

Food and Health

RETHINKING SCHOOL LUNCH GUIDE



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When I arrived [at the school], many of the returning eighth-grade students were coming to school without breakfast and getting Funyons® and Diet Pepsi at first break. . . . A lot of the first-year menus that I wrote used the familiar packaged frozen burritos, but we would add a good fresh salad and some fruit, like kiwis . . . it was a worthwhile step in the right direction. I know a lot of these kids eat fast food, but they can learn by our example what a well-rounded, nutritious meal can be . . . which all becomes a part of the education. . . . After a little while, we pulled the packaged burrito and replaced it with a healthier version of our own making. By that time the kids were ready to say, 'This is great!' because by then their tastes were beginning to tune into something different."

— Nancy May, food service supervisor for the Healdsburg (California) Unified School District

WHAT'S INSIDE?

RETHINKING FOOD AND HEALTH: The goal, the challenge, and some key points to remember.

CASE STUDY: Nancy May, food service supervisor for the Healdsburg (California) Unified School District, discusses her experiences implementing a farm-to-school lunch program.

SEASONAL LUNCH MENUS: These model school lunch menus, based on local seasonal availability, show one school's creative approach.

FOOD AND HEALTH RESOURCES: Check the "food odometer" and explore current thinking on nutrition and school lunch programs in this compendium of articles and journals.

RETHINKING FOOD AND HEALTH

The Goal *To help shape healthy eating habits, which are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential and lead healthy and productive lives.*

The Challenge *Improving the nutritional content and appeal of school meals to model the healthy lifestyle choices students learn in the classroom.*

We've all heard the phrase "You are what you eat." What does that mean for our children?

Today, school-age children are facing an escalation of diet-related illnesses, including obesity, anemia, and Type 2 diabetes. These serious health challenges — as well as problems associated with chronic low-grade malnutrition — interfere with the ability of students to learn effectively, achieve high standards in school, and lead healthy and productive lives.

Many families *do* try to ensure that their children eat healthy meals. Too often, however, the meals served at school do not reflect the healthy choices advocated in the classroom and at home. Surveys from the Centers for Disease Control show that barely 2 percent of school-age children consume the USDA daily serving recommendations for all five major food groups, and over half eat less than one serving of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. Nearly 30 percent of American school-age children eat less than one serving a day of vegetables that are not fried.

In their *Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating*, the Centers for Disease Control state (italics ours):

An optimal policy on nutrition should publicly commit the school to providing adequate time for a curriculum on nutrition, serving healthy and appealing foods at school, developing food-use guidelines for teachers, supporting healthy school meals, and establishing links with nutrition service providers. The written policy should describe the importance of the nutrition component within the comprehensive school health program.

Good nutrition has a role in promoting childhood growth, health, and learning, and in reducing the risk for chronic diseases of adulthood. It is important to establish a school environment that supports healthy eating choices by young people, and generates support for the policy, by identifying how improvements in student nutrition can satisfy the needs of different constituents of the school community.

Making the school lunch period — and the process of cooking and eating — a true learning experience helps children understand that they have choices about the kinds of food they put into their bodies, reinforces the idea that there is a real connection between their health and the food they eat, and encourages them to learn even more about how what they eat affects their lives every day.

KEY POINTS

Healthy Food = Better Students Hungry or undernourished children make poor students. They may be irritable and have difficulty concentrating, which can interfere with learning, and low energy can limit their physical activity. They are more likely than other children to become sick, to miss school, and to fall behind in class. Chronically undernourished children attain lower scores on standardized achievement tests (especially tests of language ability), are more likely to suffer from learning disabilities and retention problems, and are more prone to drop out of school.

The school meal program can model food choices that build lifelong healthy eating habits while supplying the nutrition and calorie energy children need to stay healthy and energetic. Marilyn Briggs, former director of the Nutrition Services Division and former assistant superintendent of public instruction for the California Department of Education, makes a strong case for healthy eating at school: “Most of us already connect nutrition with health. If we go one step further — to connect health with educational goals — then we have effectively connected nutrition to academic performance. There is so much concern over test scores these days. But if kids aren’t in a position to learn because they’re hungry, or they don’t get enough nutritious food at home, then schools that don’t make up the nutrition/performance connection in the cafeteria end up undermining what they’re trying to do in the classroom.”

Healthy Food = Healthy Children Obesity is increasing among children and adolescents in the United States. Approximately 4.7 million — 11 percent — youth ages 6 to 17 are seriously overweight. Obesity in young persons is related to elevated blood cholesterol levels and high blood pressure, and some very obese youth suffer from immediate health problems (including respiratory disorders, orthopedic conditions, and hyperinsulinemia). Being overweight during childhood and adolescence has also been associated with increased adult mortality.

When school food policies limit sales of foods that compete with school lunch and completely eliminate sales of certain kinds of snack foods and sodas with additives, and high fat and sugar content, they are serving the health of children.

Healthy Food = Healthy Communities School district food policies that follow the farm-to-school approach often specify that food will be obtained, to the greatest extent possible, from local, sustainably run farms. These seasonal links to local agriculture and rural communities improve the quality of food served at school and are important threads that connect the entire learning community to the local landscape.

School menus that make a point of reflecting the cultural diversity of the community include vegetarian and dairy-free choices, sending a positive message to students and parents that they are valued.

Supporting healthy eating through written policy is a tremendous opportunity for school districts to directly affect children's health and to restore authority for decisions affecting the health of children to their parents and the community.

Healthy Food Goes a Long Way Behaviors and psychological risk factors associated with dietary choices that are established during youth are difficult to change. Positive food experiences that start early will last a lifetime.

It's not hard to get children to eat healthy food — fresh, seasonal, and well-prepared food tastes delicious. When children grow and prepare the foods they eat and visit farms that serve the school, they are naturally more adventurous about tasting and enjoying new foods. Good habits learned at school have a positive impact on families at home; students are effective at bringing home newly adopted healthy attitudes and behaviors toward food.

Healthy Eating Serves Students, Administrators, Educators, and Parents The benefits of a school district's decision to adopt a healthy food policy can be far-reaching. For parents (and the community at large), it restores authority for decisions affecting the health of their children. For educators and administrators, it offers a way to build longer-lasting changes into the school system, and it allows boards of education and district food services to formalize responsibilities for improving student health.

A healthy food policy can institutionalize innovations that can occur only at the district level, such as improvements to

the nutritional content of school meals, lengthening the lunch period, forming a district nutritional advisory committee, and waste management initiatives that include reduction, recycling, and composting.

Beginning to Explore Your District's Nutrition Policies

When you begin to explore your own district's nutrition policies, you will want to form a picture of the current state of affairs. Ask the hard questions, and listen to the answers. Then think: How can we move toward healthier meals that support student learning experiences in the classroom, the garden, and the kitchen classroom?

Here are some questions to begin with:

- **Are the learning experiences in the cafeteria linked to the classroom curriculum,** garden experiences, and the kitchen classroom?
- **Does the quality of meals served at school** accurately reflect the district's level of concern for student health as expressed in the district food policy?
- **Is nutrition services a full partner** with the district in improving the quality of meals served to students, and in its role and responsibilities for improvements in student health?
- **Do meals served to students represent what and how students should eat** to create and maintain high standards of personal health over a lifetime?

- **Has the district ensured that à la carte items, junk food, and sodas** are not competitive with school meals and are unavailable to students during school hours?
- **Is a wide array of healthy, tempting, delicious alternatives available** to students in place of high-fat, high-sugar, and highly processed meals, drinks, and snacks?



RETHINKING SCHOOL LUNCH

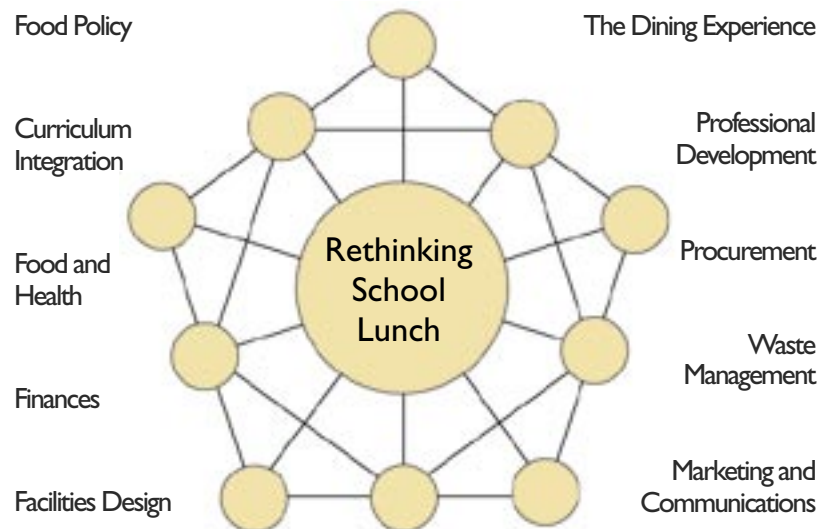
Web of Connections

This document is part of a comprehensive **Center for Ecoliteracy** project that provides helpful information on topics related to redesigning school lunch programs.

The diagram illustrates our systems approach to integrating school lunch programs with curriculum, improving student health and behavior, and creating sustainable communities.

School administrators, food service directors, teachers, and parents will each approach this project from their unique perspective. Readers can begin with the topic that interests them most, then explore the other related topics.

The entire Rethinking School Lunch project is available at: www.ecoliteracy.org/rethinking/rs1.html





Case Study

Implementing a Farm-to-School Lunch Program in the Healdsburg (California) Unified School District.

by Nancy May, food service supervisor for the Healdsburg Unified School District

My advice for anyone who wants to implement a farm-to-school program is to start anywhere, start somewhere. Start as small as you need to start to be manageable and successful. If it means one meal, once a month and the ripples spread, just however small. In a school district, if there is a site that might be better because it has better facilities, and if a willing parent group or teacher is excited and enthusiastic, then start there, where something is in place. Maybe a farmer has a child who attends school in the district. There are lots of places to begin.

I've worked on change at the state policy level, but right now it makes more sense for me to devote my attention to working the

front line. There wasn't really the support for someone to work on the policy level. But the front line is a place where I could show that change is possible. And then hopefully, the policy process here in Healdsburg will follow.

My daughters and I have been here in Healdsburg for six years. Our school district is beyond broke, and many families with school-age children can barely afford to live here anymore. They are moving out, and more expensive homes are moving in. Therefore, the school enrollment district-wide has dropped just in the time we have been here.

My first year assignment was to open up the program with the district at the junior high kitchen. About the time I got here, some nutrition education funds from the SHAPE program were offered and I had had some experience with them. I didn't know one person here in terms of building a team, but I knew it was the right kind of funding for here, so I wrote a grant and got \$30,000 for the junior high program. I made the executive decision of no soda, no junk, and I said we're not only going to do that, we're going to try something new.

We launched the program at the junior high, but I had to reel my vision back in as soon as I got to know the people. The junior high kitchen is a production kitchen. I would redesign it now because originally it was set up as a snack bar for fast food. I would really encourage any new school that is building a new facility or changing an old one to have a very open, beautiful serving line that everyone eats from—open, with beautiful presentation, where the food is right there for the kids. We are held back by the design of our current facility from the kind of service that we would like to do. We've struggled with that. But even with that, we've had to move forward.

We've done what we can to market all the food to all the kids. We had fresh hot food coming out all the windows, especially during the first year and into the second year at the middle school. We've

offered samples and taste tests. We've gone into the classrooms and done cooking in the classroom. We've marketed our program in so many ways; two for ones, information tables in the cafeteria. We brought in Odwalla drinks. Kids didn't want to try the green drinks until their friends tried them and liked them, and then it was okay. We did taste-testing with the kids of anything healthy that we could think of that we thought kids might like.

Many kids were coming to school without breakfast and getting Funyons and Diet Pepsi at first break. That's what many of the returning 8th grade students were eating when I arrived. A lot of these kids hadn't eaten with us in the new program yet. The junior high kids are experiencing bringing their own money to school to buy à la carte and snack food for the first time. It takes some doing to get them accustomed to the new foods that we're serving.

One of the things that we did to build relationships within our school community—which I realized was the key to building trust—was to get everyone familiar with what everyone else was doing. This was not the case before. We tried a guest chef thing, so that once a month we would invite a guest chef from within the school community. The format for these events was using some of our select USDA commodities, fresh produce, and different cultural kinds of meals. The first guest chef we had was head of maintenance of that site. He cooked this beautiful Cajun meal because that was his background. One of the school board members did garlic mashed potatoes and roasted chicken. We served the entire junior high, which was our experimental site for one and a half years, as long as the grant funding lasted.

A lot of the first year menus that I wrote used the familiar packaged frozen burritos, but we would add a good fresh salad and some fruit, like kiwis, which all becomes a part of the education. I know a lot of these kids eat fast food, but they can learn by our example what a well-rounded, nutritious meal can be. So we served the packaged burrito, added some healthy salad and fruit, and it was a worthwhile

step in the right direction. After a little while, we pulled the packaged burrito and replaced it with a healthier version of our own making. By that time the kids were ready to say, "This is great!" because by then their tastes were beginning to tune into something different.

From there, that rolled into reopening one of our elementary school sites that had a kitchen. That was a likely place to start. That just took off. Our participation went off the charts. That kitchen is also the site that transports to a small district that doesn't have any type of kitchen facilities, so they come over to pick up the meals we prepare. Soon the other sites began to say, "Hey, what about us?"

By the end of that next year we were ready to go, and our food staff members were hands on hips, but eyes sparkling. This is not easy, and it was not an easy transition. Now, there may have been grumbling, but their eyes were shining the whole time because they were cooking and creating and being included and involved. Fall 2000, we opened the high school kitchen which now serves as a district central kitchen.

Building relationships was so key to us moving along together. The food staff members were into it. I could tell from the very first time I mentioned the idea that there was a spark there and that this was going to be good. A lot of these women have been here for many, many years, prior to the prepackaged meals, so they came forth with all their stories of how it used to be. So they had life coming back into them around their profession. There is a great sense of pride and ownership in their life skills, so when we tapped into that, that's when things really took off.

A big part of it is that this new style of food service ushered them, and all of us, out of our comfort zone. It was a stage-by-stage thing. The first couple of years that I was here, we were still funded for professional development days through the grant, so we had actual work days when the kids weren't here. We did some training then, but really any staff training has to be on the job, which has its

challenges. But when people are into what they are doing they bend more than if it's just being imposed on them.

For staff development, we've done cooking projects that emphasized how to produce something and how to eliminate a lot of the fat and the salt—how to use fresh food and not packaged, and how to look at the menu and create the simplest menu possible. We developed a strong focus on production and serving. This is separate from the accounting and production records we are mandated to keep. We spent time on how to look at the whole menu, keeping all the parts that they are responsible for in mind.

It's important to remember that people learn in different ways. Some will get it in the setting of one day's lesson. Others won't fully understand it until they have the opportunity to apply it. But over the course of time, people are getting it. There is so much more problem-solving going on now. The staff hardly comes into my office anymore to solve problems. They're figuring it out. That continues to happen.

What's so gratifying is to see the spark of how good they feel about themselves, and how they are with the food and the kids. That's how they need to be. I have stressed that you have to be in a good way around this food and these kids, and if you're not, then we need to figure out what is going on. Our perspective is that we have the honor of providing meals for kids. And I love my staff for the high level of connection that is going on around what they are doing. It really shows up in our participation numbers. No one ever complains about our food, ever.

It's unfortunate that mealtime is not honored or recognized by school districts as it should be. That time is not protected, not set aside and staffed in an honorable way. It's a far less than good situation. Our district is 55 percent Free and Reduced eligible, but that is not a clear reflection of community need. There are still a lot of students out in the community that could benefit from our services. At the elementary sites, we're serving over half of the

enrollment in the schools. About a quarter of the kids in junior and high school eat with us. Those numbers would be even higher if our lines weren't so long, and our lines wouldn't be so long if our facilities were different.

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs hold us to many, many regulations around the school meal initiative (SMI) review. We're offered several different options on how to account for the nutrition components in our meals. The other part of it is the eligibility applications. Both those aspects are really scrutinized every five years. Our district had just been reviewed before I got here. So this whole five years that I've been here, we've been enacting these sweeping improvements in the school meal program. The whole goal was to create a program that was fiscally sound and could pass the USDA review with fresh, simple, good meals.

Last spring, we had our review and our reviewer was here for a week and went through every single piece of paper, nutrient, and menu—it's an extremely thorough review. And we passed. As far as the meals went, she really had to stretch her brain to take a look at some of these menus because we've done some different things. Like with tamales, we have a good commercial purveyor for tamales, but these tamales don't quite have enough protein for our bigger kids to qualify for our two ounces of meat/meat alternate. We supplement protein by serving chips and a really good homemade bean dip or savory, hot beans. That's the entrée—those two things, rather than one contained unit.

I spent a week by our reviewer's side as she asked, "What's this, what's that, how do you deal with this, what's going on here?" I would explain our way of meeting the nutritional requirements to her. It had to make sense to her from her perspective. It took some working with her to get her into the flow, so to speak, of how we're doing things here. Nowadays, a lot of outside vendors are producing entrées that already meet these regulations for the USDA. That's a convenient, grab-and-go thing for schools.

A formula for me in developing our own menus is: a hot entrée, fresh veggies, one other item, which is typically a grain bread, and then fresh fruit. I keep it simple, and I keep it open, and depending on what's seasonal and fresh and available, we can plug it in. For example, we had a frost two weeks ago so that suddenly ended tomatoes and peppers locally. Because I'm not so specific, it's okay. I just fill it in with something fresh and local that I can get.

Food-based menu planning is one of the options the USDA offers to schools. It's not computer-based. Of course, it is easier if you are getting prepackaged meals, since a lot of the nutritional analysis is taken care of for you because it is completely standardized. But if you are doing fresh food production, it's a bit more challenging because you have to look up all of the ingredients and figure it out yourself. Again, it consumes a little more time, but it's manageable.

The USDA commodity program also publishes a cookbook that contains a lot of nutrient serving information. So we have relied on some of that. But food-based menu planning is an old way of figuring out the nutritional component, used at a time when kitchens were well staffed. You know, people to run the mixer, take the change, run the nutritional analysis. So we've had to really modify these recipes according to the level of staffing that we have. So again, there's so many "You can'ts", but you *can*!

We've done a lot of different kinds of menus over the years and I've had to reel in my big vision and modify it by site. You need to meet people, and staff in particular, where they are. If a particular staff group really isn't there yet, then we modify the menu for them, but with that same basic concept of good and fresh—we'll never sacrifice that part of it.

An area of real interest for me is to watch the quality of the USDA commodity food program that we rely on steadily improve, and to see the politics around how that food is distributed. We know several months in advance what commodity foods will be offered,

and we can choose from that published list. There's a large inventory of commodity food that I'd never consider, but there are a surprising number of decent products too, especially if used as ingredients with fresh things.

For example, there are really good deli turkey roasts that come in raw. We roast and season them, slice them, and make a sub sandwich with them. We add local downtown bakery bread, local lettuce and tomatoes when they are in season, and turkey. And so the turkey roasts are \$2.70 for 40 pounds. If you use them for protein, then you can afford a good roll, and you can afford a few extra cents for a nice helping of fresh, locally grown lettuce. The bean salad that goes with our tamales is all commodity beans, and then canned kidneys and garbanzos. Bean and cheese burritos have commodity beans and cheese, seasoned really well, with fresh cilantro. Soups and chilies are made at the end of the week. We use up the veggies and other things that won't last until the following week. That all goes into the soups, perhaps with some commodity pasta. The kids love that.

Doing business with the farmers depends on what season it is, and what's happening on the farm. For example, right now in Northern California we're in early winter. We're going into a period where the farmers are saying, "I won't be seeing you for awhile." Just today a farmer let me know that this delivery of apples may be the last until next year. We've had a freeze, so it's going to be a little while until we're back on track for the lettuces and peas. It could take until February or March. So we've got some weeks to go before all the fresh local produce is back in production. There's no local citrus grown right here, but there's regional citrus, and so we have to broaden our buying circle. It's a real learning experience dealing with seasonal production, but it's bringing us all closer to this place.

I started working with farmers about three years ago. Generally, I've worked with about seven or eight farmers. Not all of them at the same time. Sometimes it's really busy and sometimes it's not. Most of the time, I created relationships with these farmers by calling

them on the phone. I let them know that the district was interested in purchasing fresh local produce and products. But I've also had them call me. There's a wonderful pear grower over in Lake County who heard about what we're doing over here with the food in the schools. He has beautiful, beautiful organic pears, several different varieties, and it's regional enough for me. He brings his fruit over here for us.

It can be time consuming in terms of being in touch with them, creating purchase orders, getting them paid, but not insurmountable. In a district that has any type of clerical support it would be easy to do that. In our case, it's me doing all of it and it's a little bit more time consuming. But for the sake of building this program and what we're creating together, it's okay with me to do that. We work with Love Farm here in town, and Ed Miller at Carrot Top Farm, and there's Dry Creek Peach and Produce. We get the most delicious peaches from them. There are local kiwis.

The main thing is building and maintaining these valuable relationships. To me, farmers are artists. I need to be flexible with them and meet them in the middle with pricing. They have been extremely gracious with us, and they are excited to be with schools and kids and moving something positive forward through our schools. They understand that there's so much good education going on around that.

If you ask me what success looks like here, it looks like cleaning up the food supply even more. In terms of how we purchase, we are moving toward more and more organic. That's the goal. Being able to be in the classroom more. We are holding that vision for how we take care of our kids and always looking to do better. In terms of the food, it means good, fresh, and close, with more attention to the values in the commodity food program.

Nancy May has been the food service supervisor for the Healdsburg (California) Unified School District for the past six years. Before moving to Healdsburg, May was the food service director of the Lagunitas (California) School District, where she oversaw the opening of the school cafeteria and worked with SHAPE grant funding to start gardens throughout the school district linked to nutrition education and cooking classes. May has held management positions with numerous restaurants and conference centers and studied restaurant and hotel management at the University of Nevada.



Seasonal Lunch Menus

Prepared for the Center for Ecoliteracy by Nancy May, food service director, Healdsburg Unified School District, Healdsburg, California

Introduction

The following school lunch menus represent a creative shift to a farm-to-school approach to food services. They are similar to menus already being served in many school lunch programs but include significant enhancements.

These menus illustrate how seasonal, local, and fresh ingredients can augment the nutritional content and appeal of school meals while adding very little to the bottom line. As these fresher, tastier, more nutritious meals attract new students to the program, sales and revenues increase. Positive changes also gain the attention of parents, earning their enthusiasm and confidence, thereby further raising participation levels.

These menus offer useful and practical suggestions that lead the way to a farm-to-school approach and provide an opening for positive change within the reach of most school meal programs.

(Continued on page 13)



Seasonal Lunch Menus

Fall Menus

| Menu 1 | Menu 2 | Menu 3 | Menu 4 | Menu 5 |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Chicken Fajitas | Turkey Sub Sandwiches | Pizza | Enchiladas | Pasta with Red Sauce |
| Jicama with Lime | Sweet Corn Salad | Fresh Veggie Cup | Crunchy Green beans | Armenian Cucumber Slices |
| Chips and Salsa | Cookies | Brownies | Chips and Salsa | Garlic Bread |
| Fresh Grapes | Asian Pears | Red and Golden Pears | Fuji Apples | Fresh Melon Wedges |

Winter Menus

| Menu 1 | Menu 2 | Menu 3 | Menu 4 | Menu 5 |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Tortilla Soup | Lasagne | Grilled Cheese Sandwich | Roasted Chicken | Chili |
| Mexican Rice | Caesar Salad | Winter Greens Salad | Apple Cabbage Slaw | Baby Carrots with Poppy Seed Dip |
| Jicama Orange Salad | Multigrain Roll and Butter | Roasted Potatoes | Pumpkin Nut Bread | Cornbread with Butter |
| Churro | Meyer Lemon Pudding | Faraway Fruit! Pineapple! | Tangerines | Kiwis |
| | Mandarin Oranges | | | |

Spring Menus

| Menu 1 | Menu 2 | Menu 3 | Menu 4 | Menu 5 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Tamales | Turkey Sub Sandwiches | Teriyaki Chicken | Pizza | Chicken Rice Burritos |
| Bean Dip/Frijoles | Broccoli Raisin Salad | Veggie Fried Rice | Pasta Salad | Jicama with Lime |
| Baby Carrots and Pea Pods | Fresh Strawberries | Sugar Snap Peas | Brownies | Chips & Salsa |
| Chips and Salsa | | Oranges | Strawberries | Pears |
| Faraway Fruit! Papaya! | | | | |

Fall Menus

Fall Menu 1

- Chicken Fajitas** Use bountiful sweet peppers cut in strips, sautéed in a bit of oil. Combine with cooked diced or shredded chicken, grated cheese, and serve with good thick tortillas (local, if possible), that have been wrapped in foil and warmed in the oven.
- Jicama with Lime** Jicama is a crunchy tuber that is available from produce vendors as sticks—specify FRESH. Kids love these with a squeeze of fresh lime and a shake of chili powder.
- Chips & Salsa** Homemade salsa is best, but the USDA product is very good. Enhance it with fresh cilantro, chopped cucumbers or other fresh vegetables.
- Fresh Grapes** These are often available fresh from local sources in the first several weeks of school. Student helpers are great at cutting portion bunches with scissors. Present a variety of colorful and delicious grapes from your region.

Fall Menu 2

- Turkey Sub Sandwiches** Use USDA uncooked turkey roasts, and prepare them yourself, well seasoned with salt, pepper, and herbs. This allows more portion cost to be used for good local bread and fresh produce such as local tomatoes, lettuces, and cucumbers. Kids love subs, so it's a great way to get fresh vegetables in them.
- Sweet Corn Salad** Use fresh corn if you have the staff to shuck, and cut kernels. Otherwise USDA canned is a good straightforward product. Add a lot of diced different colored fresh, local, raw sweet peppers, celery, and a bit of onion.
- Cookies** Bake these fresh from your favorite recipe. Depending on staffing, make up a large batch of dough monthly, parcel out week by week. If staff is short, there are very decent commercial doughs available as 1 oz. portions.
- Asian Pears** We buy the smallest size fruit from local farmers—these are not as commercially viable for the farmers, but the perfect size for school lunches, so we all benefit! Talk to the farmers.

Fall Menu 3

- Pizza** Homemade is best, if you have the staff. Commodity product can be enhanced with lots of good fresh produce such as mushrooms, bell peppers, onions, zucchini, and black olives. It provides an example of how a prepared entrée can become part of an overall good fresh meal.
- Fresh Veggie Cup** In Autumn, you can find a variety of sweet bell peppers, cucumbers and green beans. Slice the peppers and cucumbers into strips and combine with green beans—beautiful and well liked.
- Brownies** Again, homemade are best, if possible. Otherwise get samples of commercial mixes from your vendor and enhance them with fresh applesauce or fruit purée.
- Red and Golden Pears** These are so stunning, beautiful, and delicious when served at their peak ripeness time. Keep your eye on them in storage so they aren't served rock hard or mushy. It's valuable education for kids to be served properly ripened fruit. So many children aren't exposed to this incredible and important experience!

Fall Menu 4

- Enchiladas** Make a simple and delicious layered casserole by adding minced vegetables added to commercial enchilada sauce, heated, then combine with corn tortillas and cheese.
- Crunchy Green Beans** These seasonal favorites speak for themselves! In the first season of serving so much fresh raw produce we used 1 oz. portions of homemade Ranch dressing as a dip. The whole idea is to get kids to try something new and Ranch dressing makes it “familiar.” After they develop a taste for the new foods, now we serve mostly just fresh, plain, raw vegetables, which saves labor and production time.
- Chips & Salsa** Homemade salsa is best, but the USDA product is acceptable. Enhance it with fresh cilantro, chopped cucumbers or other fresh vegetables.
- Fuji Apples** As with Asian Pears, try purchasing small fruit in season from local farmers.

Fall Menu 5

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Pasta with Red Sauce | This sauce is good, simple, tasty, and inexpensive to produce. We make sauces and soups at the end of the week with the fresh produce that is no longer at peak quality for the fresh veggie cup serving. We enhance this pasta sauce with chopped carrots, celery, zucchini, bell peppers, or other vegetables we have on hand. |
| Armenian Cucumber Slices | These are sweet and crunchy. Cut them into long sticks or rounds. Regular cucumbers may be substituted. |
| Garlic Bread | This is a great use of leftover bread, whether fresh or frozen. Spread bread with olive oil, butter, minced fresh garlic, and a sprinkle of school garden parsley, oregano, or other herbs. |
| Fresh Melon Wedges | This is usually the first thing eaten at lunch! We wash them well and cut into wedges with the rind on so kids can check out the different varieties. Honeydew, cantaloupe, and watermelon all work well. |

Winter Menus

Winter Menu 1

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Tortilla Soup | Make a soup with basic chicken stock, good fresh carrots, celery, garlic, white onions, and shredded chicken. Place tortilla chips in bowls then ladle hot soup on top. You can make a meatless version but it must be served with a protein source. |
| Mexican Rice | Brown dry, uncooked rice on a griddle or in a large fry pan, stirring constantly until golden and fragrant. Put rice in hotel pans with simple stock or water, diced tomatoes, and seasonings. Cover tightly and bake for about 15 minutes in a 450°F oven, then another 25 minutes at 350°F. It's easy to produce and transports well. |
| Jicama Orange Salad | This is an easy Mexican recipe. Combine jicama sticks with orange sections and add salt and cilantro, if available. Jicama sticks may be purchased to ease production. |
| Churro | We use a commercial product, but we roll it in minimal sugar and good Mexican cinnamon. We serve ½-stick portions. |

Winter Menu 2

- Lasagna** We use our vegetable enhanced sauce and grate zucchini into the ricotta mixture. Cheeses provide the protein. Add school garden herbs to the ricotta mixture and/or the sauce. This is a great way to use school garden herbs.
- Caesar Salad** This is a great salad for school garden greens. Croutons help many kids accept leafy green salads more readily. We make a big batch of simple creamy Italian style dressing from scratch, but you can enhance a dry commercial product with fresh ingredients.
- Multigrain Roll with Butter** We buy these fresh from a local baker in 2 oz. portions.
- Meyer Lemon Pudding** Meyer lemons are sweeter than other lemons and are fantastic to cook with especially in salad dressings, and desserts. If they are not available in your area, use regular lemons and adjust for sweetness. Add lots of grated lemon zest to a basic vanilla pudding or blend together lemon juice and powdered sugar and top each portion with a generous drizzle of the sweet juice mixture.
- Mandarin Oranges** These are easy for kids to peel which greatly minimizes chances of whole fruit getting tossed in the garbage.

Winter Menu 3

- Grilled Cheese Sandwich** This is a basic favorite we make with local, fresh bread. Brushing the bread with olive oil and baking the sandwiches in the oven is simplest.
- Winter Greens Salad** Make this with greens from the school garden or a local farm. Toss with a citrus dressing.
- Roasted Potatoes** Cut a variety of potatoes into chunks, including Finnish, Yukon Golds, and Reds. Toss in olive oil and herbs, salt lightly, and bake. Kids love this. A variety of potatoes is great looking and stirs imagination and curiosity.
- Faraway Fruit! Fresh Pineapple** When we serve tropical fruit, we do a mid-winter education about local produce being less available and about where the pineapple comes from.

Winter Menu 4

- Roasted Chicken** Toss chicken pieces with olive oil, minced garden herbs, salt, and pepper. Bake in a hot oven. This is well loved.
- Apple Cabbage Slaw** Shred cabbage, grate apples, and mix with a simple dressing. This makes a great class project.
- Pumpkin Nut Bread** We make a basic quickbread using canned pumpkin. It's fragrant and nutritious.
- Tangerines** Look for ones that are seedless and easy to peel.

Winter Menu 5

- Chili** As with red sauce and soups, we use less than plate-perfect vegetables to make this popular recipe. Cook any combination of beans until soft. Add a sauté of well seasoned onions, peppers, tomatoes, and other vegetables. Top with grated cheese.
- Baby Carrots and Celery with Poppy Seed Dip** Combine mid-winter available fresh produce with an easy and somewhat sweet dip.
- Cornbread with Butter** As with brownies, homemade is best but check with vendors for the best commercial brands. You can add corn, chopped sweet bells, or jalapeños, depending on your students' tastes.
- Kiwis** Wash these well, cut in halves—or quarters for the littlest kids. As with all fresh fruit, be sure the kiwis are soft, ripe, and sweet before serving. Kids love to scoop them out with a spoon.

Spring Menus

Spring Menu 1

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|----------------------------------|---|
| Tamales | They have great commercial products available that are easy to prepare and transport. These do not provide sufficient Meat/Meat Alternative (MMA) for older kids (according to “Food-based Menu Planning”) so we supplement with simple savory Bean Dip/Frijoles. |
| Bean Dip/Frijoles | Cook pintos or black beans until soft and season with salt, cumin, and oregano. Purée or serve beans whole. It’s a simple and inexpensive nutritional accompaniment to tamales. |
| Baby Carrots and Pea Pods | These are colorful, crunchy, and well liked. |
| Chips & Salsa | Homemade salsa is best, but the USDA product is very good. Enhance it with fresh cilantro, chopped cucumbers or other fresh vegetables. |
| Faraway Fruit! Papaya! | We do a mid-winter education about local produce being less available and about where the papayas come from. |

Spring Menu 2

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|------------------------------|--|
| Turkey Sub Sandwiches | Use good quality USDA uncooked turkey roasts, and prepare them yourself, well seasoned with salt, pepper, and herbs. This allows more portion cost to be used for good local bread and the freshest produce. In spring, use lots of good fresh greens. Veggie Subs are very well-liked by older kids. Use a variety of vegetables and cheeses. |
| Broccoli Raisin Salad | When kids get to make this in class they recognize it and enjoy it at lunch. Use raw broccoli florets and stems with the tough, fibrous outer “skin” removed, then chopped into bite-size pieces. Add raisins, walnuts, and a bit of red onion (optional). |
| Fresh Strawberries | When these are local, organic, and seasonal – they speak for themselves! |

Spring Menu 3

- Teriyaki Chicken** Coat chicken pieces with a marinade of soy sauce, brown sugar, garlic, and ginger, then bake.
- Veggie Fried Rice** Start with cold, cooked rice with separate grains. Cut up a variety of vegetables including carrots, celery, and onions. Toss vegetables and rice together on an oiled griddle. Add soy sauce and stir well. This is easy to produce and transports well.
- Sugar Snap Peas** These are a welcome spring arrival! Wash and serve.
- Oranges** Cold and juicy wedges are great with this meal as the citrus season winds down.

Spring Menu 4

- Pizza** Homemade is best, if you have the staff. Commodity product can be enhanced with lots of good fresh produce such as mushrooms, bell peppers, onions, zucchini, and black olives. It provides an example of how a prepared entrée can be part of an overall good fresh meal.
- Pasta Salad** Go light on the pasta and add lots of cut up vegetables such as celery, peas, olives, or whatever is in season that your kids enjoy. Dress with a light vinaigrette.
- Brownies** Homemade is best, if possible. Otherwise get samples of commercial mixes from your vendor and enhance them with applesauce or fruit purée.
- Strawberries** When these are local, organic, and seasonal, kids never tire of them.

Spring Menu 5

- Chicken Rice Burritos** Seasoned diced chicken tossed with chopped fresh vegetables, fresh herbs, and leftover rice make an easy and great filling. Roll filling in flour tortillas with a little cheese. Burritos can be prepared in stages and transports well.
- Jicama with Lime** Jicama is a crunchy tuber that is available from produce vendors as sticks—specify FRESH. Kids love these with a squeeze of fresh lime and a shake of chili powder.
- Chips & Salsa** Homemade salsa is best, but the USDA product is acceptable. Enhance it with fresh cilantro, chopped cucumbers or other fresh, seasonal vegetables.
- Pears** Use ripe, late season varieties. Keep your eye on them in storage so that they are served at peak ripeness.



Food and Health Resources

Check the Food Odometer: Comparing Food Miles for Local Versus Conventional Sales to Iowa Institutions

Rich Pirog and Andrew Benjamin

This University of Iowa-sponsored study documents the large difference in miles traveled between items bought locally and those bought through “conventional” channels. (PDF: 8 pages)

www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubinfo/papersspeeches/food_travel072103.pdf

Eight Component Model for Coordinated School Health Program

This Centers for Disease Control schema elevates nutrition/health education to equal status with other parts of the curriculum. (PDF: 8 pages)

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/conference/archive/2002conference/abstracts-access01.htm

Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating

These guidelines developed by the Centers for Disease Control, affirm, “Healthy eating patterns in childhood and adolescence promote optimal childhood health, growth, and intellectual development . . .”

www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00042446.htm

Nutrition Services: An Essential Component of Comprehensive School Health Programs

Marilyn Briggs, SeAnne Safaii, Deborah Lane Beall

This joint position of the American Dietetic Association, the Society for Nutrition Education, and the American School Food Service Association calls for comprehensive, sequential nutrition curricula

integrated with child nutrition programs providing nutritious meals and snacks as part of all K-12 education. It emphasizes the need for schools to accept responsibility for preparing people for lives as healthy, productive adults.

www.eatright.org/Public/GovernmentAffairs/92_8243.cfm

Weston A. Price Foundation

The Weston A. Price Foundation is dedicated to restoring nutrient-dense foods to the human diet through education, research and activism. The WAPF website provides information on nutrition, diet, and health. The Foundation’s quarterly journal, *Wise Traditions in Food, Farming, and the Healing Arts*, is dedicated to exploring the scientific validation of dietary, agricultural and medical traditions throughout the world. It features illuminating and thought-provoking articles on current scientific research; human diets; non-toxic agriculture, and holistic therapies. The journal also serves as a reference for sources of foods that have been conscientiously grown and processed.

www.westonaprice.org

Cover photo: Tyler/Fresh Choice, Berkeley/Center for Ecoliteracy





Learning in the Real World

©2004 Published by Learning in the Real World®

Learning in the Real World® is a publishing imprint of the Center for Ecoliteracy, a public foundation located in Berkeley, California.

The Center for Ecoliteracy is dedicated to education for sustainable living by fostering a profound understanding of the natural world, grounded in direct experience.

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