

Smarter Lunchrooms

Overview

Is your school lunchroom lively and colorful? Does it promote healthy eating? If not, it's time to make your lunchroom smarter! The Smarter Lunchrooms movement was created in 2009 by the Cornell University Food & Brands Lab. Smarter lunchrooms reinforce healthy eating and nudge kids toward nutritious foods by using evidence-based, lunchroom-focused principles to promote healthy eating. Smarter lunchroom makeovers can involve changes as simple as hanging student artwork or rearranging food in your cafeteria to encourage students to eat more of the foods we want them to eat (like fruits and veggies).



Take Action

- Advocate for a smarter lunchroom. [Present the research](#) behind the Smarter Lunchrooms movement to your school administration and Food Service Manager to secure their buy-in and support.
- Complete the [Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Scorecard](#) to see what your school is already doing and what could be done better.
- Work with food service staff to review current food displays, from the lunch line all the way to the register. Make note of where healthy food choices could be better highlighted to students.
- When lunchtime rolls around, kids are hungry! Place healthy food options at the beginning of lines. Kids are more likely to order and choose the first item

they see.

- Seek approval to move all competitive foods (a.k.a. snacks students can buy to supplement their meal) behind the serving counter in the regular lunch line so they are available by request only.
- Pick 1, 2, 3+ strategies and implement them, such as:
 - *Focus on Fruit:* A variety of mixed whole fruits are displayed in attractive bowls or baskets (instead of stainless steel pans).
 - *Highlight the Salad:* Pre-packaged salads or a salad bar is available to all students.
 - *Move More White Milk:* White milk is organized and represents at least 1/3 of all milk in each designated milk cooler.
 - [See other ideas.](#)
- Create a Student Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC) to create posters, develop create names for fruits and veggies, and serve as lunchroom ambassadors.
- Encourage food service staff members to prompt students in line. For example, even saying something as simple as “Try today’s special, it’s delicious!” can increase sales.
- Add Smarter Lunchrooms language to your Local School Wellness Policy using this [sample wellness policy language](#).

Tips



Move healthy food options into areas that are easier to reach and where students don’t have to ask for them.



Place healthy food options in high traffic areas to increase students’ exposure and chances of choosing the healthy option.



Create a symbol on the school menu that designates the meal as a “healthy option” to grab students’ attention and direct them to the healthy option.



Make sure messages are age-appropriate so all students can read and understand healthy options.



Collect data to document the before and after changes: Sales records, student surveys, and photos are great ways to demonstrate to your school and community the positive impact you had on student eating.



Ask a volunteer to assist with completing the [Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Scorecard](#) or to help staff the salad bar and verbally prompt students to incorporate fresh vegetables into their lunches.



Have a creative volunteer work with food service staff to design colorful, creative signage for the lunch line.

Additional Resources

[Smarter Lunchrooms Movement \(Smarter Lunchrooms\)](#)

[Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Score Card \(Smarter Lunchrooms\)](#)

[Creative names for foods and beverages in school meals \(Smarter Lunchrooms\)](#)

[2 hour training module \(Smarter Lunchrooms\)](#)

[10-minute workshops for lunchroom staff \(Smarter Lunchrooms\)](#)

Related Activities

Cafeteria Spruce-Up

Students visit the cafeteria on a daily basis, so it's a perfect place to promote healthy choices and physical activity messages, creating an environment where students can enjoy healthy eating.

Salad Bars

School salad bars give students more variety and choice and allow them to try healthy options they may not have eaten before.

Smart Snacks Standards

Is your school smart snack savvy? The "Smart Snacks in School" rule set standards for all foods and beverages sold in schools that participate in the national school meal program.

Time to Eat

Do students have enough time to eat enough food to meet their nutritional needs? Student lunch is also about having time to talk, laugh and socialize with friends. Does your school provide adequate time to eat?