

10 TIPS FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL MEALS



Setting

- 1. Timing is everything. Move breakfast “after the bell”.** Perhaps the single-most-important thing a school can do to increase breakfast participation is to move the service to after the official start of the school day.
 - Set up grab ‘n go breakfast stations in high-traffic areas and main hallways during passing times right before and between morning classes.
 - Send breakfasts out to classrooms on carts during homeroom or first period.
 - [Click here](#) to learn more about the importance of school breakfast
 - [Click here](#) to register for the Breakfast After the Bell Challenge, sponsored by Hunger Free Vermont and the New England Dairy Council - *grant funds are available to support any equipment needs related to moving breakfast service.*
- 2. Use restaurant-style names for your menu items.** Be descriptive. “Squash bake” just doesn’t sound as tasty as “Roasted Local Autumn Squash with Macintosh Apples.” Make sure the featured entrée items are clearly labeled in the serving lines, and include sources of local ingredients when appropriate.
- 3. Display student art & work.** Work with teachers and students to display student work in the serving area and the cafeteria. Make the space feel more intimate, like an art gallery. Student-artists should be clearly recognized, with nameplates next to their pieces. Change the displays seasonally.
- 4. Avoid open-ended questions in the serving line.** Ask “yes or no?”, “mustard, or mayo?”. These questions will keep the line moving quickly, while still allowing students to “have it their way.”
- 5. Display fruit in a bowl or basket on the serving line *and* near the register.** This simple presentation makes fruit much more appealing and has been proven to increase fruit consumption. Also, having fruit available near the register as well will help ensure that more meals are reimbursable.
- 6. Work with your school to purchase or find smaller, café-style tables.** This will help to make the cafeteria feel less institutional, and more like an inviting café atmosphere. Don’t be afraid of high-top tables that students can stand around. Check with local cafes that may be selling or upgrading old furniture. Look for good deals on craigslist, freecycle.com and eBay.

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Outreach

- 7. Engage students in selecting new menu items.** When you adopt a student suggestion, let everyone know where it came from.
- 8. Get teachers on your side.** When students see teachers choosing to eat school food, it sends a strong message that school food is desirable. Survey teachers separately to find out how they feel about the quality and choices you offer. Show teachers they are appreciated. Invite them for a free lunch at the start of the school year or on special occasions.
- 9. Invite parents to join you for lunch.** Serve a meal or appetizers at back-to-school nights, sporting events, concerts or other events. Make sure to bring signage informing folks where the food for these events came from.
- 10. Sell it.** Don't assume that everyone understands the value of the school meals program. Market your program the way commercial businesses do! Use the social media tools and other campaign resources that we have provided to get you started.

Sources: Vermont FEED, School Nutrition Association, www.SmarterLunchrooms.org, National Food Service Management Institute.

Additional Recommended Resources:

- [Great Trays Toolkit for School Foodservice](#)
- [Redesigning Your Lunch Line](#)
- [Nudging Your Students](#)
- [Marketing Assessment Tool](#)
- [Marketing Healthy Foods in Wisconsin K-12 Schools](#)
- [How to Get Middle School students to vote on school menus](#)
- [Nudging Students Toward Healthier Choices](#)
- [Increasing Participation by High School Students in the School Lunch Program](#)
- [Healthy Food Choices in Schools](#)
- [Smarter Lunchrooms Movement](#)
 - Take the 2-hour [online training course](#) (earn 2 CEUs from School Nutrition Association!)
 - Fill out the [Self Assessment Scorecard](#)
 - [No Time To Train](#): A year of 10-minute workshops for lunchroom staff