



Healthy competition is just the ticket to get students excited about eating more fruits and vegetables.

## Objective

Students become more aware of their current eating habits through self-monitoring and are encouraged to set goals for sustained healthy eating.

## The Event

Students team up by class and record the fruits and vegetables they eat over the course of 2 weeks. Classrooms challenge one another to see which class eats the most or the widest variety of fruits and vegetables. Students in each class brainstorm ways to achieve the class goal. For example, how can they eat more fruit at breakfast? Also, the activity can be adapted to have children track what they consume from the dairy or grain groups (with an emphasis on whole grains).

Students can reflect upon their experience in the competition through a journaling activity. At the end of the first week, students can examine how their eating habits changed and share tips with one another about how to make even more healthy food choices during the second week of the competition. At the end of the competition, all classes can attend a celebration. The top teams can receive nonfood prizes and all students can share their experiences with unfamiliar fruits and vegetables during the event.

## Planning

**Plan your calendar.** Decide when and how long students will track what they eat. A 2-week period is suggested to keep students' attention and help them learn new habits. If possible, tie the competition to existing calendar events (for example, by linking the event to New Year's resolutions in January).

**Get teachers on board.** This event can be linked to core course content in a variety of subjects. For instance, tabulating, comparing, and analyzing the class data can be linked to math; discussing the benefits of the healthy food choices students are making can be tied to health or science; and summarizing and reporting findings can be connected to English and language arts. Refer to the following section for several Team Nutrition classroom lessons involving similar self-monitoring activities linked to educational standards.

**Choose your recording tracker and pass it out.** Consider using an existing tracker (i.e., a simplified method of recording what you eat) or develop your own. Students can track their choices at lunch or breakfast, since school meal programs help make healthy choices accessible for students at these times. Some existing trackers include:

- *Fruit and Veggie Detective Challenge Tracker* (Student Handout 6.2) for third and fourth grades in *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* (see appendix, page 97).
- *Fuel Up With Veggies...and Zoom to the Finish!* (Lesson 4 Handout) for fifth and sixth grades in *Dig In!* (see appendix, page 95).
- *Reaching Produce Peak* tracker for seventh grade in *Nutrition Voyage: The Quest To Be Our Best* (see appendix, page 95).
- Older students may be interested in using the online *MyPlate Super Tracker* (see appendix, page 97) to record their food intake.

## Planning (cont'd)

**Reflect on the experience.** At the end of the first week, students can examine their trackers to see where they made healthy food choices and where there are opportunities to add more fruits and vegetables in their diet during the second week. As part of English and language arts, ask students to write a journal entry about their experience at the end of week 1. Students can review whether they met their goals or tried new foods as a part of the activity, and talk about any challenges they faced. Ask students to identify strategies to overcome these challenges in week 2. At the end of week 2, students can again reflect on their progress and set new goals for the future or establish ways to maintain their improved eating habits.

**Select the winners and celebrate.** During each week of the competition, compile the team members' trackers and determine each student's and team's fruit and vegetable total. At the end of the competition, determine the winning class and hold a celebration. At the celebration, give nonfood prizes to the top teams and ask participants to talk about one unfamiliar fruit or vegetable they tried.

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# Team Up Success



### School

- Announce participating classrooms to the school via the public address system. During the challenge, provide tips on how to eat more fruits and vegetables (or dairy foods or whole grains) each day.
- Ask teachers, school nutrition staff, and principals to participate in the challenge along with the students. Middle schools can provide staff with *Healthier Middle Schools: Everyone Can Help* materials (see appendix, page 98), which encourage healthy role-modeling behaviors.



### Classroom

- Record students' progress as a class and strategize ways to reach their goals.
- Teach lessons associated with the trackers listed under the Planning section (see appendix for more information about *Dig In!*, *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* and *Nutrition Voyage* curricula, page 95).



### Cafeteria

- Coordinate with the school nutrition director to include encouraging messages about the challenge on the school lunch menu.
- Highlight fruits and vegetables on the menu.
- Display the *It's Launch Time* fruit and vegetable poster and *Make Half Your Plate Fruits and Vegetables* poster, if hosting the event at an elementary school (see appendix, page 96).
- Display the *Power Up!* fruit and vegetable game poster, if hosting the event at a middle school (see appendix, page 96).



### Community

- Request donations, such as nonfood prizes, from community retailers for your celebrations.
- Ask local public figures, such as the mayor, to participate with students in the challenge.

## Team Up for Success (cont'd)



### Media

- Include a “Can’t Beat How I Eat” recurring feature in the school newspaper or blog that spotlights students participating in the competition. The feature can highlight the students’ success in the competition and share tips for readers looking to improve their own eating habits.



### Home

- Send a letter to students’ families (see appendix, page 90) explaining the competition, and provide families with a copy of the tracker used by students to encourage family members to participate in the challenge.
- Middle schools can also provide families with the *Healthier Middle Schools: Everyone Can Help* parent materials (see appendix, page 98).

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# Schools **IN** Action

Students at **Wakarusa Elementary School** in **Wakarusa, IN**, completed weekly trackers for a month, noting their healthy food choices and physical activity. They completed trackers at home and turned them in to their teachers each Monday. To accompany the activity, the school made morning announcements featuring health tips, physical activity ideas, and suggestions for healthy food choices. The school also hosted food demonstrations featuring two recipes that involved apples (apple cinnamon breakfast quesadillas and apple-cranberry smoothies), and students were given apples to take home for a snack. At the end of each week, students reviewed their trackers to identify where they made healthy food choices and where they had room for improvement.

In **Dodge City, KS**, schools competed to see which teams could eat the most fruits and vegetables, as well as be more physically active. Each school had a team captain who tracked the school’s progress and reported back to the district. During the competition, teams ate more than 3 tons of fruits and vegetables and walked more than 25,000 miles. In addition to receiving prizes of fresh fruit and vegetable trays, participants reported feeling more energetic and positive. Students weren’t the only ones to take the challenge – 425 staff members participated in the competition and lost a collective 842 pounds!

Eighth-grade students at **Sequoyah Middle School** in **Doraville, GA**, participated in a “Can You Eat Better Than a Grade Schooler?” challenge. During the 2-week competition, students in health education class learned about MyPlate and the variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain-rich foods offered in school meals. Students kept journals to record the vegetables and grains they ate and how long they spent staying active each day. Challenge participants were recognized at a ceremony during annual Field Day activities.



[Photo] A **Wakarusa Elementary School** student enjoys an apple-cranberry smoothie.