

## ON THE MENU:

# *Saving the Planet*

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO BRINGING  
CLIMATE-FRIENDLY MENUS TO YOUR SCHOOL



# Welcome

Thank you for your interest in advocating for healthier foods in your community. We are thrilled you're here! Before we dive into the campaign materials, I'd love to share a little bit about Balanced with you. I believe the future health of our children will determine the future health of our country, and of our planet. Which is why, when I saw food companies putting their profits before our health, manufacturing and serving known disease-causing foods,

bottom line, no matter the cost to our health. In order to combat diet-related diseases, disabilities, and premature death, we need healthier food environments in all the places we live, work, play, and heal. As an organization, we have worked to hold major food service companies accountable for balancing their menus and the meals they serve in schools, hospitals, universities, and offices—and now, we want to help others have the same impact in

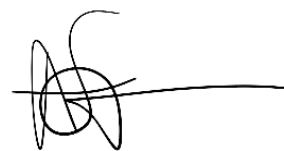
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**We deserve food environments that make healthy eating the default — not something reserved for those with time, access, and money.**

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and ignoring the fact they're contributing to a public health crisis, I felt compelled to take action—so I founded Balanced in 2017. The overconsumption of unhealthy foods like processed, disease-causing meat and egg products and under-consumption of fruits, vegetables, plant proteins, and whole grains is not - as the food industry would like for us to believe - a personal failure of choice. It is, quite frankly, the result of companies and institutions creating food environments that benefit their

their communities. What started as my personal mission has become an exciting movement, and I'm so glad you're getting involved! Now is the time for change, and together, we can create a food system that puts our health first.



**Audrey Lawson-Sanchez**  
Founder and Executive Director





# OUR SUPPORT

You might be asking yourself how you're actually going to actually take on this advocacy work. *Don't worry!* We're here to make this as easy as possible. Here's just some of the ways we can help:

## ADVOCACY GUIDE AND TOOLKIT

In the toolkit (including this guide!) you'll find all the guidance you may need as your campaign progresses, like examples, how-to guides, and templates to make it quick and easy.

## 1-ON-1 COACHING AND SUPPORT

Our team is here to answer your questions and help you become a stronger advocate for your school's (and our planet's) health. You are free to use the guide and toolkit on your own, or reach out to us for personalized guidance and support throughout the entire process.

## CAMPAIGN ASSETS AND MATERIALS

We've found the most effective advocates have a few supplies ready: a website, a petition, a press release, and compelling handouts and posters. Our team will assist in the creation of these assets and tailor them to meet your needs.



*Step One*

GETTING  
STARTED

The importance of thorough preparation for good advocacy cannot be overstated.

In this section, we'll show you how to lay a solid foundation for your advocacy that will set you up for success.





# What you will need

1

## SCORE YOUR MENU

The first step in your advocacy is to get a sense of the current state of affairs. Analyze your school's menu and find out its grade at [balanced.org/score](https://www.balanced.org/score).



2

## SET A GOOD GOAL

The goals you set for change at your institution are a crucial part of your advocacy; they determine what you'll ask for and how you'll need to proceed.



3

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

The backbone of every advocacy campaign is solid preparation. Don't skip this step or you may find yourself in over your head!



4

## FIND YOUR SUPPORTERS

In order to make a strong case to decision makers, you'll want to have a lot of supporters on your side ready to advocate with you for the change your community needs.



5

## PREPARE YOUR CASE

Once the time comes, you'll need to be ready to make the case to decision makers that the change you're requesting is necessary and doable.



6

## GET SUPPORT

Leading the way for change can be a long and difficult process, but you don't have to do it alone. Our team is here to support you by answering your questions, providing personalized guidance, and more. Learn how to get support by emailing [advocate@balanced.org](mailto:advocate@balanced.org).



## Assessing Menus

Before you get started advocating for healthier meals, it's a good idea to figure out where the food served on your campus currently stands. Our organization has created an easy way to assess the healthfulness of institutional menus called the Balanced Scorecard, which scores each category of food on a scale of green (good) to red (bad).

To learn more and evaluate your menu, go to [balanced.org/score](https://www.balanced.org/score).



## Identifying the Decision Makers

Before you start advocating for change, you will need to figure out who has the power to make the change your school needs. Start by looking for who is in charge of food service decisions on your campus, like a cafeteria director.

While this step may seem pretty obvious, it's important to take the time to consider all the key stakeholders you have to influence. Reach out to as many decision makers as you can and set up a time to meet once you're ready.





# Digging a Little **DEEPER**

Before diving into contacting decision makers, it's a good idea to get to know a little more about them and the institution you are seeking to change.

**Here are some key things to know before you proceed to the next step:**

Is their food service run by a third party provider or are menu items prepared in house?

How many people are served by this institution every day?

Are there any policies or initiatives that focus on sustainability or climate change?

Who are the top leadership at this institution?

Are there any potential allies who work there? They could be other students, environmental activists, professors, or student interest groups.

Are the people served by this institution generally happy with the food they are provided? You can try checking Google or Yelp reviews for testimonials.

**{ NEED HELP? SPREADSHEET TEMPLATES FOR YOU TO USE WHEN COMPILING YOUR RESEARCH ARE AVAILABLE IN THE TOOLKIT! }**

# Setting a **GOAL**

Once you have an idea of your starting point for the school's menu, you'll want to establish a realistic but ambitious goal. This is an absolutely critical part of the advocacy process because it determines what outcomes you want to achieve for your school.

Your ask could be reduction of unhealthy products like meat and eggs, or increase of healthier ones like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes - or a combination. We recommend a combination as a way to maximize the benefits of the change.



## REDUCE

menu items high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium



## REPLACE

with fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains







## ADVOCACY TIP #1

# *Stay Positive*

Even in the most supportive environments, change can be tricky. Getting the outcomes you want may require accepting baby steps along the way.

The best and most productive way to approach advocating for change is to partner with the decision makers and work together as a team. So be patient and stay positive — together, you'll achieve far more than you would alone.

Keep working on your powers of persuasion, stay positive, and never lose sight of the end-goal. We know you'll win in the end!

## *Step Two*

# MAKING THE CASE

When you're ready to start advocating for change, you'll need to be prepared to show why you're asking for change and what exactly you want.

In this section, we'll show you how to make a convincing case for change with key decision makers.

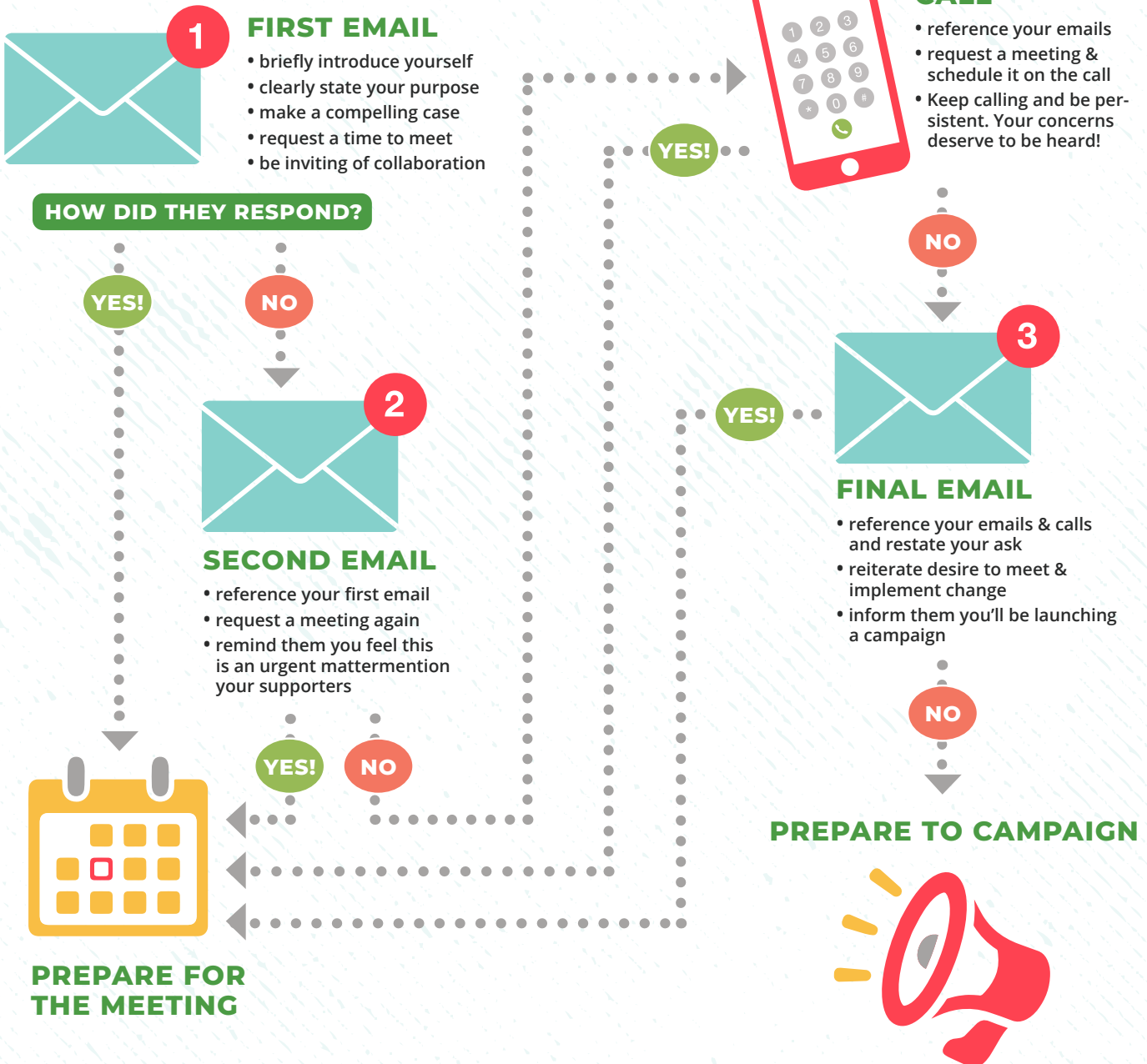




# Contacting Leadership

Use this flowchart to help navigate how to proceed from each communication.

You've prepared all your research, and now it's time to start reaching out to the key decision-makers at your school.



**NEED HELP?** EMAIL TEMPLATES ARE AVAILABLE IN THE TOOLKIT!

*Meeting with***DECISION  
MAKERS**

Prior to meeting with any key decision maker, it's important you do your research. Knowing why your proposed changes will benefit you, your peers, and the school will set you up for success. Knowing how your school will make the change is less important initially - and it's something you and your food service director can figure out together!

There are many reasons to balance the menus wherever food is served on campus, whether it is food cost savings, improved classroom or work performance, or cheaper health insurance premiums. But we've found the most compelling and effective argument for doing so is community health.

**{ CHECK OUT THE FULL TOOLKIT FOR RESOURCES TO  
HELP YOU MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MEETING! }**





## ADVOCACY TIP #2

# *Be Persistent*

If you find the decision makers are hesitant to make changes, don't give up. You deserve to be heard!

Change takes time and a shift this major may require you asking multiple times, in different ways, with different people.

The good news is you've got the facts on your side there's huge momentum toward plant-rich menus in institutions across the country.

Your community is depending on your leadership so stay in the fight and don't get discouraged!



## Step Three

# PROMOTING YOUR CAUSE

If the decision makers didn't initially agree to your request in your meeting, it's time to start convincing others in your community to join your cause.

In this section, we'll show you how to ramp up pressure for change and win big for community health.





## ••• Encouraging **OTHERS** •••

If other students are already on board with your proposed changes, encourage them to speak up! Organize a student meeting with the food service director or other decision maker, have them drop a note to institution leadership, or highlight specific examples of support when you're talking to key decision makers. **The more voices in support of the change, the more likely it is to happen.**

For any students, faculty, or parents who don't yet know the impact the school's menus are having on their health, take the opportunity to share what you've learned. You could **host an educational meeting**, host an informational **table at an event** on campus, or **post to social media** to educate your community. We've found that most people want to eat better, but feel limited by what is available. Help your peers make the connection between healthier menus and healthier choices!





# USING *Technology*

**THE FASTEST WAY TO SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT YOUR CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE THE MEALS AT YOUR INSTITUTION IS BY GETTING ONLINE.**

There are a myriad of ways to advocate for change, but we have found the best advocates take advantage of online tools like petitions, hosting a campaign website, and utilizing social media to recruit new supporters, communicate with followers, and pressure decision makers to negotiate a change.

**WEBSITE:** Hosting your own advocacy website makes it easy to spread the word about your advocacy, direct people to sign your petition, and encourage them to get more involved. Contact our team if you'd like help building and hosting a website.

**SOCIAL MEDIA:** Social media helps you recruit new supporters and spread the word about your cause. It's also an easy and effective way to show decision makers how much this issue matters to your supporters.

**PETITION:** Petitions are a great way to show decision makers that you have a broad base of support for your cause. We can help you write your petition and host it on a custom website too!

**CHECK OUT** THE TOOLKIT  
FOR DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING  
HOW-TO GUIDES!





# Getting Active

# ON CAMPUS

Now that you have spread the word digitally, it is the time to start organizing members of your school community to take action on campus.

There are lots of ways to get your community involved in your advocacy work. Here are just some ideas:

- \* **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**
- \* **ORGANIZING A DEMONSTRATION**
- \* **DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING**
- \* **REACHING OUT TO LOCAL MEDIA**
- \* **DISTRIBUTING LITERATURE**
- \* **SPEAKING AT PUBLIC MEETINGS**

## *The media*

is more likely to cover a grassroots demonstration than online organizing, and it increases the pressure on decision makers to negotiate a resolution.

**NEED HELP?** CHECK OUT OUR HOW-TO GUIDES FOR STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS FOR ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES.





## ADVOCACY TIP #3

# *Keep in Touch*

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Communication is an essential component of good advocacy. Throughout the process of your campaign for healthier menus, you'll need to be in touch with several groups of people, including your supporters, the school's decision makers, and even members of the media.

It's best practice to update your supporters regularly so they know what is going on and what they can be doing to help.

The same goes for decision makers. Keep them updated on all the work you are doing to build support for your cause in your community. Once they see how many supporters you've earned, they just might be willing to talk again!





*lll*

**WHEN YOU**

**WIN**

*lll*

••••••••••••••••••••

You persuaded the key decision makers at your school to commit to balance their menus—congratulations!

Give yourself a pat on the back—all your hard work advocating for change has finally paid off, and your community will now reap the benefits of more health-promoting menus!

It's important to thank the decision makers for agreeing to your campaign requests. A nice way to do that is to send handwritten thank you letters to each of them, along with a small, meaningful gift as a token of your appreciation. In general, the more personal you can be, the more meaningful the thanks. Showing your appreciation makes it easier to stay in touch and ensure the changes get implemented in the future.

Be sure to thank your volunteers, petition signers, local media outlets, and any other supporters you earned during the campaign as well.

*lll*

*Say*

*Thanks!*

*lll*



# GET SUPPORT

## OUR ORGANIZATION EXISTS TO SUPPORT HEALTHY FOOD CHAMPIONS LIKE YOU!

At any point in the process, you're welcome to contact our Advocacy Team for support.

We're available to help troubleshoot problems, share extra resources, and provide customized guidance and support so that you can make change happen as soon as possible--even with your busy schedule!

Our team is ready to help you with whatever questions you have. Don't hesitate to reach out today!



{ **CONNECT WITH US: [ADVOCATE@BALANCED.ORG](mailto:ADVOCATE@BALANCED.ORG)** }



# THANK YOU

On behalf of all of us at Balanced, thank you for taking on the critical work of improving your school's menus. Your advocacy will save lives and our planet!

*Get in Touch*

[balanced.org/lead](https://balanced.org/lead)  
[advocate@balanced.org](mailto:advocate@balanced.org)



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