

Cafeteria Chronicles: Innovation in Nutrition Education Award

Keeping students engaged in learning can be a challenge.

However, school districts around the country are providing innovative nutrition education with hands-on learning opportunities like raising fish in aquaponic greenhouses, testing locally produced food, and hosting cooking competitions. These are just a few examples from awardees of the Innovation in Nutrition Education Award, as part of Action for Healthy Kids' (AFHK) Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Awards.

Looking for inspiration? Hear from awardees who provided innovative nutrition education in this [video](#).

Combining biology and agriculture was the strategy used for nutrition education at **Baldwin County School District** in Milledgeville, GA. The high school gardens include an aquaponics greenhouse, home to 79 fish. Students learn about the ecosystem and how the fish provide food for plants and ultimately, the students in the cafeteria.

Innovative nutrition education can help provide a solution to a problem, as Child Nutrition Director, Cacyce Davis, from Elmore County School District in Wetumpka, AL found out. After noticing elementary students struggling to understand what a reimbursable meal was, they created a “five-star” meal system with colors for each of the five meal components. The system encourages students to aim for all five meal components, including an “I Chose ALL 5” sticker students are proud to display after earning.



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Students at **Ellensburg School District** in Ellensburg, WA were given monthly nutrition education about locally produced food such as Pacific Northwest sourced bison, Washington-grown apples, and asparagus. After a lesson, students play games, prepare recipes, and of course, taste the food! Excitement built over time and their “Bison Sloppy Joes” recipe became a popular menu item because of the lessons, said Child Nutrition Director Alexandra Epstein-Solfield.



What advice do these (and other) nutrition education innovators have?

- **Look to existing resources:** Check what other districts, state and USDA’s Team Nutrition have already developed.
- **Connect with teachers and administrators:** Understand what is feasible for your district and gain support.
- **Pull in others for help:** Reach out to dietetic interns, school volunteers, or anyone else willing to help.
- **Expect the unexpected:** Mistakes will happen, have a backup plan ready.
- **Make it fun:** Students love to learn using their senses!

Let’s give a round of applause for these school districts innovating with nutrition education!

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