



# MARKETING HEALTHIER SCHOOL MEALS

Marketing your school meals and engaging students in food, culinary, and nutrition education activities allows you to connect the school nutrition program with your customers. You can use marketing and educational activities as opportunities for your customers to learn about new lower-sodium recipes, products, fruits, vegetables, and flavors.

## WHY MARKETING MATTERS

It is essential to market your school nutrition program on an ongoing basis—consistency is key! It is also important to communicate anything new and exciting in your program. Marketing to students may increase participation, reduce food waste, and elevate opinions about school meals. Test different marketing approaches to see what works best for your program—there is no right or wrong way or a one-size-fits-all strategy.

Work with your district to create a logo and brand for your school nutrition program that is recognizable and memorable for the school community. You can use your new logo on uniforms, food trucks, prepackaged meals, swag, and in social media posts. A fresh logo will provide a foundation for creating social media pages for your school nutrition brand.

## MARKETING TO YOUR STUDENTS

### MARKETING YOUR PROGRAM AND MENUS

There are several strategies to promote your program:

- **Advertise your daily and weekly menus so students know what's being served.** Consider posting the menu in various locations around the school. Some examples include classrooms, electronic banners, class/teacher webpages, and social media platforms. Also, include the menu in daily announcements.
- **Physically showcase your daily menu.** For example, display your menu outside the cafeteria and near the service line. Displaying your menu allows students, parents/caregivers, and school visitors to see the available options, which may prove beneficial in two ways:
  - Increasing interest in school meals.
  - Helping your customers (especially the younger ones) know what they want before going through the meal service line, making it more efficient.
- **Utilize theme days/weeks such as [National School Lunch Week](#), [National School Breakfast Week](#), [School Lunch Hero Day](#), and [Farm-to-School Month](#).** Search “National Holidays,” “National Food Days,” or “Food Holidays” on the internet for more ideas. Also, check out USDA Team Nutrition’s [Popular Event Ideas Booklet](#) for fun ways to promote nutrition and physical activity at your elementary or middle school.
- **Display [USDA Team Nutrition Posters](#) or other food, health, or nutrition-related posters in the cafeteria and other places within the school.**

### Today's Lunch Menu

Oven Roasted Chicken  
WGR Biscuits  
Sweet Potatoes  
Steamed Broccoli  
Sliced Peaches  
Salad Bar  
Milk Choice

- **Involve students in the menu planning process.** Gather their input on lower-sodium menu items using menu surveys and taste-test surveys, which allow you to solicit immediate feedback on student preferences. Students are more likely to be receptive to menu changes when they feel they have an opportunity to provide input.

- **Consider starting a Student Nutrition Advisory Council (SNAC).** ICN's [Implementing and Managing a Student Nutrition Advisory Council](#) tip sheet can help you get started. Participating in a SNAC provides students a voice and a platform to engage in menu planning. Consider presenting information on the meal pattern and dietary requirements and using student members to help promote your program! USDA's [How School Lunch Is Made and How You Can Help](#) is an excellent resource to share with middle and high school students.

- **Recruit a diverse group of “student influencers,” who regularly eat school breakfast and/or lunch, to advocate for your school nutrition program.** Check out the Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition’s webinar recording of [Engaging Student Influencers for Product Selection, Menu Planning, and Program Promotion](#) to learn how school nutrition programs utilize student influencers to drive meal program participation.

ICN's [Developing, Implementing, and Assessing Menu Surveys](#) and [Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Taste-Test Surveys](#) tip sheets provide information on utilizing menu and taste-test surveys in your program.

USDA Team Nutrition's [Taste-Testing Event Resources](#) page provides posters, stickers, and social media graphics that schools participating in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs can download, print, and order.

### MARKETING YOUR PROGRAM STRATEGIES LIST

After reviewing the ideas for marketing your program, use the following table to document your strategies, with details, for current and future promotional activities. For example, for “Advertise daily and weekly menus,” document where and how you currently advertise. Then, consider additional areas or avenues you could use to advertise in the future.

Marketing Your Program	Current Activities	Future Activities
Advertise daily and weekly menus	Displayed on the e-banner, read on the morning announcements, and posted on the School Nutrition web page.	Send out a daily social media blast advertising each day's menu.
Physically showcase your menu		
Involve students in the menu planning process		
Utilize theme days/weeks		
Display food, health, or nutrition-related posters		
Manage a SNAC		
Utilize student influencers		
Other:		
Other:		

## MARKETING HEALTHY MENU ITEMS

How you market, introduce, and present new, healthy menu options plays a significant role in whether students will choose to consume them. Here are some strategies for promoting healthy, new menu items:

- Invite vendors to cook and display lower-sodium food products, offer samples, and provide nutrition education.
- Use school communication channels to highlight healthy, new food items. Some options may include featuring the menu item in morning announcements, newsletters, and social media platforms.
- Highlight menu items by creating fun names and use them to promote menu items on posters or photos.
  - Wacky Waffles
  - Sassy Sloppy Joe's
  - Tangy Teriyaki Chicken
  - Peachy Parfait
- Decorate the cafeteria or service line in a theme related to the menu. For example, host a "Local Takeover" day, highlighting where specific menu items are from in the surrounding community, region, or state.
- Place new menu items in a prominent location on the service line to encourage students to try new offerings.



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## MARKETING TO YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Once school administration, teachers, and staff buy into your program, the students will too. By utilizing the strategies to market to your students, you are also marketing to your school community. Use these additional marketing avenues to target your school community:

- Attend and present at staff meetings.
- Include promotions in a school staff newsletter.
- Ask leadership to send an email to staff about the school nutrition program.
- Encourage your school community to join the SNAC.

Consider the following talking points:

- Meal pattern and dietary requirements (including sodium targets).
- Importance of student participation in the school nutrition program.
- Positive impact school breakfast and lunch have on student learning.
- Impact of healthy meals on the whole child, including physical and cognitive health and performance.

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](#).

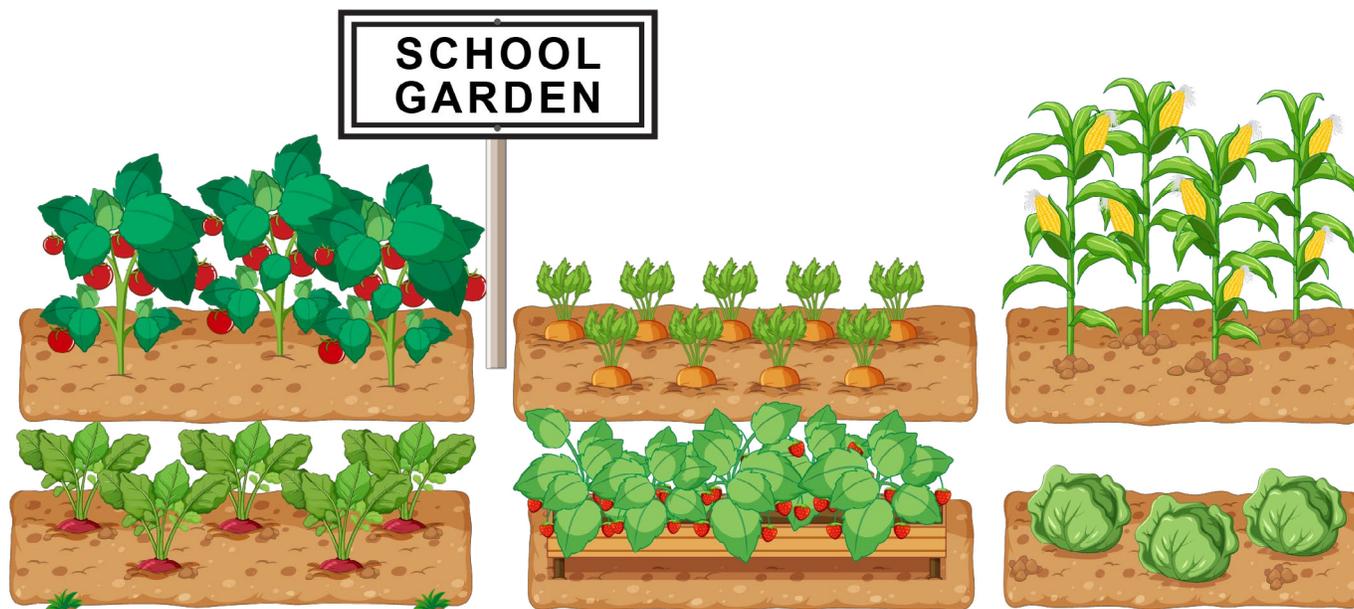


## FOOD, CULINARY, AND NUTRITION EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

Along with marketing your program and healthy menu items through more traditional means, there are also indirect ways to advertise it. Offering various food, culinary, and nutrition education activities can help students learn about new recipes, fruits, vegetables, and flavors.

- Connect with your local [Cooperative Extension](#) staff or [SNAP-Ed](#) educators to provide food, agriculture, and nutrition education in the cafeteria or classroom. Consider your school meal program an extension of the classroom where life-long eating habits are formed and inspired.
- Feature locally-sourced ingredients on the menu to educate students about where their food was grown and raised. Invite a local farmer or producer to talk with students when their product is featured. Students, school personnel, and community members will benefit from this opportunity to deepen their nutrition and school meal knowledge.
- Promote one local food product or ingredient every month through a “Harvest of the Month” program—check with your State agency for support. For example, the Georgia Department of Education – School Nutrition hosts a [Harvest of the Month](#) web page highlighting colorful nutrition education and promotional materials for use in Georgia schools throughout the school year.
- If you have an existing school garden or would like to create one, work with the teacher or coordinator in charge to harvest the produce, which is naturally low in sodium, for use in the cafeteria. Be sure to check with your state and local health departments whether you can incorporate school-grown foods on a school menu. Promote the school-grown ingredients to your students and school community.

Check out The Dirt’s [Incorporating Garden Produce into Healthy School Meal Recipes](#) issue to read about this in action! You can also subscribe to The Dirt’s publications to receive all the latest stories from Patrick Leahy’s Farm to School Programs.



***How you market your program and healthy meals to students impacts their participation.***

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