

# Celebrating Smart New Nutrition Choices at School

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It has now been a year since schools were required by the federal government to have a local wellness policy in place. Along with new laws from many state legislatures, this requirement has created a revolution in school nutrition and physical activity.

While the environment in many districts may still have plenty of room for improving health, significant progress is being made. Most importantly, legislators, administrators, teachers, parents and health experts are now actively engaged in discussing what is best for kids at school - locally, statewide, and across the U.S. Parents, grandparents and other family members are encouraged to join their children for lunch and taste the positive changes in school meals for themselves.

## **1. Get behind breakfast at school.**

When it comes to school performance, there's no doubt that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A morning meal fuels children's brains for paying attention, staying on task and absorbing new information. If your school offers breakfast, use it whenever you need it. If not, ask if they can start a program.

## **2. Support school lunch.**

Exciting things are happening in school dining rooms: more fruits and veggies, more whole grains, more tasty good-for-kids options. As you read the menus, realize that things have changed. That pizza may have a whole wheat crust, low-fat cheese and several veggies. Join your child for lunch and taste for yourself.

## **3. Makeover brown bags and lunch boxes.**

When your child takes lunch from home, pack fun, nutritious foods for optimal performance. Plan on five items: a fruit, a veggie, a whole grain, a protein and a dairy food. It's as easy as sliced turkey on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato, a single-serve cup of canned fruit and low-fat milk purchased at school.

## **4. Focus on fruit and vegetable treats.**

Fruits and veggies make the perfect treats for classroom celebrations and for booster clubs sales at athletic events. You can go simple with veggie sticks plus low-fat Ranch dip - or go fancy with fruit kabobs or a fresh fruit pizza. Veggie boats and fruits cups are popular with kids and parents at concession stands.

## **5. Push for effective, nonfood rewards.**

Sugary rewards can cause real problems - for kids' teeth and their long-term eating habits. Check your school wellness policy to see what it says about classroom rewards. Push for effective, nonfood rewards. Special privileges (like extra recess for the class or computer time for an individual) can work wonders.