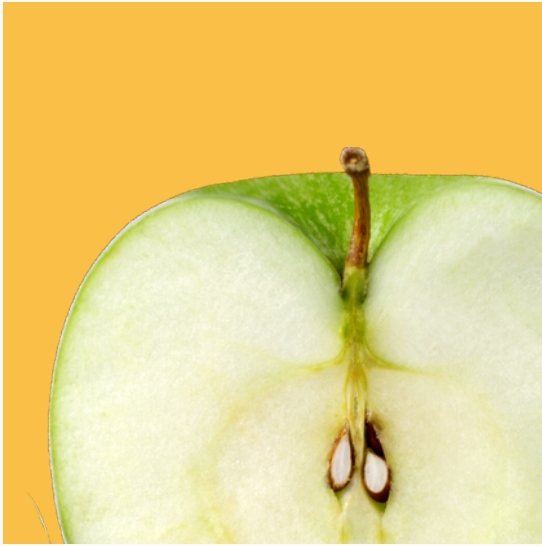


CRAFTING WELL BALANCED MENUS

IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS



A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL NUTRITION TEAMS

- Menu ideas & recipes
- Easy swaps
- Nutrient analysis
- Marketing best practices
- ...& more!

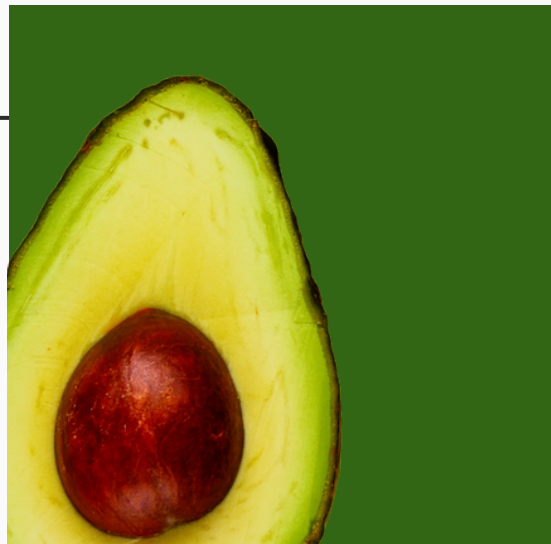


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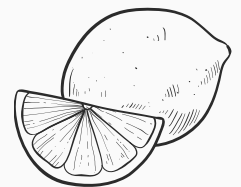
Sources

Welcome

There is a strong connection between health and food, and access to healthy food choices is essential for promoting overall well-being and reducing the risk of various health conditions. A balanced and nutritious diet plays a crucial role in supporting physical growth and development, cognitive development, energy and stamina, and immune support for children. By prioritizing access to nutritious food and empowering individuals with the knowledge and resources to make healthy choices, we can work together to build a healthier more equitable society.



WE'RE EXCITED TO COLLABORATE



At Balanced, we understand the challenges of today's modern food system. By catering to the dietary needs of a significant number of individuals daily, you and your team possess the potential to combat and even reverse the primary causes of diet related illnesses within your community.

We are aware that you approach this opportunity and responsibility with utmost seriousness. This is why we deeply appreciate the chance to partner with forward-thinking leaders like yourself, to revolutionize menus and make a profound impact on people's lives.

ABOUT US

Balanced is a nutrition security and public health nonprofit organization working to make the jobs of food and nutrition service teams easier.

With a special emphasis on nutrient-based interventions, Balanced's programs focus on shifting the proportion of health-promoting foods on menus through an increase of dietary fiber and a reduction of foods high in cholesterol, saturated fats, excess sodium, and ultraprocessing.

We believe community institutions are a key lever in the fight against chronic, preventable diet-related diseases and it's Balanced's goal to help prevent and reverse them in children, families, and communities.

Michelle Saletan

Michelle Saletan, who serves as the Institutional Support Specialist at Balanced, will serve as your main contact person. Her primary responsibility is to offer strategic assistance, practical insights, and problem-solving solutions to partner institutions. Previously, Michelle held the position of a nutrition services manager in a large school district located in South Carolina. Michelle transitioned to the role of an operations manager where she played a crucial role on the menu development team, incorporating her dedication to serving nutritious meals for children. She successfully introduced more plant-based, wholesome, and freshly prepared dishes to the menu. Michelle is enthusiastic about sharing her passion and expertise with you.

You can reach her at: michelles@balanced.org.

PARTNERSHIP GOALS & ROLES

Through this collaboration, Balanced aims to support you in creating a profitable, marketable, and successful design for your school's food environments. Our goal is to place a stronger emphasis on health-promoting foods and beverages while reducing the presence of foods that may be detrimental to health. By doing so, we strive to contribute to the overall well-being and nutritional outcomes of the students in your school.

Together, we will

- **Analyze the baseline healthfulness of your menus**
- **Tailor-make solutions to address needs and constraints (e.g., cost, participation, procurement concerns)**
- **Develop a plan of action and set goals**
- **Provide educational materials, resources, and practical tips**
- **Provide plant-forward, fiber-rich menu design tools and recipe ideas**
- **Help you successfully market menu changes**
- **Assist in handling concerns from various stakeholders**
- **Track and evaluate progress across various metrics (e.g., student satisfaction with meals)**
- **Provide ongoing support after implementation of changes**



PARTNERSHIP GOALS & ROLES

The role of Balanced in this partnership is to provide you and your team with, the non-monetary resources it needs to successfully balance menus. This support can take several forms and offer different levels of involvement based on your specific requirements. Including: general consulting, connecting your kitchen staff with trainings, providing recipes and educational resources, working around procurement barriers, and spearheading marketing strategies—just to name a few.

There are no financial commitments or contracts. Ultimately, our success is measured by how successful you and your team are, so we have every incentive to support you in a good-faith partnership.

Our team is dedicated to offering the necessary resources required to support your needs throughout this endeavor.

Open, honest communication will be key to the success of the collaboration.

STAY IN TOUCH



balanced.org



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[@thebalancedorg](https://www.instagram.com/thebalancedorg)



FOOD & CHILDREN'S HEALTH

97% of children and adults do not consume enough dietary fiber

93% of school-aged children don't eat enough fresh fruits and vegetables

60% of today's standard American diet includes ultra-processed foods like chicken nuggets and pizza

4X Children eat 4 times the recommended amount of protein.



2X and twice the recommended amount of sodium

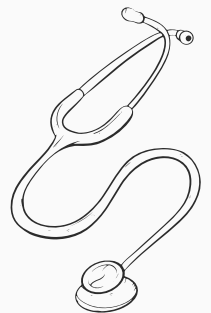
"The current generation of children is expected to live shorter lives than their parents."

-The New England Journal of Medicine,

30% Diabetes rates among children increased 30% between 2000-2010, and continue to rise

1 in 5

1 in 5 children under age 17 already have been diagnosed with high cholesterol



The leading causes of preventable illness and death in the U.S. are related to diet

"Children eating more fruit, but fruit and vegetable intake still too low."

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2014/p0805-fruits-vegetables.html>

"Diabetes rates skyrocket in kids and teens."

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/05/03/diabetes-rises-in-kids/8604213/>

"Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease Beginning in Childhood"

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2812791/>

NUTRIENT IMPACT ON HEALTH

Saturated Fat, Cholesterol, Sodium, Ultraprocessed Foods, and Fiber

OVERCONSUMED

SATURATED FAT

Reducing total energy intake from saturated fats by five percentage points could lower risk of developing coronary heart disease by 42%.

SODIUM

The average sodium intake in industrialized countries—between 2800 and 4000 mg per day—far exceeds the AHA limit of 1500 mg.

CHOLESTEROL

Our bodies naturally produce all the cholesterol we need to be healthy,

ULTRAPROCESSED FOODS

Every 10% increase in the proportion of ultra-processed food in the diet was associated with significantly higher rates of cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, and cerebrovascular disease

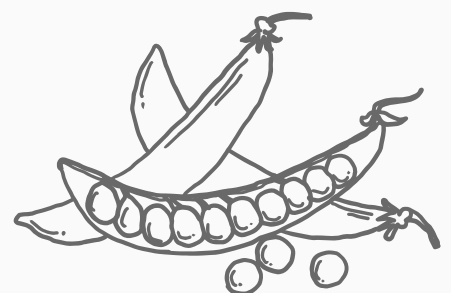
FIBER

Underconsumption of fiber may constitute the most widespread nutrient deficiency in the United States.

- Up to 97% of children* are deficient in dietary fiber consumption
- Underconsumption of dietary fiber is associated with increased rates of a number of preventable, chronic diseases like heart disease, high cholesterol, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, colorectal cancer, allergies, and even asthma
- Children in the U.S. consume only half the recommended minimum intake of fiber

Increased fiber consumption is associated with:

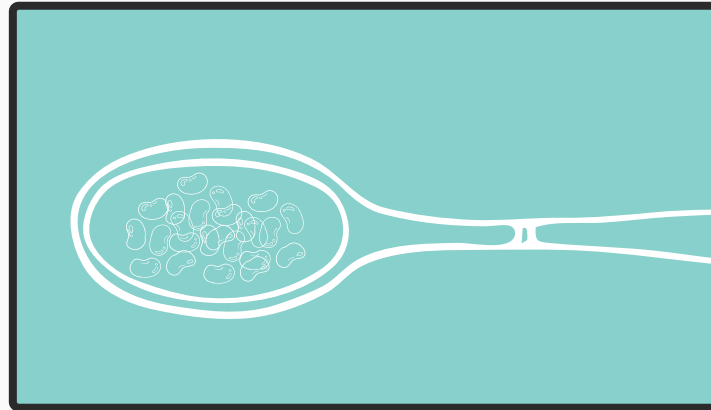
- Healthier gut microbiome
- Reduced risk of diet-related disease
- More stable blood glucose levels
- Increased longevity...and more!



THE BASICS OF A BALANCED MENU

A balanced menu or meal, centers around **minimally processed, mostly plant-source foods**, lower overall in saturated fats, cholesterol, and sodium, and **rich in fiber**.

Establishing healthy dietary patterns early in life can provide children with the foundation to continue those behaviors throughout life. Unhealthy dietary patterns and inadequate physical activity in children and adolescents ages 2 to 18 contribute to overweight and obesity — as well as increasing the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease later in life.



COMPONENT	BALANCED RANGE
SATURATED FAT	<7% OF CALORIES
CHOLESTEROL	<50 MG/DAY
SODIUM	<1500 MG/DAY
FIBER	>30 G/DAY

PLANT-FORWARD, NUTRIENT DENSE



Plant foods offer the greatest benefit to students' health due to the vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals, and dietary fiber that they contain.

Plant-based foods are naturally free of common allergens associated with dairy and eggs, making them more inclusive for children with certain dietary restrictions.

Scratch cooking enables schools to choose the ingredients that go into students' meals. Healthier ingredients lead to healthier students.

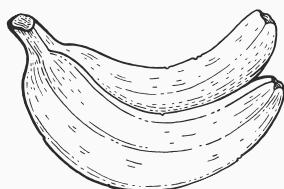
Healthy students are better learners. Research shows that eating habits and healthy behaviors are connected to academic achievement.

CASE STUDY

School Meal Nutrient Analysis

The following data were taken from real menus in April 2023 from a randomly selected high school in a randomly selected district.

All breakfast and lunch options were selected to make reimbursable meals per federal mandates.



MENU SWAPS

We compiled the nutritional content of complete, reimbursable breakfast and lunch meals in one school district for a week. Breakfast meals included a 100% fruit juice and both breakfast and lunch included a fat free white milk resulting in the daily combined average.

	Daily Combined Average	*Swapped* Daily Combined Average	% change
Calories	998	944	-4.5%
Fat (g)	28	23	-21%
Saturated Fat (g)	9.2	7.4	-21.6%
Cholesterol (mg)	95.2	81.6	-15.38%
Sodium (mg)	1497	1400	-6.7%
Fiber (g)	9	11	+17%

After replacing **only one processed entrée** with a plant forward alternative, the new daily combined average of total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and fiber changed favorably for the entire week.



This simple substitution led to a **21% reduction in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol average daily intakes**; a **7% reduction in average daily sodium** intakes; and a **17% increase in average daily fiber** intakes.

HIGH-IMPACT OUTCOMES

Cost Savings | Student Satisfaction | Academic Success

COST SAVINGS

In a pilot study conducted in concert with Friends of the Earth, Oakland Unified School District saved \$42,000 dollars in one year after reducing its meat purchases by 30%.

So the question for most isn't how much these changes cost, but really how much money is your district losing by not shifting to more balanced, plant-rich menus?

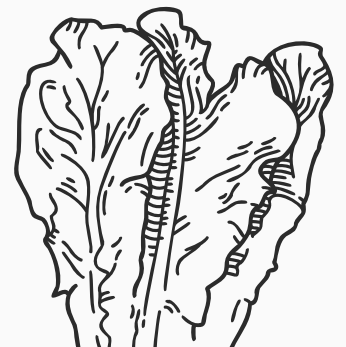
STUDENT SATISFACTION

A landmark study at three universities found that when students are presented with a plant-based option as default, an overwhelming majority (81 percent) will choose them.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

"Nutrition also plays a large part in school performance. Children who have diets lacking in fruits, vegetables, and healthy proteins tend to have lower test scores than their peers. When children have access to adequate nutrition and healthy food options, there is an overall increase in academic performance, but especially in math and reading."

--Momentous Institute



A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO SERVING BALANCED MEALS

1

Set your ultimate goal

What is your ultimate goal?

2

Create an action plan to reach your goal

Setting a well thought out plan is key for success.

3

Train your staff

This will ensure a successful and smooth implementation of menu changes.

4

Implement change and start slow

After the necessary preparation, testing, and training—your team will implement the changes to the menus in accordance with the action plan.

5

Prioritize Marketing

Generating excitement can drive positive changes in dietary habits.

6

Gather student feedback

Encourage student input, organize menu planning committees and conduct surveys.

7

Be patient

Transforming the food culture in a school requires a gradual and persistent approach. Change does not happen overnight.

SETTING GOALS FOR BALANCED MENUS

To achieve success it is necessary to have an ultimate goal. This goal can be reached by creating an action plan -- a series of smaller milestones that help you measure progress along the way!

EXAMPLE GOAL:

Replace at least 20% of the overall meat, poultry, and egg products and ultra-processed foods purchased and served by your School District with fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and other fiber-rich proteins within 2 years.



Tailored Action Plan

The team at Balanced can help you create your action plan. This plan entails the process of reaching your team's goals and will be tailored for your school and goals. The action items are the concrete steps we will take together to reach the goals your team decides upon. Balanced will provide tailored, non-monetary resources where and when they are needed in order to successfully execute these action items.

Concrete Steps

- Expand your scratch cooking menu by adding two items per menu cycle.
- Diversify proteins to include fiber-rich options beans, legumes, and other pulses.
- Replace canned fruits and vegetables, excluding legumes, with fresh options as available.
- Eliminate one prepackaged breakfast item a week and substitute for a scratch made item.
- Eliminate prepackaged sides, for ex: instead of chips, use oven baked potatoes
- Incorporate and offer more fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Create new, delicious vegetable recipes.
- Reduce prepared food usage by 1 item a month, then gradually increase the number you replace over time.
- Start a Harvest of the Month Program.
- Is there a wellness committee in your school? Enlist their help.
- Switch to 100% whole grain products, not whole grain rich.
- Source local produce from the DOD.
- Create a salad bar and experiment with homemade dressings, sauces, or dips like hummus.
- Use a self service model for fruits and vegetables, giving you the opportunity to serve more fruit students like. For ex: strawberries, orange quarters, halved kiwi fruits, etc.

Throughout our partnership, Balanced is happy to provide any of the following resources -- tailor-made for your team, to help you confidently and successfully execute each action item.

Although Balanced is unable to provide substantive in-person culinary training to kitchen staff, we can offer, via phone calls and online forums: one on one meetings and group trainings as well as workshops and presentations. There are resources available for hands on training that we can connect you with. We do not need to come to you to create change

Comprehensive Menu Analysis

Component Analysis	Meal Analysis	Nutrient Analysis (optional, or when feasible)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of animal vs. plant proteins • Red and processed meat frequency • Vegetable diversity • Grains (% whole) • Dairy options and alternatives • Fresh fruit • Prevalence of refined items • MyPlate ratios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify healthiest current menu options • Identify easily modifiable menu options (single ingredient swaps) • Identify the least healthy menu options • Select and/or develop plant protein-based recipes for replacing least healthy options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on nutrient content averages of complete meals • Saturated fat (% of kcal) • Total fat (% of kcal) • Cholesterol • Sodium • Fiber

Menu Design Tools

The following lunch menu provides an idea of what our vision of balance looks like in practice. Menus that are objectively healthfully balanced can be taken in many different directions. While still offering animal sourced proteins, they are kept to a minimum and served alongside plant forward, diversified, or more fiber-rich options.

Daily offerings include a salad bar with many plant forward proteins available, and scratch-made dressings. Notice, vegetable options on a given day are also incorporated into the wrap option, creating less cooking for your team.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black bean or plant based meat nachos -- w/ or w/o cheese • Pico de gallo • Cilantro rice, black bean & pico de gallo WG wrap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bean chili with WG cornbread or brown rice • Chili Toppings • Pizza station: classic Margherita, veggie supreme, with cheese-less options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veggie or turkey meatball sub on WG bun w/ or w/o mozzarella • Seasoned green beans • Hummus kit w/ WG tortilla chips and fresh veggies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cauliflower mac & cheese w/ WG roll • Garlic roasted broccoli • Pizza station: classic Margherita, veggie supreme, with cheese-less options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veggie and tofu or chicken WG burrito • Black beans and corn medley • Roasted veggie & hummus WG wrap w/ or w/o mozzarella

Salad bar: whole grains, legumes, nuts, fresh & cooked vegetables (choice of dairy free scratch-made dressings)



Consider the concept of “doubling the value”. By making, for example, chicken fajitas featuring peppers and onions, you can also offer veggie fajitas that include peppers, onion, and tofu. This approach allows you to create two variations of the same recipe, one with the recipe’s traditional protein and the other with plant-based proteins, resulting in cost savings in terms of labor.

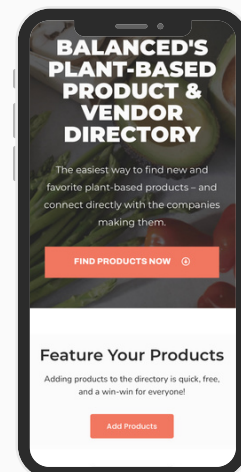
This method can be applied to many recipes.

Recipe Sourcing

Because it is not reasonable to expect menus to change overnight, our team can help you find the right recipes to fit your institution's needs and then work with you to build a menu that makes sense.

Procurement Support & Vendor Connections

We have compiled the most extensive, centralized directory of fiber-rich, plant-based food products. Search by protein substitute, brand name, and even K-12 Creditable. Find new and favorite products at plantbasedvendors.com



Taste Testing

Student Engagement:

Involving students in taste testing promotes their engagement and empowerment in the decision-making process. It gives them a sense of ownership over their school's food choices and encourages them to provide feedback and suggestions.

Menu Variety and Innovation:

Taste testing provides an opportunity to introduce new foods, recipes, and flavors to students. By offering a wider range of options, schools can accommodate different dietary preferences, cultural backgrounds, and food allergies or intolerances, fostering inclusivity and expanding students' palates.

Health Promotion:

Taste testing can contribute to promoting healthier eating habits among students. By incorporating healthier ingredients or modifying recipes, schools can assess the feasibility and acceptability of these changes through taste testing. It allows students to experience and appreciate healthier options, making it more likely for them to choose those foods in the future.

Education & Awareness:

Taste testing sessions can serve as educational opportunities to teach students about nutrition, food preparation, and the importance of balanced meals.

Before finalizing new menu items, it is often very useful to conduct taste tests with students to assess their preferences and satisfaction.

Taste test in the lunch line: Have samples of potential new menu items available for students to take while in the lunch line. See page #29, how to collect data to gather responses.

TRAINING YOUR TEAM

Devoting time and resources to train your team is crucial for achieving success.

Create staff buy in and find an ally on your team

Staff buy in will make the entire process easier and change is always easier when you're not doing it alone

Manage expectations

Unrealistic expectations set you and your team up for failure, so start with manageable changes and adjust course as necessary

Be prepared to devote time and resources

Introducing gradual changes allows students to adapt to new flavors and food choices.

Use your team's input to determine training needs

This will ensure a successful and smooth implementation of menu changes.

Create training materials and make yourself available to support their work

How-to guides can serve as reinforcements and reminders

Assess, evaluate and keep improving

Ongoing training will improve efficiency and productivity

Training Resources

Below you'll find some sample language you can use to communicate operational changes to your staff and prepare them for any expected changes to their roles and functions.

Our nation's public health is in a crisis, and ultimately, this crisis is linked to what we are eating on a day-to-day basis. As a food service team that cares about every single one of our loyal customers we have a responsibility to provide tasty meals that also promote health, well-being, productivity, and longevity.

That's why, over the course of the next year, we will be making a number of innovative and industry-forward improvements to our food service in an effort to provide healthier entrees to everyone we serve. We will be discontinuing (or reducing) 15-20% of our usual meal items and replacing them with (or adding) healthier options that feature plant-based proteins and produce.

This will involve formulating, testing, and serving exciting and delicious new recipes that contain more vegetables and beans and less fat, cholesterol, and salt. These reasonable and straightforward changes will help expose our customers to healthier meal patterns and will encourage more balanced eating.

You are probably wondering how this will affect your role within our food service operations.

The changes we make to the menus will only affect a small percentage of the overall operations, and they may present you the opportunity to acquire new kitchen skills that will benefit you both in your career and in your personal life. Any necessary training will take place prior to implementation of changes and will take place during regular work hours.

In these trainings you may find the opportunity to learn more about the connection between nutrition and health, knife skills and food prep skills, healthy cooking techniques and modifications to recipes, and more balanced meal assembly.

In general, you'll want to highlight the opportunity to acquire new skills and keep up with growing trends in food service; that balanced menus are inclusive of diverse customers and thus improve overall satisfaction; that making health-conscious choices accessible is a responsibility your institution takes seriously; and that the skills acquired through trainings will add value to the personal and professional lives of your staff.

HEALTH-PROMOTING RECIPES

To help your team get started implementing changes, try out one of these simple, FNS-approved recipes or reach out to our team for menu-planning and procurement support or additional recipe ideas!

Protein-Packed Chili

Ingredients

- 1 gallon + 3 ¼ cups canned tomatoes, diced
- 1 ¾ quarts tomato paste
- 1 ½ gallons + 1 cup (1 ½ - #10 cans) canned kidney beans, drained & rinsed
- 1 ½ gallons + 1 cup (2-#10 cans) canned black beans, drained & rinsed
- 2 pounds + 12 ounces (1 ½ quarts + ¼ cup) onions, fresh, chopped
- 8 ounces green peppers, fresh, diced
- 1 pound carrots, shredded
- 8 ounces corn, defro
- 2 tablespoons salt
- ½ cup chili powder
- ¼ cup garlic, granulated
- ¼ cup cumin
- 1 pint – 1 quart water (add 1 pint at a time)

Directions

1. Sauté onions and peppers.
2. Add tomatoes and tomato paste to onions and peppers. Let simmer until mixture is heated.
3. Add beans, shredded carrots, corn, spices and water. Simmer 1 to 1 ½ hours.

Note:

Serve chili with preferred WG grain item such as pasta, rice, corn tortilla chips, roll or breadstick.

Nutrition & Crediting

Servings: 100

Nutrition:

Calories: 106 | Total Fat: 1g |
Carbohydrate: 20g | Fiber: 7g | Sugar: 5g |
Protein: 6g | Sodium: 470mg |

Crediting:

Each cup of chili provides 2 M/MA, and ½ cup red/orange vegetable. **OR**
Each ½ cup of chili provides 1 M/MA, and ¼ vegetable component



Sweet Sloppy Joes with Lentils

Ingredients

- 3 pounds 12 ounces plant-based crumbles (such as Proterra Brand)
- 1 pounds 14 ounces dry lentils, rinsed
- 3 ½ cups water
- 3 ½ cups vegetable broth, reduced sodium
- 50 hamburger buns , whole grain rich
- 1 ¼ gallons BBQ sauce, prepared or scratch BBQ sauce (recipe below)

Scratch BBQ sauce:

- 3 ¼ cups vegetable broth, reduced sodium
- 5 ounces onions, dehydrated or fresh, diced
- ¾ gallons + ½ cup ketchup, low sodium
- 2 ½ tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 pounds + 9 ounces (3 cups) brown sugar

Note:

You can substitute purchased BBQ Sauce

Directions

1. Prepare lentils: Combine water, vegetable broth and rinsed lentils in a large pot or steam jacketed kettle. Heat on high until lentils have reach a low boil. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered for 15-20 minutes, until tender.
- 2.**Alternative method: Combine water, vegetable broth and rinsed lentils in a steam table pan and steam approximately 45-60 minutes, until tender. (Lentils can be steamed the day before and kept in the cooler.)
3. Drain remaining liquid from lentils.
4. If preparing barbecue sauce: Simmer vegetable stock and onions over medium heat for five minutes.
5. Add ketchup, garlic powder and brown sugar. Simmer 15-20 minutes, stirring frequently. (Can be made the day before.)
6. Heat crumbles in tilt skillet or steam jacketed kettle for 5 minutes, stirring frequently.
7. Add lentils and barbecue sauce and simmer until meal service.
8. For even more robust flavor, allow the sloppy joe mix to simmer for at least two hours.

Nutrition & Crediting

Servings:~50

Nutrition:

Calories: 292 | Total Fat: 4.5g Saturated Fat: 1g | Monounsaturated Fat: 1g | Polyunsaturated Fat: 1g | Carbohydrate: 51g | Fiber: 6g | Total Sugar: 22g | Protein: 16g | Sodium: 467mg |

Crediting:

Serve 1/2 cup on hamburger bun. Each sandwich provides 2 meat/meat alternates, 2 ounce equivalent grains. **OR**

Serve 1/4 cup on hamburger bun. Each sandwich provides 1 meat/meat alternates, 2 ounce equivalent grains.

Fast Penne Alfredo

Ingredients

- 1 #10 (110-ounce) can low-sodium great northern beans, drained and rinsed
- 12 cups (roughly 3-4 heads) cauliflower florets, steamed
- 3 quarts (12 cups) unsweetened plant-based milk
- 3/4 cup nutritional yeast (or vegan Parmesan cheese)
- Juice of 3 lemons (6 tablespoons)
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons black pepper
- 18 cups (3 pounds) broccoli florets, steamed
- 6 pounds whole wheat penne pasta, cooked (or your choice of pasta)
- Vegan Parmesan

Directions

1. Steam the cauliflower until soft.
2. Add the beans, cauliflower, milk, nutritional yeast, lemon juice, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and pepper to a blender, or use an immersion blender. Blend until smooth and creamy.
3. Add puree to a large pot, heat over medium-low heat, and whisk to combine everything. Be sure the sauce is hot before moving to the next step.
4. Steam the broccoli and cook the pasta.
5. Add the broccoli, cooked pasta, and sauce to a large bowl. Toss the sauce with broccoli and pasta until everything is coated.
6. Optional: Garnish servings with vegan Parmesan.

Nutrition

Servings: 48

Nutrition:

Calories: 106 | Fat: 2g | % Calories From Fat: 17% | Protein: 2g | Carbohydrate: 20g | Sugar: 4g | Fiber: 4g | Sodium: 495mg | Calcium: 46mg |



Protein Packed Pasta Marinara

Ingredients

- 1 gallon Diced tomatoes and sauce, canned
- $\frac{3}{4}$ gallon + $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Tomato Sauce
- 1-#10 can Great Northern Beans, drained
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Olive or vegetable oil
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons Oregano, dried
- 2 tablespoons Garlic powder
- 2 tablespoon Basil, dried
- 1 tablespoon Salt
- Sugar to taste
- 2 tablespoons Parsley, dried
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons Pepper
- 4 pounds 6 ounces whole wheat Pasta, dry
– Each Serving: 1.4 oz. dry (1/2 cup prepared)



Directions

1. Prepare pasta accordingly, drain and rinse with water. Toss with olive oil.
2. Stir all ingredients together except for pasta and heat thoroughly.
3. Using a 6 ounce ladle or spoodle, serve 6 ounces of marinara sauce over $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked rotini, penne, or elbow noodles. Serve with roll, breadstick or other whole grain rich bread component.

Nutrition & Crediting

Servings: ~50

Nutrition:

Calories: 274 | Total Fat: 1.5g | Carbohydrate: 46g |
Fiber: 13g | Total Sugar: 7g | Protein: 17g | Sodium: 480mg

Crediting:

Each serving of bean pasta and marinara provides 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ meat/meat alternates, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup red/orange vegetable.

Pinto Bean Tacos

Ingredients

- 8lbs Pinto Beans, canned
- 2 onions, chopped
- 1 1/2 Tbsp garlic powder
- 2 tsp Ground black or white pepper
- 14oz Canned tomato paste
- 1 quart Water
- 2 Tbsp Chili powder
- 1 1/2 Tbsp Ground cumin
- 1 1/2 tsp Paprika
- 1 1/2 tsp Onion powder
- 100 Enriched taco shells or whole grain soft tortillas
- Optional Toppings:
 - Vegan Cheddar cheese, shredded
 - Fresh tomatoes, diced
 - Fresh lettuce, shredded
 - Fresh Pico de Gallo
 - Cilantro

Directions

1. Heat pinto beans, do not drain. Puree beans to a smooth consistency, you can mash with a potato masher if you want a chunkier texture.
2. Add onions, granulated garlic, pepper, tomato paste, water, and seasonings. Blend well. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 25-30 minutes. Stir periodically.
3. Fill each taco shell with a No. 20 scoop (about 3 Tbsp) bean mixture.
4. Top with desired toppings.

Nutrition & Crediting

Servings: ~50

Nutrition:

Calories: 249 | Fat: 9g | Saturated fat: 2g |
Sodium: 536mg | Carbohydrates: 32g | Fiber:
5g | Protein: 11g

Crediting:

2 tacos provide 1.75 oz equivalent meat/meat alternate, 1/2 cup of vegetable, and 1 oz grain equivalent



IMPLEMENTING MENU CHANGES

There is no one right way to roll out menu changes, and there is not an exact or scientific timeline either. You and your team know your students better than anyone.

You have prepared, tested, and trained. You will now implement the changes to the menus in accordance with the action plan.

START SLOWLY

Introducing gradual changes allows students to adapt to new flavors and food choices.

ANSWERING YOUR STAKEHOLDERS' QUESTIONS

Anytime you make menu changes, you'll probably be met with a few questions. Especially if you engage in a marketing and/or promotional campaign. Having a prepared response or some place your customers can go to learn more will help ease any anxiety those you serve may be experiencing.

Will these menus comply with federal nutrition mandates? (public schools)

The changes we are making to the menu are in full compliance with the USDA's nutrition mandates for public schools and will, in fact, meet a higher standard of healthfulness than those set by the USDA. Specifically, we are further reducing sodium, saturated fats, and processed meats while we increase the amount of legumes, vegetables, and 100% whole grains.

Why are changes being made to food service?

We are diversifying our menus by adding more healthy entrée options in place of health-harming ones, as well as providing additional beverages and sides. We want to create an atmosphere that promotes the health, wellness, and academic success of our students in making healthier choices as easy, convenient, and appetizing as possible.

ANSWERING YOUR STAKEHOLDERS' QUESTIONS

What changes are being made to the menus?

We are adding a number of plant-based options to the menu and reducing processed meats, red meats, and high-fat and -cholesterol foods that have been shown to harm health when eaten on a regular basis. In addition, we are adding healthier milks, healthier grains, and more produce and plant proteins generally as a means of diversifying options and improving consumer choice.

Why are you removing processed meats from the menu?

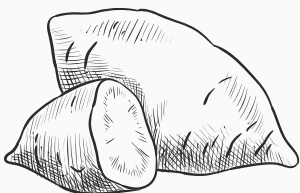
The World Health Organization has determined processed meats to be Group 1 carcinogens, meaning that the body of evidence supporting a causal link between processed meats and cancer is definitive. Other medical authorities, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have called for the elimination of processed meats from hospital menus and from the diets of children and pregnant women. We want to ensure that nothing we serve is causing demonstrable harm.

Where can I read the evidence in support of these change?

We have resources on our website, as well as handouts, that provide links to the primary sources we used to determine our new nutrition standards. These resources will help explain the health benefits, academic and productivity benefits, and the cost savings associated with the innovative menu changes we have implemented. Another resource, with which we are unaffiliated, is the Nutrition Facts website, www.nutritionfacts.org

How will this affect the price of lunch and breakfast?

(public schools) The changes we are making to the menu options will not affect the pricing of student meals. We project that operational costs will [decrease / stay the same].



MARKETING YOUR MENU IMPROVEMENTS

You probably have a lot of experience marketing and promoting the menus you've created, so we've designed some strategies on the following pages in the hopes of helping you build on the successes you've already had.

THINK ABOUT MESSAGING

Using words like balanced, enriched, flavorful, energy-boosting, fiber-rich, nutrient-dense, and other positively-associated phrases is a great way to start investing your team, customers, and other stakeholders in the menu changes from the very beginning. If you can help them see how the menu changes will improve some part of their life, you'll be on track to winning them over!



Replace vegetarian or vegan as a descriptor on dishes that don't absolutely require labeling. Hearty Lentil and Tomato Basil Marinara over Pasta for example, doesn't need the word vegetarian between hearty and lentil. If a vegetarian or vegan eater is curious, they'll ask, and for everyone else, there's no need to point out something that might dissuade them from the choice otherwise!

The terms "Vegan" and "Vegetarian" have a significant impact on the marketability of a product—and not in a good way. Unless the majority of your customer base identifies as vegan or vegetarian, those labels do more harm than good.

STEALTH HEALTH

Using words like balanced, enriched, flavorful, energy-boosting, fiber-rich, nutrient-dense, and other positively-associated phrases is a great way to start investing your team, customers, and other stakeholders in the menu changes from the very beginning. If you can help them see how the menu changes will improve some part of their life, you'll be on track to winning them over!

STEALTH HEALTH

Other stealth health changes could include:

- Replacing unhealthy salad bar toppings like bacon with sunflower seeds or crunchy chickpeas, and reducing the number of cream-based dressings.
- Switching to 100% whole grain products instead of whole-grain rich (51-99%).
- Reducing the portion size of animal products and processed food items.
- Limiting the variety of toppings at a deli or pizza bar. Instead of Meat Lovers, Pepperoni, and Sausage pizza, replace one with a veggie option. There will still be two pizzas with meat options, but a third, meatless option will encourage more people to make a healthier choice.
- The same applies to processed deli meats. Swap turkey slices for avocado or hummus and you're improving the healthfulness of 1/3rd of the toppings offered!

Stealth Health example: if you replace some amount of meat or processed ingredient in a chili dish. Subtle changes to the menu from “Beef Chili” to “Hearty Chili,” or even simply calling the improved dish “Chili,” are almost certain to go unnoticed.

STRATEGIC MENU PLACEMENT

Strategic menu placement works by designing your food environment to encourage specific choices.

Completely removing less healthy choices all at once is unlikely to be an effective strategy. But when menu placement makes the healthier choice easier to access and more appealing in sight, description, and convenience, it becomes an excellent means of encouraging habits that promote life-long health.

Examples of strategic menu placement

Make the healthiest dish the “Main” or “Featured dish”

- Display it most prominently on the menu and on the serving line
- Decorate a menu-board with this dish as the featured item

Don't relegate healthier options to a different section of the menu. Integrate the items into the main menu.

Require an additional step for customers who wish to order the less healthy options:

i.e. instead of selecting the meal from a pre-prepared host of entrées, require customers to verbally ask a team member for the secondary, less healthy option

Limit choices: Restricting options can help students from overlooking the healthier options

Position the less healthy items at the farthest end of the line. Convenience and availability are excellent drivers of choice, and people often select one of the first dishes they encounter. Make the healthiest foods the first ones they see.

Position the healthier food items in the physical path of your students. If you want to increase salad bar sales, move the salad bar to a central location forcing all customers to pass it, not a corner or side wall that requires customers to go out of their way to access it.

There are many other changes we can help you design based on your unique situation and needs!

MAKE HEALTHIER EATING COOL

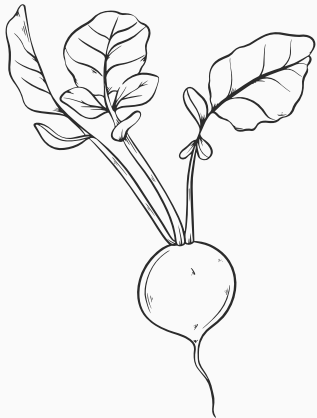
Prosocial messaging—that is, messaging that makes a person believe “everyone else is doing it”—is a powerful behavior change motivator.

On your menus, in your conversations, and/or on any promotional materials you develop, it’s easy to use prosocial messaging, and more and more food service professionals are doing just that to increase their sales.

So, what does prosocial messaging sound like? Here are some examples:

- More people are choosing the quinoa bowl than ever before!
- We know you and your classmates love to eat the veggie soup on cold winter days.
- Lots of people pick the chickpea curry when they want energy for later!
- Since its debut, the veggie pot-pie has only gotten more popular.
- More people are opting to swap their greasy burgers for fiber-rich bean burritos.

Prosocial messaging is especially powerful when you have an audience of customers who are likely to be influenced by the positive choices their peers are making.



- Fun descriptors like “Superhero Spaghetti Squash,” “Totally Cool Tomato Soup,” and “The Queen’s Three Bean Chili” are great for younger students.
- Linking a food product with a beloved adult/influential person is also a good strategy. Ask teachers, school leaders, or others on campus if they have a preferred healthy menu item and incorporate that into the menu, e.g., “Mr. Thompson’s Favorite Hummus Wrap.”
- Use signage or marketing materials to highlight a healthy food item as a recommended choice:
 - “Lunchroom Pick of the Day,” “Principal Lawson Suggests...,” “Mr. Elliot Recommends...,” “Dr. Peterson’s Lunch Recommendation,”

HIGHLIGHT THE IMPACT

After talking to students and gathering data highlight the positive responses and your hard work. Capture the attention of concerned parents who perceive school lunch as unhealthy by emphasizing the positive changes. One such example is replacing processed food items with nutritious, plant-based meals prepared from scratch. This strategic shift will ultimately lead to a rise in student participation.

HIGHLIGHT THE IMPACT

Below are examples of how to highlight the change:

- Post an article on your district's webpage
- Write an article to parents and share it in individual school's newsletters and webpages
- Send out mass emails to all parents
- Create a "Nutrition Services" Newsletter
- Invite parents to join their students for lunch
- Use social media to your advantage, post pictures of your amazing meals and promote the work you are doing

Like all change, your new and improved menu may take a while for your customers to get used to—and that's OK!

Trial-and-error is a normal part of this entire process, but we have no doubt marketing menu improvements is a skill you'll master in no time! With strategic messaging and promotion, not only will those you serve grow to love the food, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you're helping them live healthier and live better.



Establish social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram for your department. Emphasize the positive changes to the menu, and utilize these platforms as a means to acknowledge and appreciate employees.



GETTING FEEDBACK

CONDUCT A SURVEY

As you start to make changes, consider conducting a survey to learn more about your students' experience, preferences, what's working, and what you should change.

Some of the common purposes of a school lunch survey include:

- Assess the taste of a new recipe
- Find out what students want to eat
- Determine student's likes and dislikes

Be specific!

When seeking student input whether regarding a particular menu item or recipe, or general school food information, ask students to provide specific responses and insights. Below are some common questions you may consider including in your school lunch survey:

- What is the best thing you've eaten at the cafeteria? What did you like about it?
- After trying the new hearty chili, would you order it in the lunch line? If not, what did you not like about it?
- Rate today's new menu item on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the best)

When you finish developing the survey, test it with a small group of students. This will help you ensure that the survey is clear and easy to understand.

How To Collect Data

Use online survey tools:

For older students, ask school administration which groups of students will be most likely to do the survey. Distribute surveys through platforms like Google Forms.

To gather feedback from younger students, a simple approach would be to personally approach them in the cafeteria and ask about their preferences or opinions on menu items or new recipes.

Use technology to your advantage:

When you are asking students to take a survey or taste test new items, create a QR code and strategically place it in and around the cafeteria. The QR code will take students directly to a link where they can offer their opinions on new menu items. Use this feedback to help create balanced menus that students want to eat.

Create a relationship with school administration and together build a school food student focus committee

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

We understand financial concerns can have a very real impact on menu design. To make it easier for you, we've compiled a number of grant opportunities and our team is happy to provide additional support as you navigate the application process. **Below are several grant assistance opportunities for schools transitioning to a balanced menu.**



- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Farm to School Grant
- School Breakfast Expansion Grant
- Team Nutrition Grant for Nutrition Education
- NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant

These plus many more grants are available on the USDA website. These grants are examples and opportunity's are subject to change.

www.fns.usda.gov/fm/grant-opportunities?



Salad Bars to Schools (SB2S) is a granting program that provides schools and districts with salad bar equipment and support, including Cambro salad bars, camchillers, and technical assistance.

The program is currently a partnership of the Chef Ann Foundation and Whole Kids Foundation.

To apply:
<https://www.saladbars2schools.org>



Get Schools Cooking (GSC) is an intensive 3-year assessment and strategic planning program that provides public k-12 schools with the operational knowledge to transition from a heat & serve to scratch cook operational.

www.chefannfoundation.org/what-we-do/get-schools-cooking



- Planning grants to develop a farm to school program
- Implementation grants to start a farm to school program or advance an existing program
- Support service grants to provide services to farm to school initiatives

<https://sustainableagriculture.net/>

FIND MORE GRANTS

Search for grants specific to your state

- Use keywords such as:
 - farm to school grants in SC
 - School lunch grants in MN
 - School breakfast grants in CA
 - School nutrition grants in VT

THANK YOU!

We are extraordinarily grateful for the partnership and responsibility with which you have entrusted us, and we are even more thankful for your commitment to the health and well-being of your students who depend on the food service your team provides! You have created the possibility to establish life-long healthy habits, the possibility of greater success and achievement, and the possibility for the future of your students to live a life free of debilitating diet-related disease.

LET'S GET STARTED!

On behalf of your students who may not yet fully appreciate all the hard work you do behind the scenes for their benefit, we thank you for your willingness to lead, to act, and to innovate. We know this process can be difficult, thankless, and overwhelming, which is why we pledge our continued support to you and your institution, and we know that the future will be brighter for so many as a result of the collaboration you were willing to undertake with us.



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