



**Creating Healthy Schools  
and Communities  
in Bronx County**

# Nutrition Education & School Food Toolkit

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## Introduction

A person’s surroundings and environment influence daily choices which can either positively or negatively impact health and well-being. This involves how information is communicated about health and nutrition, as well as what options are available and how affordable those options are. Fruits, vegetables, water, and other fresh and less processed foods support overall health and well-being, brain function and student academic success. Furthermore, they reduce chances of developing debilitating diet-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, which are closely linked with epidemics of overweight and obesity. Creating a healthy nutrition and wellness environment in schools can foster healthy habits that can last a lifetime and contribute to overall student achievement in life.

Teachers have a role to play in the following ways...

### Action in the Classroom

#### **Nutrition Education and Promotion**

Teachers can provide students with opportunities to experience and learn about food and nutrition as part of daily classroom activities.

[DESIGN for Teachers](#) provides a step-by-step guide for creating lesson plans that incorporate nutrition concepts.

The [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) has created “Wellness Wakeup” Morning Announcement messages with tips and encouragement for trying new nutritious foods. These messages can be further aligned with the DOE Office of SchoolFood’s menu to encourage taste testing of school menu items. You can access these messages [here](#).

#### **Media Literacy**

Consumers, especially children, are bombarded with advertising for junk foods and beverages everywhere they go. Companies spend billions of dollars marketing these items, and evidence even shows that these unhealthy items are more frequently marketed to Black and Hispanic people and to youth in particular. Teachers can help students learn how to navigate the food marketing landscape and choose healthier options.

The National Institutes of Health has a [Media Smart Youth](#) Curriculum.

The NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene has a campaign to protect children from unhealthy food and beverage marketing, [We All Want Healthy Children](#).

The Public Health Advocacy Institute has a fact sheet about “[Copycat Snacks](#)” – foods and beverages that have been reformulated to meet nutrition standards but that mimic unhealthy snack counterparts.

#### **Healthy Snacks, Celebrations, and Rewards**

The NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene’s template for a [healthy snack policy and letter that can be sent home to parents](#) can be adapted to help you communicate with families about healthy snacking and celebrating in your classroom (or your whole school!)

There are many ways to have classroom celebrations and reward students for good behavior without including unhealthy foods and beverages. Bronx Health REACH has model guidelines and suggestions for healthy classroom celebrations in our [Healthy Celebration Toolkit](#). The NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene and [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#) also provide exception guidance. See our toolkit for their resources and many others.

### Social Marketing Campaign

Bronx Health REACH worked with a social marketing firm, WorldWays Social Marketing, and created a youth-led campaign promoting fruits, vegetables, and water. Student input guided the character theme creation, and the resultant characters are named the “Super Starions.” The characters can be used to reinforce nutrition lessons taught during classroom nutrition education through table tent prompts in the cafeteria and healthy eating missions in the home, school and community. More information can be found on page 5 of the [Bronx Health REACH Summer 2012 Newsletter](#).



### Staff Role Modeling

We all know that kids learn from observing the adults in their lives so it is important that school teachers and staff model healthy behavior. Show, not tell, how to take good care of their bodies and minds by taking care of yours! Here are some resources for taking care of your health and wellbeing:

[USDA Choose MyPlate](#)

[Meatless Mondays](#)

[Move it Monday](#)

Ask your school wellness council to support staff wellness activities, like healthy lunch ideas, healthy snack challenges, and staff hours in the school's fitness room, or other [low-cost ideas for worksite wellness](#). There are [grants available from the DOE Office of School Wellness](#) for school wellness council efforts.

Bronx Health REACH can also provide support to staff who wish to learn more about nutrition for their own personal health and well-being goals. Please contact [Kelly Moltzen](#) or [Moria Byrne-Zaaloff](#) for more information.

#### Schoolwide initiatives

Schools that are interested in creating a healthier school environment and school community have lots of support from the DOE and local and national organizations. The major questions to ask are: What fits best for your school? Who can help us plan and implement the changes to make our school a healthier place to teach and learn?

#### **Nutrition Education and Promotion**

Students can also provide input into the school meal options through participation in [SchoolFood Partnership Meetings](#). Teacher leaders and administrators should speak to their SchoolFood Managers to find out about scheduling these.

Administrators and teacher leaders may find Teachers College's Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy's report, [Expanding Nutrition Education Programs in New York City Elementary Schools](#), helpful in thinking about how to incorporate nutrition education in a meaningful way.

[FoodCorps](#) is a national AmeriCorps program whereby each service member spends a year supporting 1-3 schools in improving student knowledge, access, and engagement with fresh food. The host site in NYC is Edible Schoolyard NYC.

#### **Water**

[Partnerships to Improve Community Health \(PICH\) Healthy Beverage Campaign](#): As part of the Partnership for a Healthier NYC, Bronx Health REACH is developing a city-wide campaign to increase water consumption in New York City. When children don't drink enough water, they are more likely to replace it with soda or other sugar-sweetened beverages, all strongly linked to obesity. Look for our

marketing materials on social media, newspaper advertisements, and strategic street team outreach. We want community feedback – so please let us know if you and your school community want to get involved! Please contact [Emily Oppenheimer](#) from Bronx Health REACH for more information.

### **SchoolFood & SchoolFood’s New Local NY Thursdays**

Creating awareness about the benefits of local food is a great way of introducing students to thinking about their local food system. The NYC DOE Office of SchoolFood now offers “[Local NY Thursdays](#)” in the cafeteria, featuring a food item sourced locally from the NY region. Schools can utilize this opportunity as a “teaching moment” and highlight the food being sourced locally as part of the school curriculum and/or cafeteria promotion.

### **SchoolFood Programming and Menus**

The DOE Office of SchoolFood offers several different options of menus that schools can choose from. In addition to the Regular menu, there is an Alternative Menu and a Vegetarian Menu to choose from. The Alternative Menu is available in both lunch and supper options and offers more scratch-cooked, plant-based, and fewer processed food items than the classic menu. While still including some meat options such as chicken and turkey, the Alternative Menu features a greater selection of plant-based and vegetarian menu items from various cultural traditions. You can view the monthly Alternative Menu and compare DOE menus on SchoolFood's website [here](#). Schools can select a different menu than what is currently in place at a school, but must have the support of all principals in a school building. A letter from all principals in the school building needs to be sent to the SchoolFood Manager with the menu change request.

If you think your school community might not be ready for an abrupt switch to the options on the Alternative Menu or Vegetarian Menu, know that many schools gradually introduce new menu options to students through experiential opportunities such as taste tests that can be organized with the [Office of SchoolFood](#). There are resources for fruit and vegetable education, nutrition education, garden-based education, and student participation in SchoolFood Partnership meetings. Schools that have school gardens can participate in the Office of SchoolFood’s [Garden to Café](#) program, where food is harvested from the school garden and incorporated into a school meal or provided through taste tests during a Harvest Day event.

### **Taste Testing**

We know that taste tests of fruits and vegetables can increase preferences for fruits and vegetables. Providing opportunities and encouragement for taste testing healthier options such as fruits and vegetables are a great way to promote healthier options for students. Schools can provide opportunities for taste testing through classroom or garden-based food and nutrition education, or through taste tests in the cafeteria such as through the DOE Office of SchoolFood’s [Garden to Café](#) program.

### **Competitive Foods and Beverages**

Competitive foods and beverages are those items sold or provided in schools that are not part of the National School Lunch Program—typically, foods and drinks that are sold in vending machines, cafeteria

a la carte lines, and school stores. The DOE School Wellness Policy states that competitive foods and beverages sold in schools must meet certain nutritional criteria, the [“Smart Snacks” standards](#). The Alliance for a Healthier Generation has a [Smart Snacks Calculator](#) that can be used to determine if a snack meets the standards or not. There is also a [Competitive Snack and Beverage Standards list](#) provided by the DOE Office of SchoolFood, although the list includes items the food industry has reformulated to meet nutrition standards but that mimic unhealthy snack counterparts, called [“Copycat Snacks.”](#)

Teacher leaders and school administrators can work to improve the school food environment while still bringing in revenue. There are many examples of healthy fundraisers that can be profitable, such as those listed on [Action for Healthy Kids fact sheet](#).

School vending and fundraising programs should follow the nutrition guidelines outlined in the DOE’s [Competitive Snack and Beverage Standards list](#) and the [Smart Snacks standards](#). [This toolkit](#) from the Nemours Foundation provides information about healthy vending for youth, including: strategies to promote healthier vending options, and how to incorporate the “Go, Slow, Whoa” healthy snack guidelines (page 3); healthy vending companies such as Canteen Vending Services & Aramark’s Just4U vending program (page 4); and examples of how these changes were just as profitable as unhealthier snack items (page 7). Another vending company option is [Fresh & Healthy Vending](#), which works with [schools](#) to install their vending machines which they then run and share the profits with schools. They also provide product sampling events for promotion.

[GracePlay Connect](#) is an interactive, parent and teacher-friendly health and sustainability board game program that includes a healthy fundraiser opportunity as part of the program through the Grace Connect app.

Additional resources for healthy fundraising can be found on the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene’s [healthy school fundraising page](#) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s [“Sweet Deals: School Fundraising Can Be Healthy and Profitable”](#) report.

### **Food and Beverage Marketing**

The food and beverage industry spends nearly two billion dollars annually marketing to youth! We all know most of the food and beverages marketed to youth are unhealthy, but the food industry spends a lot of money making sure that their marketing works and it does. Marketing directly influence children’s and adolescents’ food choices. You can find more information in the NYCDOH’s report *We All Want Healthy Children*, Facts for Parents on Marketing to Youth, Facts on Marketing to Youth, a Pledge to Reduce Marketing of Unhealthy Food and Beverages to Youth, and more on the [We All Want Healthy Children campaign website](#). The [Food Marketing Workgroup](#) is also an important source of information about this topic. **Active Design in Schools and School Gardens**

Buildings and spaces can be designed to promote healthy eating and active living, which is the premise behind the Partnership for a Healthier NYC’s [Active Design for Schools](#) program. Many schools lack

adequate gym or outdoor recreational space for physical activity. Active Design for Schools provides resources for stakeholders to increase student physical activity by transforming common areas in and around schools into safe, appealing and accessible spaces for movement. Some projects schools in the Bronx have taken on include installing new water fountains and improving outdoor play spaces. Schools partnered with Bronx Health REACH to conduct initial assessments of physical activity spaces in and around the schools, implement community visioning workshops with school stakeholders, and disseminate student surveys. [The Partnership for a Healthier NYC](#) also offers grants for schools to implement Active Design Projects.

Redesigning an area of a school campus to incorporate a school gardens is another means of implementing an Active Design project. Under the Partnership for a Healthier NYC's Active Design program, support for school gardens can be found under the Green Spaces and Nature section. The organization GrowNYC orchestrates the [Grow to Learn Citywide School Garden program](#), and provides grant opportunities and technical assistance to schools in setting up school gardens. Schools that create garden space also become eligible to participate in the Garden to Café program, which is a joint initiative between the Grow to Learn program and the DOE Office of School Food. Grant recipients are also eligible to apply for starter seed kits for the Bronx Salad — a dish created in an effort to promote healthier eating at restaurants and delis throughout the Bronx. The [Bronx Salad Toolkit](#) was adapted for schools as a how-to guide on growing “The Bronx Salad” in schools with existing garden. The starter seed kit includes all of the seeds you will need to grow the salad!

Other Active Design grant opportunities include those for improving the route students take to get to and from school, as well as ways of improving active recreation.

### **Community Health Initiatives**

Schools can be a hub of promoting health and wellness within community settings as well as the school building. Partnering with local bodegas or retail outlets to increase both supply and demand of healthier options is an important way of creating a food environment that supports healthy eating on students' ways to and from school. Similarly, promoting community-based physical activity events can foster a culture of wellness within the community.

### **Healthy Bodegas**

Bronx Health REACH has established through collaboration with the Bodega Association to create a training for bodega owners. The training provides bodega owners with the knowledge and skills to sell healthy foods at affordable prices while still maintaining a profitable business. Through partnerships with the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, City Harvest, Urban Health Plan, FamilyCook Productions and others, a network has formed to connect community members and bodegas together to promote healthy options in bodegas. The healthy options that participating bodegas have agreed to sell include:

- Healthy Sandwiches – low fat cheese, low-fat mayo, low sodium meats
- Combo meal with the healthy sandwich and substituting water for soda

- Fruit
- Low-fat milk
- Water closer to the front door

Now, it's your turn to help us show store owners that there is demand for healthy, affordable options near your school! Your school can partner with a local bodega and encourage their participation in the Bodega Association training. For more information, contact [Kelly Moltzen](#) or [Moria Byrne-Zaaloff](#) at Bronx Health REACH.

### **Farm Share Programs**

Schools can become a site for a farm share program such as [Corbin Hill Food Project](#) or [GrowNYC Food Boxes](#). By becoming a farm share site, your school can provide a convenient way for families to access fresh fruits, vegetables, and other perishable foods, while also supporting local farmers.

### **Family and Community Engagement**

It is important to maintain communication and engagement with parents around wellness and nutrition. Inviting parents to participate in School Wellness Councils and offering wellness, nutrition, and SchoolFood information to Parent Associations can provide parents with an opportunity to understand how they can provide input into food options and availability in the school and community. The [Bronx CAN Health Initiative Family Health Challenge Guidebook](#) is a great place to get started.