Improving Nutrient Content

Adequate nutrients play an important role in student wellness, growth and learning. Certain foods have higher levels of key nutrients and including these foods as a part of school meals will improve the nutritional health of your students.

Calcium (strong bones and teeth) low fat or nonfat milk, cheese and yogurt

Vitamin A (healthy eyes and smooth skin) broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, greens, romaine lettuce, spinach and sweet potatoes

Vitamin C (healthy skin, blood vessels and immune system) oranges, peaches, peppers, strawberries, broccoli

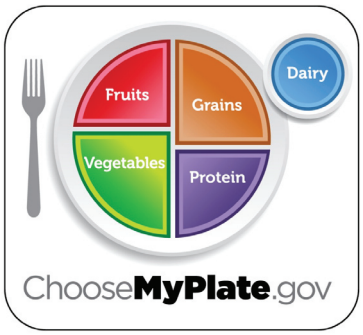
Iron (red blood cells to carry oxygen to the body) beans, lean beef, enriched cereals and spinach

Protein (builds, repairs and maintains body tissue and muscle) meat, beans, dairy

Carbohydrates (energy for growth) breads, cereals, rice, pasta and fruit

Folic Acid (tissue growth and cell function) spinach, broccoli, orange juice

B Vitamins (growth and energy) breads and grains



Here are some great, practical strategies for improving the nutrient content of your school meals:

Get fresh and colorful with vitamin C-rich fresh fruits. Cut kiwis in half and serve. Kids love scooping out the flesh with a spoon. Also try serving fresh strawberries when in season with a low fat yogurt dip.

Boost the iron and fiber in school meals by adding beans. Try hummus dip with fresh vegetables. Hummus, made with garbanzo beans, is a Middle Eastern dip that is growing in popularity. Check out the USDA recipe at www.nfsmi.org/Information/school_recipes/E-24.pdf. Also, try adding beans to your burritos, chili, quesadillas and soups.

When introducing new items like hummus dip or kiwi to students, remember that kids are more likely to try a new food if they know something about it first and have a positive opportunity to taste it. This is a great reason to coordinate your efforts with classroom teachers. The hummus dip would enhance lessons on the Middle East and kiwi originated in New Zealand.