



ENGAGING STUDENTS IN MENU DEVELOPMENT

A thriving school nutrition program looks beyond the cafeteria and includes input from the entire school community. Key stakeholders in your community include school administration, teachers, staff, parents and caregivers, and students. Show your community that you value their opinion by asking for feedback and incorporating it into the menu. Students can participate in menu development and implementing healthier, lower-sodium items through various activities explored in this worksheet, including menu surveys, taste-test surveys, and joining the Student Nutrition Advisory Council (SNAC).

MENU AND TASTE-TEST SURVEYS

Menu and taste-test surveys allow the school nutrition staff to interact with a large number of students on a regular basis.

Menu surveys provide an avenue for you to collect feedback and interest on current and future menu items. For example, you can use surveys to ask about specific menu items on days when your meal participation is lower. You can also use surveys to gauge the level of interest in items you are considering for the menu. Refer to ICN's [Developing, Implementing, and Assessing Menu Surveys](#) tip sheet to learn more about menu surveys.

Taste-test surveys enable you to test the initial acceptability of new products and recipes. For example, you might need to replace an entrée with a lower-sodium version and use a taste test survey to find out which products students find acceptable. Check out ICN's [Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Taste-Test Surveys](#) tip sheet to learn more about utilizing taste-test surveys.

STUDENT NUTRITION ADVISORY COUNCIL

A SNAC is a group of students and other school representatives who are interested in advancing wellness in their school by engaging in the evaluation of their school meal program. Participating in a SNAC provides students a voice and a platform to engage in menu planning. Student members, along with school nutrition operators and other school representatives (teachers and staff), work together to:

- Create a student-centered, nutritious menu
- Improve student acceptability of meals
- Encourage students to make healthier choices

Refer to ICN's [Building and Managing a Student Nutrition Advisory Council \(SNAC\)](#) tip sheet for more information on how to build and manage a SNAC, along with suggested activities.

SEEK ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Before interacting with students, always seek support and approval from your school administration.

Meet with your school principal or administrator to explain the importance of student participation in the school nutrition program. Pitch the benefits of school breakfast and lunch on student learning. Share information from the following resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [School Meals](#)
- Food Research & Action Center's [Benefits of School Breakfast](#) and [Benefits of School Lunch](#)
- United States Department of Agriculture's fact sheets on the [National School Lunch Program](#) and [School Breakfast Program](#) and information from [The School Day Just Got Healthier: School Administrators and Foodservice](#)

Educate your school principal or administrator on the meal pattern, dietary specifications (including sodium limits), and meal participation. Discuss the impact of healthy meals on the whole child, including physical and cognitive health and performance.

Plan to:

- Schedule time to collect menu feedback and engage students in taste-test surveys.
- Identify teachers and staff who will coordinate with you to promote and collect feedback for the program.
- Start or continue a SNAC; educate SNAC members about their local wellness school policy and encourage participation with their local wellness committee.
- Collaborate with student groups or activities that support your nutrition program.

Use the following table to prepare for a meeting with the administration.

Seek Administrative Support Activity	
1. Write your “pitch.” Try to capture the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” in one sentence.	Pitch: <i>As the food service manager at XYZ Middle School, I would like support for administering taste tests in the hallway foyer following selected 6th, 7th, and 8th grade lunch periods to find lower-sodium entrées that are acceptable to the students.</i>
2. Outline the benefits for the students and the school’s nutrition program.	Benefits:
3. Specify the proposed activities.	Proposed activities:
4. Remember to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to the administration’s comments, concerns, and suggestions; demonstrate willingness to adjust your plan accordingly.• Ask for suggested teacher/support staff to involve.• Thank the administration for meeting with you. Tell them how much you appreciate their support for your school’s nutrition program.• Promptly follow up with an email summarizing the discussion.• Inform administration of the activities’ outcomes.	

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN MENU DEVELOPMENT

- Partner with your district’s culinary program.
 - Work with culinary teachers and students to create menu items or a full menu that meets the meal pattern and dietary specifications.
 - Hold a contest among students to develop recipes that can be incorporated into the school nutrition program.
 - Encourage participation in programs such as:
 - “Cooking up Change,” sponsored by the [Healthy Schools Campaign](#), which “challenges high school culinary students to create healthy, delicious meals that meet the real-life requirement of the National School Lunch Program—and taste great to their classmates.”
 - [ProStart](#)[®], sponsored by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, which is a two-year, industry-backed culinary arts and restaurant management program for high school students.
- Utilize “student influencers.”
 - Student influencers represent the best of your diverse student body (and regularly eat school breakfast and/or lunch) and are interested in advocating for your school nutrition program.
 - Listen to the [Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition’s](#) webinar recording of [Engaging Student Influencers for Product Selection, Menu Planning, and Program Promotion](#) for ideas of how other schools utilize student influencers.

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN MENU DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS STORY

Julie Anderson, Family and Consumer Sciences and Health Educator

In March 2022, Wisconsin Team Nutrition hosted its 10th annual [Whipping Up Wellness, Wisconsin Student Chef Competition](#). Teams of three to five students in grades six through twelve from across Wisconsin competed to develop nutritious, student-friendly recipes featuring local foods that could easily be incorporated into their school nutrition program. In addition to several other requirements, this year's breakfast or lunch entree or side dish recipe needed to include broccoli, carrots, potatoes (all varieties except sweet), or winter squash as a main ingredient. Students were also encouraged to develop a recipe that contained less than 10% of calories from saturated fat and 480 mg of sodium per serving. Recipes were scored on creativity, recipe presentation, use of Wisconsin agricultural products, school food service reproducibility (including affordability), and level of application completion. Qualifying recipes were featured in the annual *Whipping Up Wellness Cookbook*, and one overall champion was selected. This year, 56 teams submitted recipes and 24 recipes are featured in the [Whipping Up Wellness Wisconsin Student Chef Competition 2022 Cookbook](#).

New Glarus School District

Location: New Glarus, WI

Enrollment: 1,000+; 1 elementary school, 1 middle school, 1 high school

Website: [New Glarus School District](#)

The 2022 champion, *Yummy Tummies* of New Glarus High School New Glarus School District, won with their *Creamiest Vegan Chickpea Curry* recipe, featuring local carrots as a main ingredient. Their recipe contained 7.34% of calories from saturated fat and 463 mg of sodium per serving, meeting the recommended nutritional requirements. The team, led by Julie Anderson, a Family and Consumer Sciences teacher at New Glarus High School, consisted of a freshman, sophomore, and senior foreign exchange student. Julie requires her introductory culinary students to compete in the student chef competition for their final class project. She explained, "The students are given one week (five days) to work on the project, including picking their groups, brainstorming an original recipe, developing the recipe, conducting a nutritional analysis, and putting together a grocery list."

To help bridge the *Whipping Up Wellness* competition to the school nutrition program, Julie shared the winning recipe with the New Glarus School District Food Service Director, Rebecca Derke. Rebecca will work with her food service team to scale and cycle it into the menu for next school year. Julie has also attempted to engage her culinary students in the school nutrition program by encouraging their participation in the high school *Student Food Committee*. The committee, which was started by Rebecca pre-pandemic (but paused during the pandemic), consists of food service team members, Julie, and any students that want to join. The committee meets in the kitchen after school once a month to sample dishes and provide feedback. Rebecca also asks the students what foods they want to see more and less of as they attempt to incorporate more foods made from scratch into their menu.

Julie's relationship with the school food service team and her students participating in the *Whipping Up Wellness* competition and *School Food Committee* are just a few examples of how the school community can participate in menu development that focuses on incorporating healthier, lower-sodium items.

Engaging students in menu and taste-test surveys and Student Nutrition Advisory Councils will help you grow your school nutrition community and program!

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