

# Opportunities for Nutrition Education in US Schools

Schools play an **IMPORTANT ROLE** in helping students establish healthy eating behaviors, by providing:

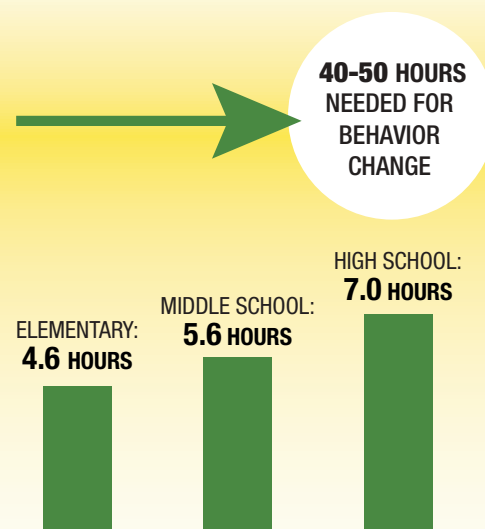
- nutritious and appealing foods and beverages
- consistent and accurate messages about good nutrition
- ways to learn about and practice healthy eating.<sup>1</sup>

**NUTRITION EDUCATION** is a vital part of a comprehensive health education program and **EMPOWERS CHILDREN** with knowledge and skills **TO MAKE HEALTHY EATING CHOICES**.<sup>2-8</sup>

**US students receive less than 8 hours of required nutrition education each school year,<sup>9</sup> far below the 40–50 hours**

**that are needed to affect behavior change.<sup>10,11</sup>**

Additionally, the percentage of schools providing required instruction on nutrition and dietary behaviors decreased from 84.6% to 74.1% between 2000 and 2014.<sup>9</sup>



Data from CDC's School Health Policies and Practices Study, 2014<sup>9</sup>

Given the important role that diet plays in preventing chronic diseases and supporting good health, schools would ideally provide students with more hours of nutrition education instruction using multicomponent and multilevel approaches.<sup>5,12</sup> This can include addressing policy and environmental changes at the same time as providing nutrition education and engaging teachers and parents in the nutrition education activities.

Because schools face many demands, schools can consider ways to integrate nutrition education into the existing schedule.<sup>11,13</sup> This approach can help provide students with appropriate amounts and types of nutrition education.

**Schools can include nutrition education throughout the school day.**



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



## In the classroom

Nutrition education can take place in the classroom, either through a stand-alone health education class or integrated into other subjects including:<sup>2,5</sup>

- counting with pictures of fruits and vegetables.
- learning fractions by measuring ingredients for a recipe.
- examining how plants grow.
- learning about cultural food traditions.

Nutrition education that is part of comprehensive health education should align with the [National Health Education Standards](#),<sup>3</sup> and incorporate the characteristics of an effective [health education curriculum](#).<sup>2</sup>

## Farm to school



Farm-to-school programs vary in each school or district, but often include purchasing and serving local or regionally produced foods in the school meal programs; educating students about agriculture, food, health, and nutrition; and engaging students in hands-on learning opportunities through gardening, cooking lessons, or farm field trips. Farm-to-school activities help students learn about nutrition and agriculture, try new foods, and consume more fruits and vegetables.<sup>14-17</sup>

## School gardens



School garden programs can increase students' nutrition knowledge, willingness to try fruit and vegetables, and positive attitudes about fruits and vegetables.<sup>18-22</sup> School gardens vary in size and purpose. Schools may have window sill gardens, raised beds, greenhouses, or planted fields. Students can prepare the soil for the garden, plant seeds, harvest the fruits and vegetables, and taste the food from the garden. Produce from school gardens can be incorporated into school meals or taste tests. Classroom teachers can teach lessons in math, science, history and language arts using the school garden.

## In the cafeteria



Cafeterias are learning labs where students are exposed to new foods through the school meal programs, see what balanced meals look like, and may be encouraged to try new foods through verbal prompts from school nutrition staff<sup>23</sup> or taste tests.<sup>24-25</sup> Cafeterias may also be decorated with nutrition promotion posters or student artwork promoting healthy eating.<sup>24</sup>

## Other opportunities during the school day

Messages about nutrition and healthy eating can be incorporated into morning announcements, school assemblies, materials sent home to parents and guardians,<sup>24</sup> staff meetings, and parent teacher group meetings. Nutrition posters and artwork can be displayed in hallways, school entryways, gymnasium, cafeteria, and classrooms. These strategies can help ensure that students see and hear consistent information about healthy eating across the school campus and at home.<sup>2</sup>

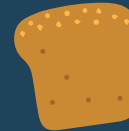


# Nutrition education helps students learn to:

Eat a variety of foods within each food group.



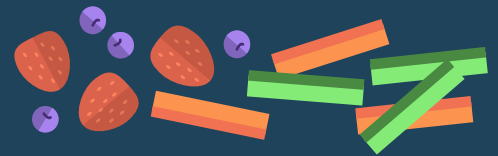
Limit foods and beverages high in added sugars, solid fat, and sodium.



Choose whole grain products.



Follow an eating pattern that supports healthy growth and development.



Nutrition education can be incorporated **THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL DAY** through age-appropriate activities. This provides flexibility for schools to tailor programs for their environment, daily schedule, and resources.