

Cafeteria Chronicles: Littleton Public Schools

Littleton Public Schools in Littleton, Massachusetts is serving up more than just lunch – they're serving innovation! Recently, the district received two Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Awards: **Innovation in the Cultural Diversity of School Meals** and the **Small and/or Rural School Food Authority Lunch Trailblazer Award**.

These awards, presented by USDA and Action for Healthy Kids in partnership with the Chef Ann Foundation and RMC Health, celebrate Littleton's commitment to nourishing its students with delicious, healthy, and inclusive meals.

Littleton is committed to representing a variety of cultures on their school menus and recently added dishes like Chicken Tikka Masala, Aloo Gobi, and Crispy Tofu. These efforts are guided by input from employees, school committees, parents, and students, as well as hands-on staff training through a local organization. The district sees an average of a 12% increase in lunch participation on days when they serve culturally relevant meals.

Hear more about Littleton's work with culturally diverse menus in this [video](#).

In addition to diversifying their menu, Littleton reduced sodium in school meals while keeping meals flavorful and appealing to students. By sourcing local proteins such as beef and fish, they significantly lowered sodium in dishes where pre-packaged beef and fish were previously being used. The introduction of daily produce bars stocked with colorful, fresh fruits and vegetables further helped the district reduce overall sodium by replacing canned and frozen items.

Feeling inspired? Follow Littleton's lead with some of their best practices:

- **Engage Students:** Host taste test events to let students provide feedback and vote for their favorites before adding new items to the menu.
- **Partner with Experts:** Connect with local chefs, institutes, cultural organizations, or even district students and families to develop authentic and lower-sodium recipes.
- **Educate and Celebrate:** Pair cultural meals with lessons or themed events to create an immersive and engaging experience in the cafeteria.
- **Start Scratch Cooking:** Scratch cooking gives you greater control over sodium, so evaluate your menu to see where changes can be made. Don't be afraid to start slow – even small changes can make a big difference!
- **Source Locally:** Partner with local farms and vendors to bring fresh, low-sodium ingredients to your kitchen.

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- **Empower Students:** Self-serve produce bars give students more control over their choices, and by offering a variety of options, there's always something available that every student will love.

Kudos to the team at Littleton Public Schools for leading the way in school nutrition!