



Low Cost	Middle School-Oriented
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Middle school students sample and vote on a variety of school menu options, giving them the chance to select new healthy food choices.

## Objective

Give students a voice in selecting healthy school menu meals, empowering them to make nutritious choices while increasing their awareness of MyPlate and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

## The Event

If possible, the first part of this event should be held at the beginning of the school year, prior to the date when ingredients for the next school year must be ordered. School nutrition staff can present two to four dishes that could be incorporated into the school menu. To give students the chance to try healthy ingredients in a variety of ways, consider theming your dishes around a common fruit, vegetable, low-fat dairy, or whole-grain ingredient. For example, students could taste both a sweet potato and black bean stew and a sweet potato, squash, and carrot side dish.

A different table for each dish can be set up, with the ingredients prominently displayed. A teacher or school nutrition professional can briefly introduce the dish, making it clear how each food fits into MyPlate. Students then visit the tables to receive sample cups of each item. When all dishes have been tasted, students can vote for the dish they would most like to see on the school menu using a ballot (see appendix, page 81).

The second part of the event occurs once the votes have been tallied and the winning food is announced. Give students the opportunity to suggest a creative name for the dish. Each classroom can then vote so that one title per classroom can be submitted to a schoolwide title selection. The winning title can be announced over the school's public address system.

When the winning dish debuts on the school menu, promote it as the students' choice and offer additional samples.

## Planning

**Form a team.** To determine what kinds of healthy food choices would work best as additions to the school menu, gather the wellness committee, school nutrition staff, volunteers, student advisory board, and teachers for a wide range of input and ideas. Consider availability of ingredients, cost, taste, and ease of preparation.

**Decide which dishes to present to students for sampling and voting.** The selection can range from two to four dishes determined well in advance by the school nutrition staff. **Denver Public Schools in Denver, CO**, decided to add healthy items, such as a homestyle meatloaf and a cucumber and tomato salad, to its menu. To decide on these foods, they consulted the USDA Foods program, which sources approximately 15 to 20 percent of the food served in each school lunch. USDA Foods provides more than 180 nutritious choices of fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, and grains. For a full list, read the *USDA Foods Available List* (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods-expected-be-available>).



## Planning (cont'd)

**Set a date and decide what resources you will need.** The tasting and voting can be held in conjunction with lunch, and school nutrition staff can plan to incorporate the dish samples into the day's menu items, if possible. Once the dish ideas have been selected, develop a list of the ingredients needed. Invite the principal and other faculty members to attend and serve as role models in trying the various dishes. Ideally, three to four volunteers will help staff the event and hand out samples, as well as tally the students' votes (see appendix, page 85).

**Promote the idea in a fun way.** Display materials in the hallways and cafeteria that drum up enthusiasm for the event and reinforce the power students have to make healthy choices. Middle schools can use Team Nutrition's *You Control You* poster (see appendix, page 96) to reinforce the message of empowerment. For more ideas, consult the list of promotion tips (see page 3).

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# Team Up Success



### School

- Form an advisory panel of students from each grade to consult with school nutrition staff. They can be invited to the planning meetings or hold their own meeting and present a list of suggestions to the school nutrition staff.
- The entire student body can be involved in voting, both for the meal they want to see added to the menu and for the meal's title.



### Classroom

- Teachers can incorporate the voting process into the math curriculum, asking students to create different pie or bar charts that display the results.
- If it is an election year, social studies teachers may want to incorporate the voting element of this event into a lesson on the national election process.



### Cafeteria

- School nutrition services will provide two to four new foods for tasting. For ideas, consult the planning team, the *USDA Foods Available List* (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods-expected-be-available>), and Team Nutrition's *Recipes for Healthy Kids Cookbooks* (see appendix, page 99).



### Community

- Invite a local community figure such as a registered dietitian to join the planning team and provide nutritious meal ideas that kids will enjoy.
- After the voting reveals the winning dish, ask local health-related organizations to include the students' favorite recipe in their newsletter or on their Web site.



## Team Up for Success (cont'd)



### Media

- Take photos of each dish selection, along with the number of votes they received and students' comments about the foods, and post them to the school's Web site.
- Students can write posts for the school's blog and newsletter about the new food items they tried and what they liked and didn't like about each new dish. They can also share what they learned about the nutritional benefits of the various ingredients.



### Home

- Provide students with the recipe for the winning dish to take home and try making with their families.

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# Schools **IN** Action

**Orange County Public Schools in Florida** hosted an annual food festival, the largest student food sampling event in the State. In 2012, more than 300 students attended the event, where they tasted and voted on food items. A total of 140 menu items were available to try, including turkey pot roast, rainbow trout, Mexican brown rice with vegetables, and mini whole-grain sweet potato pancakes. A total of 85% of the district's new menu items for the subsequent school year came from the food festival.



[Photo] **Orange County** students smile at the fifth annual Food Festival.