

# Developing, Implementing, and Assessing Menu Surveys

## Developing and Implementing Menu Surveys




Menu surveys allow you to collect feedback from students on current and future menu items. Students can be surveyed in various locations, including the cafeteria, classrooms, after-school programs, etc. Design the survey questions so that the responses can guide action afterwards. When planning the survey, identify the students' grade level and select age appropriate questions and methods for distributing and collecting surveys.

### EARLY ELEMENTARY STUDENTS (PRE K–3RD GRADE)

Implementation Ideas	
Survey Type	Description
Paper-and-Pencil	Words: YES (I like it!) / NOT SURE / NO (I do not like it.) <b>or</b> Graphics: "Thumbs Up / Thumbs Down" or Emojis: "Smiley Face / Neutral Face / Sad Face". For example- At a table, provide the survey questions and allow students time to answer. Use simple answers such as YES/NOT SURE/ NO or utilize graphics (thumbs up/thumbs down) or emojis (smiley face/sad face).
Technology	Ask students to complete the survey via a computer or tablet. This can be done in coordination with a classroom teacher or a technology/librarian/media teacher.
Tokens	At a table, provide the survey question, tokens, and two or three collection boxes. The question should be displayed in large, easy-to-read font. Each collection box should be marked with a response (words or graphics). Ask students to drop a token into the collection box that represents their response.
Words/Graphics	At a table, provide the survey question, printed out words/graphics to represent possible responses, and a collection box. The question should be in easy-to-read, large font. Ask students to select the graphic representing their response and drop it into the collection box.

#### Paper-and-pencil survey example:

Today we served a new menu item, chili-mac. Did you like the chili-mac?

 <b>I liked it!</b>	 <b>I did not like it.</b>	 <b>Not sure.</b>	<b>I did not try it.</b>
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## OLDER ELEMENTARY (4TH AND 5TH GRADE) AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

For older elementary and middle school students, read the implementation ideas below.

### Implementation Ideas

#### Survey Type

#### Description

Paper-and-Pencil

Use "Yes/No" questions with one to two open-ended questions about your current menu options and menu items you are considering adding to the menu.

Technology

Ask students to complete the survey via a computer or tablet. This can be done in coordination with a classroom teacher or a technology/librarian/media teacher.

For both the paper-and-pencil and technology surveys, consider these open-ended questions:

- What do you like most about [menu item]?
- What do you NOT like about [menu item]?
- What would you change about [menu item] to improve it?
- Why would you like to see this [menu item] on the menu?
- What food or beverage would you like to see added to the menu?

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Adapt the implementation ideas listed for middle school students. Generally, you can ask more questions and ask for more details!

### Implementation Ideas

#### Survey Type

#### Description

Paper-and-Pencil

Use student council members (or other student leaders) to interview students and record comments on a survey tool. Ask teachers to recommend student leaders that may be interested in leading or participating in this activity.

Technology

In the cafeteria, post a QR code linked to a short survey that students can complete using their smartphones.

If school policy allows, ask students to answer questions and post suggestions on social media.

Provide older students with more detailed evaluation tools that include ratings and a broader range of questions about:

- The portion size, flavor, appearance, and texture of menu items
- Products to accompany menu items, such as sauces, dips, or toppings
- Preferred fruit and vegetable sides for specific entrées
- Favorite menu items from restaurants they would like to see on the school menu

## Rating survey example:

USDA Team Nutrition has an example of a [rating survey](#).

What do you think of the portion size of the [menu item]?

1	2	3	4	5
Too small		Just right		Too big

How does the food look on your tray?

1	2	3	4	5
Not appetizing		Appetizing		Very appetizing

How does the [menu item] taste?

1	2	3	4	5
Too bland		Just right		Too much flavor

## ALL AGE/GRADE GROUPS

### Provide Non-food Incentives

Provide non-food prizes and awards or hold a prize drawing for those who complete and return surveys. Individual prizes might include water bottles, Frisbees™, balls, jump ropes, movie passes, or donated local vendor incentives that promote active, healthy lifestyles. Please note that survey incentives are not an allowable cost to the non-profit school food service account. Consider reaching out to your Parent Teacher Association or local businesses to donate items.

If your school has a Student Nutrition Advisory Council (SNAC) or similar organization, this would be a great activity for group members!

Check out ICN's [Assembling and Managing a Student Nutrition Advisory Council](#) tip sheet to get started!

## Assessing Menu Survey Feedback

Once surveys are collected from students, it's time to analyze the feedback to see if changes need to be made to the menu.

- To validate the survey results, talk to a few students who provided feedback to gather more information and insight. Teachers can help make sure younger students' genuine opinions are reflected appropriately.
- Listen to your customers and look for themes in their responses. For example, have numerous students mentioned a menu item was too bland or too spicy? Don't be discouraged by unfavorable feedback. All feedback is valuable when assessing ways to make the menu the best it can be.
- Menu preferences and likes/dislikes can vary, so menu changes should require a number of responses.
- Survey responses may include ideas that could improve several menus—such as offering a variety of fresh toppings for burgers, chicken patties, and sandwiches.
- If an entrée isn't well-liked, consider what it is paired with. Would it be more acceptable with different side items? Could it be enhanced with a low sodium sauce?

# Incorporating Menu Survey Feedback

When you decide to incorporate your students' feedback and update your menu, keep the following information in mind:

- Appeal to their senses when making menu modifications – it has to **look** good, **smell** good, AND **taste** good to be a popular menu choice and gain student acceptance.
- Share student survey responses with the entire operations team. The team can help generate ideas to improve menu items. This builds buy-in from the staff and encourages everyone to work towards the common goal of improving the menu for the students.
- Make sure the menu item presentation is attractive. Plate it appropriately (right side up, proper spacing, and separated if necessary). Check out USDA's [School Meals Trays, Many Ways](#) for presentation ideas.
- Consider advertising nutrition information. A number of menu planning and nutrient analysis software programs allow you to post the nutrition information of your online menus. Only [USDA-approved nutrient analysis software](#) is considered an allowable cost to the non-profit school food service account.
- Consider providing nutrition education about the foods on your menu through fact sheets, posters, and learning activities.
- For an unpopular entrée or side:
  - ▶ Made from a recipe, consider modifying it or trying a new recipe. Be sure to taste test (with your students) and standardize new recipes before putting them in your menu rotation. Refer to the [USDA Recipe Standardization Guide for School Nutrition Programs](#) for a tutorial of the recipe standardization process.
  - ▶ That is a heat-and-serve product, consider procuring a different variety or brand. Ask your distributor for samples to hold a taste-test with students. This will help confirm acceptability before it is added to the menu.
- Continue to evaluate your menu items' success by monitoring participation trends and production records.

- USDA's [Team Nutrition Resources for Schools](#) offers nutrition education for children and families, among other resources.
- Check out Iowa's Team Nutrition [Nutrition Education Tools](#) used to educate students about local Iowa foods.

- Use USDA Team Nutrition's [Taste-Testing Event Resources](#), including posters, stickers, and social media graphics that can be downloaded, printed, and ordered by schools that participate in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs to plan and host a successful taste-testing event.
- Check out ICN's [Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Taste-Test Surveys](#) tip sheet to learn more about utilizing taste-test surveys.

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