

Salad Bar



Objective

- *Establish school salad bars to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and improve academic performance.*



Key Messages

Most school-aged children currently don't consume enough fruits and vegetables.

- Less than 10 percent of school-aged children consume an adequate amount (9-13 servings) of fruits or vegetables daily.¹⁻²
 - In Dakota County, less than one-fourth of students consume fruits or vegetables five or more times per day.³
- Helping students develop good eating habits early in life is critical for maximizing academic performance during the school years and maintaining wellness throughout their lives.² Schools are an excellent venue for promoting healthy eating habits.

Salad bars significantly boost children's intake of fruit and vegetables.

- Salad bars significantly increase a child's consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.⁴⁻⁸
- Additionally, when fruits and vegetables are offered, children try new items and incorporate greater variety in their diet. Through these early, positive experiences, children are better prepared for a lifetime of healthy eating.⁹

Fruit and vegetable intake is associated with academic performance.

- Research demonstrates an association between diet quality and academic performance.¹⁰ Students who consume the highest levels of fruits and vegetables are significantly more likely to have higher academic performance.²

Salad bars will improve the perception of the school meal program and boost student participation.

- Salad bars have resulted in positive relationships between school food service staff members and students, administrators, and teachers.¹¹
- Salad bars may lower plate waste in the school feeding program.^{4, 12} When children are allowed to choose what they're going to put on their plates, less food is thrown away.



Key Strategies

- **Allow adequate planning time before implementing a salad bar.** Allow at least three months for planning the salad bar launch to set your school up for success. During this time, develop ways to reduce salad bar waste (such as using shallow pans in the salad bar and re-serving leftovers), gain student and staff support, and train school food service staff.



Key Strategies (cont'd)

- **Train students and staff about proper salad bar etiquette.**
 - Post a “Salad Bar Etiquette” sign near the beginning of the salad bar to remind students to always use utensils, to not bring food back to the salad bar, and to not put their head under the sneeze guard. (See page 6 in “Tricks of the Trade” document under Key Resources below for an example.)
 - Train all food service staff in food safety and sanitation. Emphasize the importance of keeping the salad bar neat and clean throughout service, how to assist younger students with plates and tableware, and the need for students to follow safe food practices and proper salad bar etiquette.
- **Install equipment that makes it easier to serve healthy options.** Utilize either an ice-packed or mechanically cooled salad bar so that fruits, vegetables, and other healthy options can be available during lunch. Consider using food preparation aids such as fruit and vegetable sectionizers to speed up produce preparation.
- **Promote the salad bar and include students as stakeholders.** Increasing students’ awareness of foods available from the salad bar and generating enthusiasm for these items will increase the success of the salad bar. Consider offering nutrition education lessons, guest speakers such as chefs or farmers, taste testing, cooking classes, or field trips to a farm or farmers’ market.
 - Advertise the salad bar so students and staff know what’s ahead. Post the menu in the cafeteria, homeroom classes, and teachers’ lounges. Consider announcing the menu over the PA system and in the school bulletin.
- **A salad bar can be made into a reimbursable meal,** or it can house fruits and vegetables that are part of a reimbursable meal. Ensure that students take minimum required portion sizes so that the meal will qualify as reimbursable. Although it may take several months, kids will learn the required portion sizes, and the food service staff can be trained to eye-ball portion sizes to assist with providing reimbursable meals. Schools could also consider visual signage to help students determine what a minimum portion is (especially for leafy greens).⁴
- **Be creative in how a salad bar could work for your school!** Salad bars can be set up in a variety of ways, including pre-portioned and pre-packaged foods to emulate the grab-and-go concept to accommodate a high volume of students in a short period of time.⁵ To keep students engaged, consider featuring a special fruit and vegetable theme, a baked potato bar, or a side salad.⁴
 - Consider implementing a “Rainbow Day” at your school to encourage students to eat a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables. On Rainbow Day, students challenged with the task of creating a “rainbow” on their tray out of the fruits and vegetables offered on the salad bar. When they’ve finished eating their rainbow, they receive a sticker or other small reward to encourage healthy eating habits. See the “Rainbow Day” resource in the Key Resources section below for more details.
- **Utilize technical assistance from a registered dietitian.** These professionals can assist with training workshops, implementation resources, nutrition education, and strategies for parent engagement. For example, a registered dietitian can provide training to food service staff on salad bar operations, food safety, and ways to reduce food waste from the salad bar.
- **Prevent the spread of infectious disease.** Handwashing and glove-wearing are the best ways to stop the spread of infectious disease in salad bars. Also keep in mind that a sanitarian will visit your school twice per year and will ask several questions regarding the salad bar.
 - The sanitarian will typically ask about when the salad bar is set up and when it is taken down. The sanitarian will also inquire about what is done with the leftover food from salad bars.
 - For more details regarding the sanitarian visits, request the “Ask a Sanitarian” document from Dakota County Public Health Department.

Success Stories

Salad Bars in Hastings, MN Schools

Hastings Middle School launched a fresh fruit and vegetable salad bar in 2014. The self-serve salad bar was part of efforts by the district to decrease food waste by making foods more appealing. The food service director trained staff on safe and appropriate use of the new salad bar. In addition, 45 food service staff representing all schools in the district received training on new chef-approved techniques and recipes for preparing fruits and vegetables. To increase customer engagement, students in the business class created a promotional video for their peers which may be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8jLHYTW7s0>

West Saint Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan, MN (ISD 197) Salad bars in all 8 schools, K-12th grade

To increase access and availability of fresh produce in ISD 197 schools, the child nutrition director collaborated with a dietitian consultant to apply for a Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools grant to expand beyond the secondary schools to elementary schools. All five elementary schools received a generous salad bar donation from a local company, CH Robinson. The salad bar has been successful in all 8 schools across the district. Keys to success were training food service staff on salad bar operations and food safety, and building student interest by offering taste testing of fruits and vegetables and having older children teach younger children how to use the salad bar.

Sample Policy Language

"Salad bars will offer nutritious, fresh, and appealing fruits and vegetables."

"Schools will offer a salad bar to students at least 3 days per week."

"Salad bars will contain at least one dark leafy green vegetable and at least two other types of vegetables."

"Ensure that salad bars comply with the food code safety guidelines and recommendations of the local sanitarian."





Resources for Implementation

- **A Field Guide to Salad Bars in Schools: A comprehensive guide to getting a salad bar in your school:** <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/docsandpdf/guidetosbinschools.pdf>
- **Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools: Learn how your school may qualify for a free salad bar:** <http://www.saladbars2schools.org/>
- **The Lunch Box: Includes assessment, planning, training, marketing, and many more resources to successfully implement a salad bar:** <http://www.thelunchbox.org/programs/salad-bars/>
- **Smarter Lunchrooms Movement: Trainings and tools on how to design lunchrooms that promote healthy choices and increase student participation:** <http://smarterlunchrooms.org>
- **Safe Use of Salad Bars in Schools: A factsheet regarding the food safety of salad bars in schools** http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/Docs/Fact_School_SaladBar_Safety.pdf
- **California Professional Nutrition Education and Training: An Outreach Toolkit that provides schools with assistance marketing and promoting their food program:** <http://www.nufs.sjsu.edu/calpronet/outreachtoolkit/>
- **USDA's Guide to Salad Bars in Schools: A brief overview of how schools can implement a successful salad bar:** http://origin.drupal.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/salad_bars.pdf
- **"Tricks of the Trade": Preparing Fruits and Vegetables: A thorough guide to getting a salad bar in your school. It includes several handouts and training resources for students and staff:** http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tricks_trade.pdf
- **Rainbow Days: Encourage students to "eat the rainbow" with this fun lunchtime activity. This toolkit provides assistance with menu planning, parent engagement, and even includes ways to involve local media in the event** <http://health.mo.gov/living/wellness/nutrition/rainbowdayprojects/doc/guide.doc>

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Smart Choices is a partnership of the Dakota County Public Health Department and school districts in Dakota County committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity before, during and after school.

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