



# Using Taste Tests and Surveys to Engage Students in School Meals

November 19, 2019

1:30 PM – 2:00 PM

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS LEARNING CODE: 1220



# Objectives

Understand the benefits of conducting taste tests and surveys

Create a plan for conducting a taste test

Be aware of the partner resources available for taste testing

# Why Is This Important?

Children need to be exposed to unfamiliar foods **MANY TIMES** before they are willing to try it.

Providing these opportunities for exposure to new foods in a safe environment is important for shaping children's eating behaviors.

"Introducing new and healthy food is  
part of the work of caring for children."  
-Penn State Extension

# Relevant Research

## USDA's Successful Approaches to Reduce Sodium in School Meals Study

- Taste testing was the most commonly used approach for gaining student acceptance of lower sodium items.

## In-Classroom Fruit and Vegetable Tastings Offer Potential for Increasing Consumption among Third through Sixth Grade Children

- Taste-testing activities were positively associated with increased liking and willingness to eat the tasted foods again.
- Children who previously tried the taste-tested foods were more likely to accept these foods; however, 43% of the children had not tried the test foods before.

Gordon, E.L., Morrissey, N., Adams, E., Wieczorek, A. Glenn, M.E., Burke, S & Connor, P. (2019). Successful Approaches to Reduce Sodium in School Meals Final Report. Prepared by 2M Research under Contract No. AG-3198-P-15-0040. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Cirignano, S.M., Fitzgerald, N., Hughes, L.J., Savoca, L., Morgan, K., Greci, A. In-Classroom Fruit and Vegetable Tastings Offer Potential for Increasing Consumption among Third through Sixth Grade Children. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*. 2014.

# Relevant Research

## Changes in Nutrition Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior After Implementation of Serving Up MyPlate and Vegetable Taste Tests

- Incorporating nutrition education and taste testing activities improved students' attitudes towards legumes and increased self-reported consumption of dark green vegetables.

## Does Tasting Local Sweet Potatoes Increase the Likelihood of Selection by High School Students?

- Production records analyzed to compare selection of local sweet potatoes before, during and after tasting.
- Selection of sweet potatoes increased and nearly equaled the carrot servings taken (comparable, control vegetable).

Williams, K., Dill, A., Lindberg, S. Changes in Nutrition Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior After Implementation of Serving Up MyPlate and Vegetable Taste Tests. (Abstract) *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 2019.

Bristow, K., Jenkins, S., Kelly, P., Mattfeldt-Beman, M. Does Tasting Local Sweet Potatoes Increase the Likelihood of Selection by High School Students? *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*. 2017.

# Benefits of Taste Tests and Surveys

# Benefits

## *What are the benefits of conducting taste tests and surveys with students?*

- Allow you to interact with students and obtain valuable feedback
- Students are able to understand your perspective too
- Students may be more comfortable sharing feedback with you when they are comfortable with you and they are regularly asked for feedback
- Shows students you care
- Provide opportunities for nutrition education
- Encourage healthy food choices outside the cafeteria

# Benefits

## *What are the benefits of conducting taste tests and surveys with students?*

- Using student feedback to plan menus can increase participation and consumption and decrease food waste
- Students can be hesitant to try new foods in the breakfast or lunch line when there isn't much time to get their food and eat
- Help students learn what they like and develop their palates
- Pull them out of their comfort zone by combining the familiar with the unfamiliar
- Repeated tastings have been associated with high acceptability of fruits and vegetables



# Strategies for Success

# Strategies for Success

## Determine your "why"

Think about your menus, the foods you plan to introduce, or new foods you want to see the students try. Examples:

- Test a new recipe
- Allow students to taste a new item being served on the line
- Compare items you consider putting on the menu
- Expose students to a new fruit or vegetable



# Strategies for Success

*Determine your "why"*

**Think about the long-term impact of your taste tests.**

**Examples:**

- Shape healthy eating behaviors in children
- Help children get used to trying new foods
- Increased participation in school meals
- Increase popularity of less popular items

# Strategies for Success

*There are many ways to execute taste tests!*

**Here are some things to consider when planning your tasting event.**

- Timing of the event
- Frequency
- Evaluation methods
- Marketing
- Procurement
- Other tips for success
- Limitations

# Timing

## During Meal Service

### In the serving line or eating area

- Reaches many students in a short amount of time
- More labor-intensive providing samples to many students
- Feedback received can vary



# Timing

## During the School Day

### In the classroom

- Integrate taste tests into the curriculum
- Time for nutrition education
  - Show food in its natural form
  - Origin
  - Use their senses
- Tie the taste test back to what is served in the cafeteria



# Timing

## During the School Day

### In the cafeteria

- Small groups
- Can receive specific feedback
- Time for nutrition education



### In the kitchen

- Hands-on experience preparing a recipe
- Students are more likely to try foods they prepared themselves



# Timing

## Outside of the School Day

### After school

- Clubs that meet after school
  - Culinary Club
- Part of snack or supper program

### Health fair

### Farmer's market

### Back to school events

### Summer Food Service Program



# Group Size

*Small groups are best*


**Some schools have seen best results for getting feedback when limiting events to small groups**

- Focus on the tasting experience
- Allows students to think independently
- Able to have a discussion with them

# Surveys

- Obtain more in-depth feedback on your programs
- Captures students who do not participate in school meal programs
- Survey specific audiences, i.e. athletes
- May or may not include taste testing

**SAMPLE LUNCH SURVEY**



Wouldn't it be great if the school cafeteria served food that you looked forward to eating? Please fill out this survey and help us improve our school's meal program.

1 Where do you normally get lunch on school days? Mark all that apply.

a. From the school cafeteria.  
b. I bring my lunch.  
c. I buy it off campus.  
d. I do not eat lunch.  
e. Other? Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

2 How often do you eat the cafeteria food? Mark one.

a. About six or more times a month  
b. About two to five times a month  
c. About once a month  
d. Never

3 If you've eaten in the cafeteria at least one time this year, list three words you would use to describe the food: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4 In general, how would you rate the taste of the cafeteria food? Mark one.

4-Delicious   3-Pretty good   2-Okay   1-Terrible   0-I don't eat it

SCHOOL LUNCH SURVEY   CENTER FOR ECO LITERACY   WWW.ECOLITERACY.ORG

# Frequency

- Conducting taste tests on a regular basis normalizes the practice
- Students get used to trying new foods



# Evaluation Methods

- Emojis
- Thumbs up/down
- Buckets for voting
- Senses
- Small group conversation

| Taste Test Survey |                 |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Tried It</u>   | <u>Liked It</u> | <u>Loved It</u> |
|                   |                 |                 |

**Make Today a Try-Day!**

It's fun to find new favorite foods!  
Write the name of the food you tried and then circle the faces below to tell us how you feel about it.

The food I tried: \_\_\_\_\_

The food looked: 😊 😐 😞

The food tasted: 😊 😐 😞

The food smelled: 😊 😐 😞

The food made me feel: 😊 😐 😞

## Be strategic about the prompts used

"Would try the food again"  
vs "Would choose the food for lunch"

## Keep the language positive

"No, thank you" instead of  
"Don't like it"

DVUSD Food Critic: Student Tasting Experience

**Directions:**  
1) Observe, smell, touch, and taste food.  
2) Describe food.  
3) Rate food below.  
4) Name food.

**Reminder:**  
"Your YUCK might be someone else's YUM!"  
→ Respect the experience and everyone participating. Taste is unique to EACH person and EACH opinion is valuable.

**Describe food here!**

**Name food here!**

For each category, circle which best shows your opinion.

|         |   |   |   |   |   |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Look    | → | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 | 😍 |
| Smell   | → | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 | 😍 |
| Texture | → | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 | 😍 |
| Taste   | → | 😞 | 😊 | 😄 | 😍 |



# Market Your Event

*Marketing strategy depends on the type of tasting event or survey*

- Social media
- Website
- Menus
- In the cafeteria
- Parent newsletters
- Morning announcements
- Student newscast

# Procurement

## Utilize Micro or Small procurement methods

- Can perform purchases "off-bid" of Formal contracts for certain situations/purchases (Micro/Small)
- Micro-purchases must be at or below \$10,000 and one-time or "spread the wealth" purchases

*\*Remember: one intent of micro-purchasing is for supply emergencies, trying a new item that is not available through your contracted vendor, or when highlighting seasonality or offering a special event that requires a different method of purchasing.*

# Other Tips for Success

- Limit to 1-3 items for tasting
- Students like good sized-samples
- Ensure you have enough samples for all students to try
- Try offering items prepared in different ways
  - Fresh, steamed, roasted
- Provide stickers to students who took a taste



# Other Tips for Success

- Involve the students with planning the event
  - What foods to sample
  - Preparing the samples
  - Marketing
- Plan your testing days when the menu is less labor-intensive
- Choose items you know will be cost-effective and easy for staff to prepare if added to the regular menu



# Other Tips for Success

- Involve food service staff
  - Allow them to have a voice in the items to be sampled
  - They will probably be helping you with setting up, so you want their buy-in!
- Invite the principal, teachers and other staff to join the event
  - Be involved, provide feedback, encourage students to try the foods

# Other Tips for Success

## Respond to student feedback

- Communicate the results to students and implement their feedback whenever possible
- Let them know how their feedback has made an impact
- Show the students you are listening!
- Be prepared to address negative feedback
- Ask students to be more specific and constructive

"I hate school lunch."



"Can you tell me exactly what it is you don't like? What would you like to see on the menu instead?"

# Limitations

## *Know that students' tastes change*

- Students may tell you they like the food because it's a fun environment, but when they see it on the line they may stick with what is familiar
- When adding items used in a taste test to the menu, be mindful of what else is being offered that day
- Remember that exposure is key!

# Partner Resources

# Brokers

## *Utilize your brokers to support you with taste testing*

- Provide products for sampling at your event
- Be onsite the day of testing
- Prepare the food according to manufacturer recommendations
- Share best practices and feedback from other schools

# Service Organizations

National organizations and universities can assist with taste testing

Project-based partnerships that can help to administer long-term goals, such as recipe development, nutrition education, school garden implementation, etc.

- FoodCorps AZ
- AmeriCorps
- Interns



# SNAP-Ed Agencies

*SNAP-Ed focuses on populations with at least 50% free or reduced-price eligible students*

Contractors across the state that work out of school districts, UA Cooperative Extension offices or public health departments.

Find your SNAP-Ed partner at  
AZ Health Zone:

<https://www.azhealthzone.org/resources/lia>



# Other Resources

- Parent-Teacher Organizations/Associations
- Student leadership groups
- Afterschool clubs
  - YMCA
  - Kids Zone
  - Boys & Girls Club



# So... what now?

# Next Steps

Determine your "why"

Develop your plan

Contact potential partners  
for taste testing

## ORGANIZING A TASTE TEST

—>>> —<<<

DISTRICT GOALS: EXPOSURE AND REPETITION

### STEP 1

**DETERMINE TYPE: QUANTITY VS. QUALITY**

What information are you looking for with this taste test? Do you want a simple yes or no, or additional opinion? Are you trying to break a recipe? Are you looking to provide a tasting experience? Are you concerned with food waste? These are the questions you must first ask yourself.

### STEP 2

**IDENTIFY PARTICIPANTS**

Who are your program's stakeholders? In addition to students, does your site also provide food for staff and parents? Consider other kitchen staff in your school district and the Food and Nutrition Department. Think about the diversity of opinions you could receive, and embrace the opportunity to show off your ideas.

### STEP 3

**DEVELOP AND WORK THROUGH THE RECIPE**

Ideally, you want your recipe as close to finished as possible before the taste test. Make a small batch and allow the kitchen staff to share their thoughts. The more complete a recipe is for the taste test, the more consistent and reliable the results. This is also true for comparison taste tests.

### STEP 4

**ESTABLISH THE ENVIRONMENT, PROCESS, AND PROCEDURE**

Where and when will you conduct the taste test? How will you serve the samples? Samples can go out from the serving line, set up on a stationary table, or served from a moving cart. How will you know who participates? How will you track results? How much time is needed? What will you do with the results? All of this should be decided in advance.

### STEP 5

**ADVERTISE, ADVERTISE, ADVERTISE**

A taste test is an opportunity to get students excited about school lunches. It's a chance to try new foods without a commitment to finish if they don't like it. It's a way to let stakeholders know that their voice matters. And, it's a way to build community within a school with the cafeteria at the center. It should be fun! Spread the word!

DYUSD Food and Nutrition Department  
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Phoenix AZ 85027

SOURCE: DANIELLE ANDERSON@DYUSD.ORG

# Next Steps

Start planning your taste test event!

Download the Taste Test Timeline & Checklist available on the upLIFT LEARN webpage under the Webinars tab to get started!

## Taste Tests in Schools

### Timeline and Checklist

Use this checklist to help stay on track with completing all of the tasks necessary for conducting a taste test in your school!

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>1-2 Months Prior</b>   | Goal Completion Date: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determine where and when the taste test will take place   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to brokers or other partners to set up an event   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determine what you will sample (allow at least 2-3 weeks for special order items)                   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Select the students who will be involved  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determine how much staff you'll need  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>2-3 Weeks Prior</b>  | Goal Completion Date: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Create materials for the event  | <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase supplies                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Promotional materials   | <input type="checkbox"/> Tasting cups                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback cards  | <input type="checkbox"/> Utensils                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveys   | <input type="checkbox"/> Decorations                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recipe Cards  | <input type="checkbox"/> Order the food                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition education   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Begin advertising the event, if applicable  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>1 Week Prior</b>   | Goal Completion Date: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure all food items, print materials and supplies have been ordered and will be delivered on time | <input type="checkbox"/> Train staff involved, if applicable        |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Check in with principal or others involved |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Continue to advertise, if applicable       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day of the Event</b>   | Date: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the event during morning announcements  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure enough time for setup and food prep  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take pictures   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>After the Event</b>  | Goal Completion Date: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Send a follow up letter to parents  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate the event  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gather and analyze the data collected   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop your action plan  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the results to students   |   |

# Next Steps

## November's upLIFT Nutrition Fact Sheet:

### Exposure

#### Exposure

Why is it necessary to expose children to new foods more than once?

##### Definition

##### Exposure

When a child has the opportunity to try a new food. They may or may not actually eat the food, but they have the option.

##### Importance

##### Why does exposure matter?

Research suggests that children who are neophobic (afraid of new foods) need to be exposed to a fruit or vegetable many times before they are willing to try it.



##### Put it into Practice

##### How can you increase exposure in your school nutrition program?

- Hold "taste tests" of fruits and vegetables that are unfamiliar to students
- Promote a "featured" fruit or vegetable alongside your usual offerings
- Serve the same vegetable repeatedly in different styles (fresh, roasted, blanched, steamed, chopped, etc.)
- Start a salad bar as an affordable way to frequently offer new fruits and vegetables
- Apply to operate the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at your sites



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

**Note:**  
Acceptance of new foods may take more than five repeated exposures. Some experts say as many as 15 exposures may be necessary!

# Next Steps

Join us next month!

Baby Steps to a Better Menu

December 17, 2019

1:30pm - 2:00pm

Do you want to improve your menu, but don't know where to start? In this webinar we will discuss small shifts SFAs can make towards improving the quality and wholesomeness of their menus.

# Remember!

Watch webinars, win training!

Participate in the upLIFT webinar contest  
and you could work with a



Professional Chef!

LEAs who attend or watch\* every upLIFT webinar from August until March will automatically be entered into a contest to receive a FREE culinary training for their staff from the Blue Watermelon Project.

\*Submission of the online survey following completion of each recorded webinar is required in order to count toward the contest.





# Thank you!

**Any questions?**  
**Please type them into the chat bar now.**

If you are attending the live webinar, you will receive a link to complete the survey in EMS. After you complete the survey you can print a certificate of completion.

If you are watching the recorded webinar, you can access the survey link and certificate of completion at the end of the webinar slides.



# Comprehension Check

## Question #1

What size group is best for getting feedback from students?

- a. Small
- b. Medium
- c. Large



# Comprehension Check

## Question #1

What size group is best for getting feedback from students?



- a. Small
- b. Medium
- c. Large

# Comprehension Check

## Question #2

Which statement would be best to use to learn how students feel about a food they tasted?

- a. "I don't like this"
- b. "Yuck!"
- c. "No, thank you"

# Comprehension Check

## Question #2

Which statement would be best to use to learn how students feel about a food they tasted?

a. "I don't like this"

b. "Yuck!"



c. "No, thank you"

# Comprehension Check

## Question #3

How often do children need to be exposed to unfamiliar foods before they are willing to try them?

- a. Just once
- b. A few times
- c. Several times

# Comprehension Check

## Question #3

How often do children need to be exposed to unfamiliar foods before they are willing to try them?

- a. Just once
- b. A few times
- c. Several times

# Congratulations!

You have completed the [Recorded Webinar: Using Taste Tests and Surveys to Engage Students in School meals](#)

To request a certificate, please go to the next slide.

In order to count this training toward your Professional Standards training hours, the training content must align with your job duties.

Information to include when documenting this training for Professional Standards:

- Training Title: Recorded Webinar: Using Taste Tests and Surveys to Engage Students in School Meals
- Key Area: 1000-Nutrition
- Learning Code: 1220
- Length: 0.5 hour

Please Note:

- Attendees must document the amount of training hours indicated regardless of the amount of time it takes to complete it.

# Congratulations!

## Requesting a Training Certificate

Please click on the link below to complete a brief survey about this webinar. Once the survey is complete, you will be able to print your certificate of completion from Survey Monkey.

\*This will not appear in your Event Management System (EMS) Account.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/upliftrecordedwebinar>

The information below is for your reference when completing the survey:

- Training Title: Recorded Webinar: Using Taste Tests and Surveys to Engage Students in School Meals
- Learning Code: 1220