



the need for

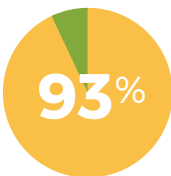
BALANCE



EXAMPLE NUTRITION POLICY DOCUMENT



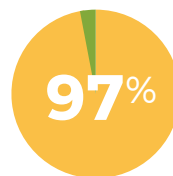
Children's diets are **badly imbalanced**



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



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



of children and adults do not consume enough dietary fiber



Children eat 4 times the recommended amount of protein and twice the amount of sodium

...and it's **making our kids sick**



of children under age 17 already have been diagnosed with high cholesterol



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



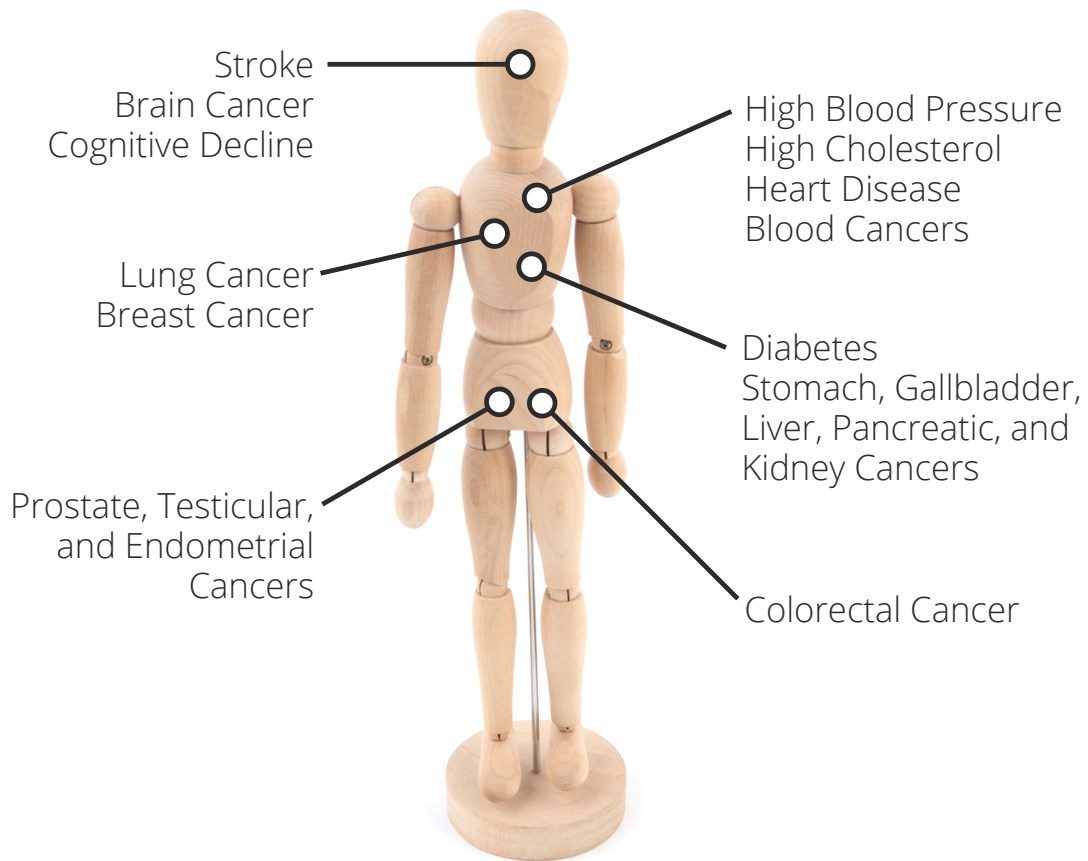
The current generation of children is expected to live shorter lives than their parents



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

Imbalanced diets **are deadly**

Our overconsumption of animal products and processed food products—beginning in childhood — coupled with our radical underconsumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, are associated with increased risk of developing:



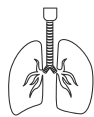
and increased risk of dying from:



Heart Disease



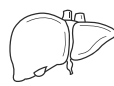
Stroke



Respiratory Disease



Cancer



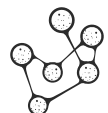
Liver Disease



Diabetes



Kidney Disease



Infections

Generic City is **ready**

Alexandria is already suffering the consequences of imbalanced menus.



32% of high schoolers in Generic City report not eating green vegetables in the last week



Over 30% of adults screened in Generic City have high cholesterol and 28% have high blood pressure



By 2030, it's projected that the number of Citians with diabetes will double and diet-linked cancers will triple



Diet-related diseases make up 6 of the top 10 causes of death in Generic City and kill up to 38,600 Virginians every year

In partnership with Balanced, Generic City Parent has reached out to the community to measure support for more balanced meals.

As of December 9, 299 people have signed a petition in support of more balanced menus, including:

257

parents & students

3

faculty & staff

39

community members



Balancing the **food environment**

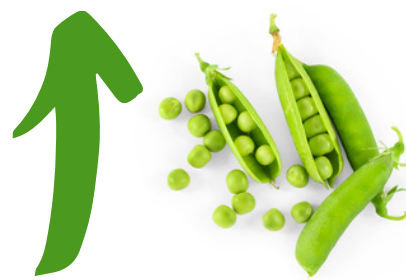
Overconsumption of foods high in cholesterol, saturated fat, and sodium like meat and egg products, coupled with radical underconsumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, is the result of our increasingly imbalanced food environments—and it's damaging public health in epidemic proportions.

Food environment, more so than any other factor, is the strongest predictor of food choice. Students eat at least 180 meals a year at school, which is why it's so important for school food service programs to serve options that reflect the best available nutrition evidence.

Leading health organizations such as the CDC, the Mayo Clinic, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend a balanced food environment that promotes increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, plant-proteins, and whole grains and reduced consumption of foods high in cholesterol, saturated fats, sodium, and excess calories.



less ultra-processed, high-cholesterol and saturated fat meat & egg products



more fruits, vegetables, plant proteins, & whole grains

Our kids deserve **healthier**

While USDA requirements provide a baseline level of nutrition, they do not go nearly far enough in encouraging meals in line with evidence about what is healthiest. The standards are so loose that many USDA-compliant school meals are **unhealthier** than meals from fast food outlets like McDonald's.

HOW ACPS ENTREES STACK UP



Below are entrees from Generic City elementary schools compared to 6-piece Chicken Nugget Happy Meals and Big Mac hamburgers.



Pepperoni Pizza

More saturated fat than a Happy Meal but with **less fiber**



BBQ Beef Riblet Sandwich

Nearly twice the sodium as a Happy Meal



Chicken Sausage

As much **cholesterol** as a Big Mac but with **no fiber**



Spaghetti and Beef Meatballs

More cholesterol and **more saturated fat** than a Happy Meal



Chicken Alfredo with Spaghetti

More cholesterol and **more saturated fat** than a Happy Meal



Macaroni and Cheese Bowl

Twice the total fat of a Big Mac (>100% of the DV) and **more saturated fat** than a Happy Meal

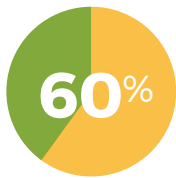
Generic can lead the way

...[I]ncreasing the nutritional quality of school meals appears to be a promising, cost-effective way to **improve student learning**. The value of providing healthier public school lunches is true even without accounting for the potential short- and long-term health benefits, such as a reduction in childhood obesity and the development of healthier lifelong eating habits

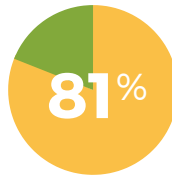
*-How the quality of school lunch affects students' academic performance.
The Brookings Institution, 2017.*

Schools with a commitment to innovative education and student engagement have a responsibility to set students up for a lifetime of health and success in and out of the classroom.

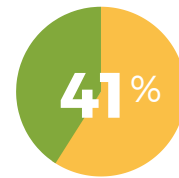
According to recent USDA data,



of NSLP participants
consume too much
saturated fat



of NSLP participants
consume too much
sodium



of NSLP meals fell within the
specified calorie range
Elementary and middle schools
were likely to exceed, high schools
were likely to fall below

Public health organization Balanced has scored the menus at ACPS and has given it an overall score of "D."

As a leader in the Generic area, Your Schools can be doing more to promote a happier and healthier student body, while improving academic performance and reducing school dining costs.

For more information on the Balanced Menu Scores, please refer to the Scorecards provided.

The Ask

Over the next 2 years, commit to eliminating processed meat and replacing at least 20% of the overall meat, poultry, and egg products and ultra-processed foods purchased and served by Generic City Public Schools with fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and other plant-proteins.





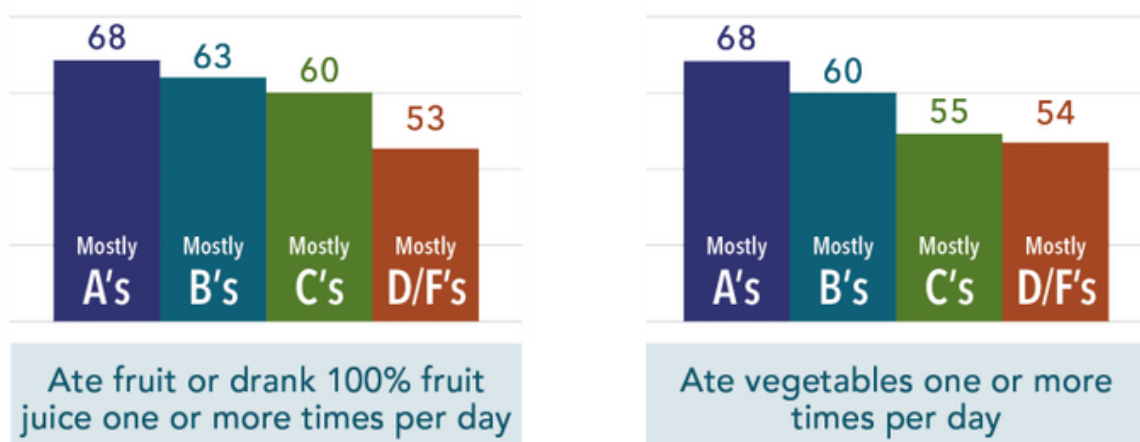
Better for **Generic City's students**

IMPROVES CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE

Schools that commit to healthier menus see improved attendance, grades, test scores, and classroom behavior.

According to the Brookings Institution, in years when a school contracts with a healthy lunch company, student test scores are 4 percentile points higher. In addition, socioeconomically disadvantaged children saw the most benefit from healthy food in terms of score increases, indicating these improvements improve equity in the classroom. Healthier school lunches are at least 5 times cheaper than hiring more teachers to reduce class size and improve scores.

68% of students with mostly A's ate fruits one or more times per day and vegetables one or more times per day, compared to 53-54% of students with mostly D's and F's.



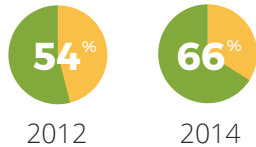
Source: CDC

Better for **Generic City's students**

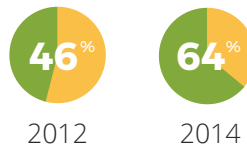
FOSTERS HEALTHY HABITS

Healthier meals have promoted better dietary habits for students since new standards were rolled out in 2012:

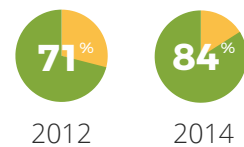
More students are choosing fruit in the lunch line



Students are eating more of the vegetables they choose at school



Students are eating more of their school meal entrees



Studies show that healthier choices at school can also improve their dietary choices outside of school, highlighting the important role that school food environment plays in shaping dietary choices for children.

The impact of school lunches is so significant, Harvard researchers project that healthier school meal standards will **save up to \$792 million** in health care costs over the next 10 years.

APPEALS TO SHIFTING DEMANDS

79%

of Gen Z are eager to go meatless a few times a week

75%

of Gen Z say they are cutting down on meat consumption

65%

of Gen Z find plant-based foods "appealing"



Better for **the bottom line**

According to a study by Friends of the Earth, when Oakland USD reduced their meat servings by 30%, student satisfaction with school meals improved, students purchased 10% more beans, fruits & veggies, and the schools saved **\$42,000**, or about 1% of their annual food budget.

An assessment by Forward Food found that school districts in Florida have reported saving **\$0.10-0.20** per meatless meal.

| Popular protein sources in child nutrition programs | Commercial pricing per 2-ounce serving in participating Florida schools |
|---|---|
| Beans | \$0.15 - \$0.28 |
| Beyond Meat crumbles | \$0.37 - \$0.42 |
| Beef crumbles | \$0.33 - \$0.53 |
| Dark and white meat chicken | \$0.33 - \$0.52 |
| Fish sticks | \$0.45 - \$0.66 |

Source: Forward Food



Recent data from the USDA shows that schools serving meals scoring higher on the Healthy Eating Index have **10% more participation** than schools serving less nutritious meals.

Additionally, the USDA found no statistically significant difference in cost for meals at the highest and lowest nutritional quality level. Thus, providing healthier meals **does not cost more** than the alternative.

It really **works!**

Improving food environment in school cafeterias promotes more balanced dietary habits. When the proportion of meatless options doubled from one to two of four choices at the University of Cambridge, overall **sales remained consistent**, but sales of meat-containing meals dropped and sales of plant-forward meals **rose 40–80%**.

IN DISTRICTS LIKE YOURS...



Boulder Valley School District participation has increased 29% as they have added more vegetarian and blended animal and plant protein options over several school years.



PPS converted their daily hot vegetarian options in elementary schools to 100% plant-based. Food Service Director Jane McLucas noted that plant-based options offer a huge benefit for students of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds with dietary restrictions.



Los Angeles Unified School District has run a pilot program testing plant-based options, and preliminary data shows some days more than half the students are choosing the plant-based option, with no change in overall waste.



The School District of Lee County has found that the majority of plant-forward options do not cost the district any extra money, and has "only heard feedback asking for *more*" plant-forward options.

Maximize your impact

Change doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen all at once. Here are the ingredients to focus on reducing or eliminating first to make the biggest positive impact on your students' health.

RED AND PROCESSED MEATS

Red meat simply refers to all mammalian muscle meat, including beef, veal, pork, and lamb. The World Health Organization defines processed meat as meat that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermentation, smoking, or other processes to enhance flavor or improve preservation. Processed meats can contain pork, beef, other red meats, poultry, offal, or meat by-products. Examples of processed meat include:



Hot dogs
all varieties



Deli meats
all varieties



Pepperoni
pork and beef



Bacon
pork and turkey



Sausage
all varieties

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

Ultra-processed foods are industrially formulated, refined, and packaged foods that often contain additives that manipulate taste and texture. They often include food substances not commonly used in culinary preparations such as modified starches, hydrogenated oils, preservatives, or other additives. Examples of ultra-processed foods include:



Mass-produced
bread and buns



Pre-prepared
pizzas



Poultry or fish
nuggets or sticks



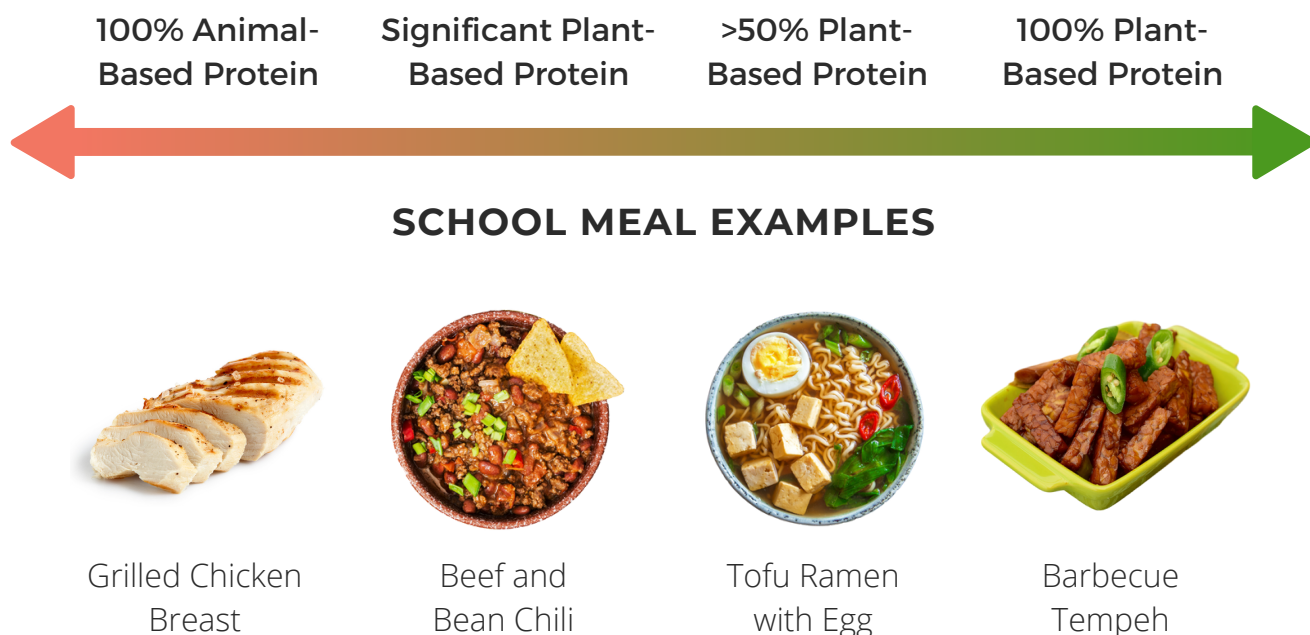
Prepared sauces
and dressings



Packaged
breakfast cereals

Implementing Changes

When you are ready to make changes to your menu, start by reflecting on the current status of your offerings. From there, you can identify existing recipes you can adjust or add new ones. As you plan, we recommend plotting your progress along the Plant Forward Continuum by the Chef Ann Foundation.



For instance, you may decide to adjust one recipe from being 100% animal-based protein to include 80% animal-based protein and 20% plant-based protein, as the Beef and Bean Chili pictured above.

In order to maximize your impact on your students' health, it is important to prioritize incorporating more plant-based foods into the menu. Plant foods offer the greatest benefit to students' health due to the vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals, and dietary fiber that they contain. Decreasing the animal-based proteins by 20% and replacing them with plant-based foods can make a significant impact on your students' health.

When choosing plant-proteins to incorporate more of in your menu, there are several options that are approved the by USDA as meat alternatives, including:



Beans and Lentils



Tofu



Tempeh



Soy Yogurt



Nuts and Seeds



Nut and Seed Butters



Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP)*

**May be used only partially to replace meat*

Utilizing plant-based proteins like those above will enable you to serve more meals that not only meet USDA requirements, but exceed them to the benefit of your students' long-term health.

Nutrition science has shown that the following ranges are ideal for promoting long-term health and lowering risk for chronic disease:

| COMPONENT | BALANCED RANGE |
|------------------|-----------------------|
|------------------|-----------------------|

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| Saturated Fat | <7% of daily calories |
| Cholesterol | <50mg / day |
| Sodium | <1500mg / day |
| Dietary Fiber | >30g / day |

The diversity of plant-based foods allows for a vast array of creative ways to feature them while maintaining flavor and nutrition.

Below is a sample menu that meets the targeted nutrition ranges while featuring a diversity of proteins. Menus are associated with decreased risk of chronic disease and premature death.

SAMPLE MENU

| | MAIN DISHES | SIDES |
|-------|---|---|
| DAY 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• WG Veggie Pizza w/ or w/o mozzarella• Chicken (2oz), brown rice, & veggie soup with WG bread | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Italian herbed white bean salad• Seasoned, roasted cauliflower• Fresh orange slices |
| DAY 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crispy teriyaki tofu with mixed veggie WG lo mein• Black bean tamales w/ brown Spanish rice and tomatillo salsa | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sauteed squash• Zesty sweet potato wedges• Fresh pineapple |
| DAY 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bean, okra & brown rice jambalaya w/ WG cornbread• WG pasta salad with tomato, green onion, olives, spinach, & chickpeas | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Garlicky green beans w/ lemon• Sauteed collard greens• Fresh grapes |
| DAY 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Butternut squash and chickpea WG mac and "cheese" (nondairy)• Beef (2oz) and bean burger on WG bun w/ lettuce and tomato | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Herbed roasted potato wedges• Steamed broccoli• Fresh banana |
| DAY 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lentil, eggplant, and potato moussaka w/ WG pita• WG veggie and beef (2oz) lasagna w/ or w/o mozzarella | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greek tomato salad• Spinach and citrus salad• Fresh strawberries |

Learn more about the support Balanced can provide at balanced.org/menus, and reach out at menus@balanced.org.

Take the **next step**

Schools have the opportunity not only to influence students' short term food choices and health, but also students' long-term academic success and health while potentially decreasing the school lunch program's bottom line. As one of the leading school districts in the DC area, Alexandria City Public Schools has the unique opportunity to lead the way for healthy school food and set up its students for a lifetime of health and success in the classroom and beyond.

The expert team at Balanced, a nutrition advocacy and public health nonprofit, is available to support ACPS in making this transition every step of the way, from reformulating menus to marketing and publicizing the school's dining program as an innovative leader.

Our **FREE Food Service Professional's Guide to Balanced Menus** is available on our website, and our team is available for one-on-one support every step of the way.

Learn more about the support Balanced can provide at **balanced.org/menus**, and reach out at **menus@balanced.org**.

We look forward to working with you to ensure a healthier future for all students at ACPS!



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