

Low Cost | Minimal Effort | Elementary School-Oriented | Middle School-Oriented

Students from different schools share stories about nutrient-rich foods grown and eaten in their area.

Objective

Students gain favorable attitudes toward novel fruits, vegetables, or whole grains.



The Event

Teachers or administrators connect their school with another school in a different part of the United States, pairing individual students as pen pals. Through letters, students introduce themselves and share information about their favorite fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, as well as foods that are native to their region. Students can be given a list of questions to ask their pen pals, using materials such as *Dig In!: Lesson 6, Handout 2: Garden Pen Pals* (see appendix, page 95). If the school maintains a garden, students can also share updates about the garden with their pen pals. As letters are received back, students can read them aloud to the class and discuss how their pen pals' eating habits differ from their own.

Planning

Identify your pen pal project leaders. With help from the school wellness committee and language arts teachers, identify a staff member or teacher who can lead the effort. Check to see if administrative approval is needed. If your program starts at the beginning of the school year, pen pals will be able to correspond throughout the year.

Find a classroom or school partner. Use the U.S. Department of Agriculture's *Team Nutrition: Schools Database* Web site to find other Team Nutrition schools in different regions of the country (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/database>).

Connect leadership at both schools to determine how your pen pal program will work. Decide together how the program will function. Will students correspond through email or hand-written letters? How often will pen pals write to one another? Is online video chat software appropriate to use?

Integrate classroom activities into the project. Before the pen pal program begins, ask teachers or guest speakers to talk about different types of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains produced locally and around the United States. That way, students will be prepared with knowledge about their own local food history – and they'll be ready with questions for their new pen pals.



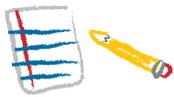
Team Up Success



School

- Students can share letters from their pen pals in the school paper.
- A student reporter from the school paper or cable news show can interview students about the pen pal experience.
- Students can send a cardboard cutout or other replica of the school mascot to their pen pals. The pen pals can then send back photographs of the mascot with the pen pals' school lunch, in the school garden surrounded by local foods, or at a nutrition education class.

Classroom



- Elementary school teachers can help students learn about the many choices from different food groups using several standards-based curricula from Team Nutrition, including *Serving Up MyPlate: A Yummy Curriculum*, *Dig In!*, and *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* (see appendix, pages 94-95). These resources include a cross-walk that shows how activities meet Common Core and other educational standards for core subjects.
- Seventh grade science classes can use the *Nutrition Voyage: The Path to Fruits and Veggies* lesson to track and analyze their fruit and vegetable consumption. Eighth grade English and language arts classes can use the *Nutrition Voyage: From Farm to You* lesson to further explore where food comes from (see appendix, page 95).
- Use class time to talk about healthy breakfasts and lunches in different parts of the country. For example, a class in Virginia might talk about what students in Alaska eat for breakfast.
- Math classes can determine the distance between each student and their pen pal, or discover what percentage of their State's economy relies on agriculture.

Cafeteria



- Classrooms can decorate a cafeteria bulletin board with letters from their pen pals and, if resources allow, prepare (with school nutrition staff supervision) a healthy dish local to the pen pals' area.

Community



- Students can write to the mayor or school superintendent at the end of the project, encouraging other schools in the area to participate in a pen pal program.
- Schools can invite a local chef, registered dietitian, or farmer to be the school's pen pal, writing about the locally grown fruits, vegetables, or whole grains they serve or grow.

Team Up for Success (cont'd)



Media

- Invite a local blogger to write about the pen pal program and post students' letters to the school blog.



Home

- Compile the students' letters to their pen pals into a booklet to share with students' families. Encourage families and students to write pen pal letters together over school breaks.

Schools **IN** Action



As part of *International School Meals Day* (ISMD), **Cartoogechaye Elementary School** in **Macon County, NC**, partnered with **Bridgend Primary** in **Scotland** to share challenges and successes with healthy eating in different parts of the world. Before connecting with its partner school, the elementary school invited three guest speakers to visit the classroom: a community member of Scottish heritage, who discussed the local history of Scottish culture in Macon County; the school's child nutrition director, who talked about nutrition and brought a healthy breakfast for students to sample; and a representative from the Macon County Health Department, who discussed MyPlate, portion control, and building a balanced diet. Following the guest speakers, the students researched Scotland and brainstormed in groups to compile questions for the students at **Bridgend Primary**. Students also compared the menus of both schools, worked together to locate Bridgend on a map, wrote letters to Bridgend students, and prepared foods from Scotland. During the video conferencing session with Scotland, Cartoogechaye showed Scottish students typical school breakfast foods consumed in the United States.

Fourth-grade students at **M.B. Henderson Elementary School** in **Dallas, TX**, also celebrated ISMD by holding a breakfast video conference with students in Scotland. Students learned about what foods they ate during the week, shared different recipes from other countries, and created a poster.



[Photo] American students share breakfast with new Scottish friends as part of *International School Meals Day*.