



# SCHOOL FOOD CHARTER



**Our school food charter is a set of food values we believe should underpin every school meal service. With a bit of planning and negotiation, you'll find them easy to adopt. You'll notice a dramatic difference in the health of the children in your care, your school cooks will find mealtimes more rewarding and teachers will see improved concentration and better performance in class.**

**You can also use this practical plan for any community food project and for your families at home.**

**Food education is at the heart of making a change and can help both children and adults make better choices, in and out of the lunch line. Make sure it is incorporated into your plans and policy.**

## SERVE FRESH FOOD

Make fresh, raw ingredients the basis of your school meals. Don't cheat with processed and ready-made foods. The most basic kitchen equipment will help your cooks to peel and chop fresh vegetables quickly for sauces and toppings. Raw food isn't a health risk unless you have poor kitchen hygiene.

## CHECK INGREDIENTS

Make a point of always knowing what's in the food you serve. Appoint someone in the kitchen to be your label watchdog. Don't just look for the USDA symbol. How many ingredients do you recognize? How many are adding nutritional value to the food? Real food, cooked fresh, doesn't need additives, preservatives, or anything artificial. Processed food is often full of these things.

## DON'T SELL JUNK FOOD

Make sure all the food choices for kids at school are healthy choices. The kids who eat fries, chips and candy and drink soda every day instead of having a good meal don't get the nutrition they need to grow and learn properly. It also sets them on a fast track to health problems for later life.

## HONOR THE MEAL

Stop snacks and fast food. Make sure each child gets a proper meal for breakfast and lunch and put a bit of everything on their plate – if children just choose their favorites, they won't get a balanced, nourishing meal. Serve meals on washable plates with cutlery – no styro-foam means less waste. Give children time to sit down and eat, and ask adult volunteers to join them and supervise. Eating meals together builds social skills and can make lunchtime a fun part of the day that they will look forward to.

## TOUGH LOVE

It takes time and patience to get children to eat something new, and it may take a few weeks for your new menus to be accepted. Remember that children don't always know what's best for them, so if they resist, don't give in. You may face opposition, but just take it one step at a time. Remind yourself of why you are doing this and persevere in the knowledge that they will be better nourished. Put out small tasters, challenge the children to try them and use the menu board to make new dishes sound special. If it tastes great, the children will soon want to eat it.

## SERVE WATER

Children need to drink because their bodies need hydration, not extra calories. Water is the best thirst quencher, and it's free. Remember that sports drinks, flavored milk and fruit juice contain sugar and children get enough of these drinks outside school, so water should be accessible throughout the day, particularly in places around the school where physical activity and sports take place.

## EAT SEASONAL AND LOCAL

Not only is this a great way to support your local community and educate children on seasonal foods, but fruit and vegetables are usually cheaper and tastier when they're in season. Get your school to eat local as often as possible, even if it is only once a semester and serve seasonal foods all year round. You can also make a display of seasonal foods and incorporate seasonality into food education so children know when different foods are in season. Make sure children don't grow up thinking food comes from a packet.

## GROW SOMETHING YOU CAN EAT

A pot of herbs and a tomato plant are enough to show kids how to make a salad and teach them the basics of mixing ingredients and flavors. It also gives them a way to touch, feel and interact with the food they put into their mouths and understand where it comes from. Knowledge gives them the power to make good choices.

## GET FOOD IN THE CLASSROOM

Children should be learning about food in the classroom, not just when they eat. Find out how you can integrate food education into the current curriculum, whether it's spelling ingredients in English classes, the basics of nutrition in science, or the impact climate has on vegetable growth in geography. Teachers should also use assembly as a time to talk about food education and the changes being made to the menu.

## GET SMARTER IN THE DINING HALL

It takes time to change school menus, but there are things you can do in the meantime. Make healthy foods look appealing and easy to access, push less healthy foods to the back, and ask food service staff to recommend the healthier options. Short meal periods also make it difficult to have a proper lunch and can mean that more students end up having snacks from vending machines, so make sure access to meals is easy and time efficient.

## DON'T SUPERSIZE

You need to make sure that you are giving children suitably sized meals – new standards give calorie guidelines to ensure children eat the right portion size, based on their age. Part of a proper meal is ensuring that the quantity is right, so use these age-based guidelines to help meet these new calorie limits. Ensuring that portions aren't too big can also help reduce waste.

## CONNECT WITH LOCAL FARMS

Connect with your local farmers to see if they can supply fresh produce to your school. This way you can use your school program to support your local community. See if you can also arrange field trips for students to local farms or farmers' markets so they start to understand where their food really comes from.

## APPLY NUTRITION STANDARDS TO FUNDRAISERS

Healthy fundraisers set a positive example – they support healthy eating and physical activity by showing children, nutrition education and parents making an effort to eat healthily. Schools have also found healthy fundraisers to be both practical and profitable. Make sure your message of eating real, wholesome foods is projected throughout the school and provide ideas for healthy fundraising options to teachers, the PTA, students and school groups.

## COMMUNICATE

Take a whole-school approach and get everyone to sign up to these food values. Tell people why they are important for your school and involve everyone, including children, parents, teachers, cooks, janitors, custodians, school nurses, local politicians and food suppliers. With their support, you can make real, lasting change.

## CELEBRATE FOOD!

Food is our friend, not our enemy. Teach kids that food is fun. Put food at the heart of your school culture and teach kids how to cook. They'll enjoy it, and it's a skill that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

### WHY ADOPT THESE VALUES FOR YOUR SCHOOL?

- ★ They're easily achievable.
- ★ They're highly cost-effective.
- ★ They can meet federal nutrition standards, so your meals will get reimbursed.
- ★ Children will like it, just make sure you psyche them up for the change.
- ★ Teachers will like it, their students will achieve better grades and concentration.
- ★ Parents will like it, their kids will be healthier and hopefully eat their veggies!
- ★ Healthcare providers will like it, they'll see a dramatic reduction in preventable diseases.

