

## 6 — NUTRITION EDUCATION

### POLICY COMPONENT NUTRITION EDUCATION

#### POLICY AREAS

This section addresses best practices for nutrition education in the child care environment including policy recommendations, rationale, implementation strategies and resources for the following five policy areas:

- Standards-Based Nutrition Education
- Appropriateness of Nutrition Materials
- Connecting with Planned Learning Experiences
- Nutrition Promotion
- Professional Development

### STANDARDS-BASED NUTRITION EDUCATION

#### *Policy Recommendations*

- ▶ The child care program provides standards-based nutrition education that reflects current science and national guidelines and is focused on children's eating behaviors. Nutrition education aligns with state standards, such as the CSDE's *Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework, A Guide to Early Childhood Program Development* and *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*.
- ▶ Nutrition education is offered at least once per week as part of a planned comprehensive health education program designed to provide children with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote and protect their health.
- ▶ Nutrition education activities are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and emphasize the appealing aspects of healthy eating. They promote nutrient-rich foods, healthy food preparation methods, good nutrition practices and include enjoyable, developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant participatory activities, e.g., cooking, taste-testing and farm visits.

This section addresses nutrition education for children. For information on nutrition education for families, see *Engaging Families* in section 8. For information on nutrition education for staff members, see *Professional Development* in this section and *Food Service Personnel Qualifications and Training* in section 5.

### Rationale

To develop healthy habits, *The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation* emphasizes that children need a planned and sequential health education curriculum for prekindergarten through Grade 12.<sup>33</sup> This curriculum should be based on national health education standards and address a clear set of behavioral outcomes that empower children to make healthy dietary choices and meet physical activity recommendations.

Educational materials that are consistent with state or national standards provide relevant science-based nutrition information that is developmentally appropriate and focused on developing skills for healthy eating. By providing positive food experiences, child care programs help children to develop an awareness of good nutrition and develop healthy eating habits for a lifetime. Helping children to make healthy food choices can promote consumption of a balanced diet; achievement of optimal growth and intellectual development; increased physical performance; maintenance of healthy weight; and decreased risk of nutrition-related diseases.



Successful nutrition education programs influence children's eating behaviors. The CDC says that nutrition education strategies are most likely to promote lifelong habits for good health if they help children learn the skills needed for healthy eating behaviors, provide opportunities to practice these behaviors and make nutrition education relevant and fun.<sup>65</sup> Activities should be designed to encourage developmentally appropriate food experiences that help children learn about new and culturally diverse foods and healthy eating. Nutrition education should:

- teach children the relationship between food and health;
- help children understand their growing bodies and how to take care of themselves through positive health behaviors;
- expose children to a variety of learning experiences about where food comes from and how it can be prepared; and
- help children develop sound attitudes and knowledge about food, nutrition and health.

NAEYC standards specify that children are provided varied opportunities and materials to help them learn about nutrition, including identifying sources of food and recognizing, preparing, eating and valuing healthy foods.<sup>41</sup> Head Start regulations require that children are provided with opportunities for involvement in food-related activities, as developmentally appropriate.<sup>39</sup>

## Implementation Strategies

- Develop a plan for nutrition education that includes opportunities for children to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make appropriate food choices and is the shared responsibility of all staff members, including program administrators, teachers and food service personnel.<sup>38</sup> The plan should devote adequate time and intensity to focus on behaviors and skill building.
- Provide developmentally appropriate nutrition education activities based on state health education standards for prekindergarten through Grade 12, such as the CSDE's *Preschool Curriculum Framework* and the CSDE's *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*.
- Employ active learning experiences that use developmentally appropriate instructional concepts at each age or grade level and introduce children to foods and healthy eating.
- Provide concrete experiences that focus on changing specific behaviors rather than on learning general facts about nutrition, such as increasing exposure to many healthy foods and building skills in choosing healthy foods, e.g., Captain 5 A Day and MyPyramid for Kids.
- Provide culturally relevant nutrition education that addresses the different health concerns, eating patterns, food preferences, and food-related habits and attitudes of different cultural groups. For more information, see *Cultural Diversity* in section 10.
- Integrate nutrition materials and foods into the curriculum that reflect the diversity of the community, e.g., include healthy foods and cooking utensils from a variety of cultures in the dramatic play area, regularly include foods from various local cultures when cooking, and ensure that literature includes foods from various cultures.
- As age appropriate, include cooking and food-related activities that reinforce and promote health messages, e.g., using recipes for healthy foods, taking field trips to farms or orchards and growing vegetables from seeds.
- Follow the CCCNS for foods used in nutrition education activities, e.g., taste tests and cooking. For more information, see section 4 and appendix C.
- Provide current nutrition resources, games, toys and materials that staff members can use with nutrition education activities.
- Model healthy behaviors, e.g., staff members eat the same foods with children and talk about nutrition and healthy eating habits. For more information, see *Modeling Healthy Behaviors* in section 5.
- Promote healthy eating messages in language families can understand using a variety of methods, e.g., posters, parent newsletters, menu backs, program Web site and parent presentations. For more information, see section 8.
- Provide meal programs and food-related policies that reinforce classroom nutrition education. For more information, see sections 4 and 7.
- Ask families to share healthy recipes that children can prepare as a group cooking activity in child care.
- Encourage children to tell their parents about their food experiences in child care.
- Involve families in nutrition education. For more information, see *Engaging Families* in section 8.



### SMART STEPS

Provide weekly nutrition education activities for children that focus on developing healthy behaviors.

### Resources

*A Guide to Early Childhood Program Development*, CSDE, 2007:

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/early\\_childhood\\_guide.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/early_childhood_guide.pdf)

*Captain 5 A Day*, Connecticut Department of Public Health: <http://www.captain5aday.org>

*Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework*, CSDE, 2006:

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/Preschool\\_framework.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/Preschool_framework.pdf)

*Cultural and Ethnic Food and Nutrition Education Materials: A Resource List for Educators*, USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center, January 2008: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/ethnic.pdf>

*FitSource Physical Activity and Nutrition in Child Care Settings*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/fitsource/>

*Food and Nutrition Fun for Preschoolers*, USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center, July 2008:

[http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun\\_preschoolers.pdf](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun_preschoolers.pdf)

*Food and Nutrition Fun for Elementary-Age Children*, USDA Food and Nutrition Information Center, July 2008: [http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun\\_elementary.pdf](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun_elementary.pdf)

*Food and Nutrition Information Center*, USDA: <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov> (click on “Topics A-Z” then “Nutrition Education” or click on “Resource Lists”)

*Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*, CSDE, 2006:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/Healthy&BalancedLiving.pdf>

*Healthy Meals Resource System for Child Care Providers*, USDA:

<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov> (click on “Nutrition Education”)

*National Food Service Management Institute*: <http://www.nfsmi.org> (click on “Resource Center”)

*MyPyramid for Kids Classroom Materials*, USDA:

<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/mypyramidclassroom.html>

*Team Nutrition*, USDA: <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/childcare.html>

For additional resources, see *Curriculum Development*, *Nutrition Education*, *Nutrition Handouts* and *Nutrition Promotions* in section 10.

## APPROPRIATENESS OF NUTRITION MATERIALS

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### Policy Recommendations

- ▶ The child care program reviews all nutrition education lessons and materials for accuracy, completeness, balance, cultural relevancy and consistency with the state’s and child care program’s educational goals and curriculum standards.
- ▶ The child care program does not use nutrition education materials with corporate logos or advertising.

## Rationale

To provide consistent and appropriate health messages for children and families, nutrition education materials must be consistent with established standards and reflect science-based information. Materials with corporate logos or advertising contain commercial messages and expose children to product marketing. These materials are not appropriate in the child care setting.

## Implementation Strategies

- Use science-based nutrition education materials from state and national health agencies and organizations, such as the USDA, CDC, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Connecticut Department of Public Health.
- Determine a schedule for regularly reviewing all curricula and materials to ensure they reflect current health recommendations (e.g., Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid) and state standards (e.g., the CSDE's *Preschool Curriculum Framework, A Guide to Early Childhood Program Development and Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*).
- Identify appropriate individuals to review nutrition education materials, e.g., curricula, activities, handouts and other materials. For licensed child care centers that serve meals, the registered dietitian consultant can assist with this process. The early childhood education consultant can help to evaluate the appropriateness of education materials regarding state early childhood education standards. For more information, see *Finding Consultants* under *Professional Development* in section 6.

## Resources

*A Guide to Early Childhood Program Development*, CSDE, 2007:

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/early\\_childhood\\_guide.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/early_childhood_guide.pdf)

*Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHER/characteristics/index.htm>

*Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework*, CSDE, 2006:

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/Preschool\\_framework.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/Preschool_framework.pdf)

*Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. USDA and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005:

<http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/>

*Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*, CSDE, 2006:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/Healthy&BalancedLiving.pdf>

*Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT)*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/HECAT/index.htm>

For additional resources, see *Evaluating Nutrition Education Materials* in section 10.

### CONNECTING WITH PLANNED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

#### Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Nutrition education is a part of comprehensive health education and is included in other content areas, such as language and literacy development, mathematics, science and music.
- ▶ The child care program encourages instructional staff members to incorporate nutrition themes from the CSDE's *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework* and *A Guide to Early Childhood Program Development* into planned learning experiences, when appropriate, to reinforce and support health messages.
- ▶ Nutrition concepts are integrated into daily routines whenever possible, such as mealtimes and transitions.
- ▶ Afterschool programs integrate nutrition activities throughout the learning environment.



#### SMART STEPS

Integrate nutrition education activities throughout the curriculum and into daily routines.

#### Rationale

An integrated approach to nutrition education is more effective than teaching nutrition only as a discrete unit, since it is ongoing and continually reinforces what children are learning. When nutrition education is linked with other content areas, children have daily exposure to nutrition concepts and messages. Nutrition concepts are easily integrated into a variety of content areas such as language and literacy development, mathematics, science and music. They can also be incorporated into daily routines such as mealtimes and transitions.

The interdisciplinary approach to nutrition education should complement and not replace sequential nutrition education lessons within a comprehensive health education curriculum.<sup>36</sup> The exclusive use of an interdisciplinary approach can sacrifice key elements of an effective nutrition education program, e.g., adequate instructional time, focusing on behaviors and skill-building, attention to scope and sequence and adequate teacher preparation.



#### Implementation Strategies (as developmentally appropriate)

- Include appropriate staff members in planning for nutrition activities, e.g., teachers, food service personnel, registered dietitian consultant, health consultant, early childhood education consultant and other program staff members.

- Provide training for staff members on strategies for integrating nutrition into different content areas and daily routines.
- Review current curricula to identify content areas that can incorporate nutrition.
- Identify and use resources that integrate nutrition into other content areas. For more information, see *Integrating Nutrition* in section 10.
- Use literature with appropriate health themes, e.g., messages about healthy eating or physical activity. For more information, see Michigan State University's *Michigan Team Nutrition Booklist* and *Michigan Team Nutrition Preschool Booklist*.
- Use nutrition to teach math concepts, e.g., charting how many servings of fruits and vegetables children eat. Older children can learn to read food labels and compare the nutritional value of foods.
- Sing food-themed songs during daily activities such as center learning time, art, cooking, washing hands and during transitions between activities.
- Demonstrate nutrition-related science concepts, e.g., cooking activities or growing vegetables from seeds. Older school-age children can identify foods' chemical compounds or determine chemical changes in recipe ingredients, such as the formation of gluten in flour.
- Learn about and research food customs of other countries. Involve children in cooking activities using foods from different countries. Older children can create a healthy menu based on the local food preferences of a specific country or ethnic group.

## Resources

*Michigan Team Nutrition Booklist*, Michigan State University, 2006:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/UpdatedMichiganTeamNutritionBooklist\\_290287\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/UpdatedMichiganTeamNutritionBooklist_290287_7.pdf)

*Michigan Team Nutrition Preschool Booklist*, Michigan State University, 2006:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/PreschoolBooklist\\_290284\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/PreschoolBooklist_290284_7.pdf)

The following resources provide guidance on integrating nutrition and physical activity into afterschool programs.

*Changing Lives, Saving Lives, A Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Exemplary Practices in Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Food Security in Afterschool Programs*, Center for Collaborative Solutions, 2010:

<http://www.ccscenter.org/afterschool/Step-By-Step%20Guide>

*Empowering Youth with Nutrition & Physical Activity*, USDA, 2007:

<http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/empoweringyouth.html>

*Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in Out-of-School Programs*, The Nemours Foundation, 2008:

<http://static.nemours.org/www-filebox/nhps/grow-up-healthy/after-school-book.pdf>

*The Power of Choice: Helping Youth Make Healthy Eating and Fitness Decisions, A Leader's Guide*, USDA, 2003:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/power\\_of\\_choice.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/power_of_choice.html)

Resources on connecting nutrition themes to the preschool or school-age curriculum can be found in *Integrating Nutrition* in section 10.

### NUTRITION PROMOTION

#### Policy Recommendations

- ▶ The child care program conducts nutrition education activities and promotions that involve children, families and the community.
- ▶ The nutrition education program is coordinated with CACFP meals and snacks and other foods and beverages available in the child care environment, such as parties, meetings and other events.
- ▶ Whenever possible, nutrition education activities involve the entire child care program and are linked to health-related community initiatives, services and programs.
- ▶ The child care program collaborates with agencies and groups conducting nutrition education in the community to send consistent health messages to children and their families.

#### Rationale

Promoting nutrition throughout the child care environment provides consistent health messages for children and families. Linking nutrition education to CACFP meals and snacks provides children with hands-on opportunities to practice healthy habits. Participation in community programs that promote and reinforce health emphasizes the child care program's commitment to a healthy child care environment and supports local nutrition and physical activity efforts.

Collaborating with community initiatives, services and programs enhances the child care program's existing resources. It also increases the effectiveness of local nutrition interventions by providing consistent and reinforcing health messages to children and families.

#### Implementation Strategies (as developmentally appropriate)

- Promote nutrition in the child care program through a variety of activities, such as cooking, connecting with local farmers' markets and community gardens, sampling popular healthy ethnic foods, and participating in marketing campaigns promoting nutrition or physical activity messages, e.g., Fruits & Veggies More Matters.
- Collaborate with and participate in community-based programs that promote and reinforce children's health, such as nutrition initiatives, health fairs, physical activity challenges and food drives. For more information, see *Partnering with Community Organizations* in section 8.
- Coordinate CACFP meals and snacks with the nutrition curriculum, e.g., fruits and vegetables used for a nutrition education activity are featured on the menu and a recipe is sent home for families.



#### SMART STEPS

Coordinate nutrition education activities with CACFP meals and snacks and other foods and beverages available in the child care environment.



#### SMART STEPS

Collaborate with community-based nutrition programs, initiatives and services.

- Provide healthy choices that reflect the cultures and customs of families and that meet the CCCNS (see appendix C) whenever foods and beverages are available in the child care environment, including CACFP meals and snacks, nutrition education and cooking activities, meetings, celebrations and other events.
- For school-based centers, link nutrition education with the district's coordinated school health initiatives.
- Promote nutrition and physical activity challenges for children, families and staff members, e.g., eating the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables or meeting daily physical activity recommendations.
- Decorate classroom and dining areas with nutrition and physical activity posters and displays.
- Promote nutrition and physical activity to families and staff members through a variety of methods, e.g., bulletin boards, newsletters, fact sheets, program Web site, activities and events.
- Plan special events for national health awareness days, such as National Nutrition Month, National Diabetes Month, or Fruits & Veggies More Matters Month.

## Resources

*Coordinated School Health*, CSDE:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&q=320726&sdePNavCtr=|45534|#45556>

*Fruits & Veggies More Matters*, Produce for Better Health Foundation:

<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org>

*National Health Observances*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

<http://healthfinder.gov/nho/default.aspx>

For additional resources, see *Nutrition Promotions* and *Partnering with Community Organizations* in section 10.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Staff members responsible for nutrition education are adequately prepared and regularly participate in professional development activities to effectively deliver the nutrition education program as planned. The child care program includes relevant nutrition training at least twice a year for teachers, assistant teachers and other staff members, as appropriate.
- ▶ Professional development includes orientation to appropriate state standards and curriculum frameworks, such as the CSDE's *Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework*, *A Guide to Early Childhood Program Development* and *Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework*.



#### SMART STEPS

Provide training on nutrition and physical activity for all staff members at least twice a year.

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- ▶ The child care program builds awareness among teachers, food service personnel, consultants and other staff members about the importance of nutrition, physical activity, decreased screen time and positive body image to academic success and lifelong wellness.
- ▶ Nutrition and physical activity information shared with children, families and staff members is based on current science and national health recommendations.

### Rationale

It is important for the child care program to develop and implement a training plan for staff members. Appropriate training in nutrition and health education affects the quality of instruction and increases the extent to which teachers implement the curriculum.<sup>66-67</sup> It also impacts how staff members behave at mealtimes, which in turn influences children's eating behaviors. Staff members' nutrition knowledge is correlated with their ability to positively influence children's eating behaviors at mealtime, e.g., eating the same foods as the children, encouraging pleasant conversation, nutrition education and modeling healthy eating behaviors.<sup>68</sup>

Training should address developmentally and culturally appropriate content and teaching strategies while focusing on giving teachers the skills needed to provide innovative nutrition education.<sup>65</sup> Staff members also need to understand basic nutrition concepts and issues related to children, such as dietary recommendations and the impact of childhood obesity. Staff members are better able to implement and support program policies when they understand the rationale behind them.

The child care program should include all appropriate staff members in professional development activities in nutrition, for example, program consultants and food service personnel. (For more information on training for food service personnel, see *Food Service Personnel Qualifications and Training* in section 5.) All staff members need to be aware of the importance of nutrition and physical activity to children's development and achievement so they can consistently reinforce positive health messages throughout the child care environment. Appropriate professional development assists staff members with providing accurate nutrition information that is based on current science and national health recommendations instead of personal beliefs.



## Implementation Strategies

- Ensure that staff members responsible for nutrition education are adequately prepared and regularly participate in professional development activities to effectively deliver the nutrition education program as planned.
- Provide an orientation for all new staff members on basic nutrition and the program's nutrition and physical activity policies.
- Encourage staff members to participate in appropriate credentialing programs, such as an associate's degree from a community college, the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential through Connecticut Charts-A-Course or certification through a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution.
- Offer professional development activities on nutrition at least twice a year, e.g., basic knowledge of nutrition, modeling healthy behaviors, and instructional techniques and strategies that are inclusive and respectful of cultural values and traditions and are designed to promote healthy eating behaviors.
- Provide staff members with science-based health information regarding benefits and risks of dietary habits, health trends, effective strategies for addressing nutrition issues, and food safety and foodborne illness prevention.
- Offer professional development activities in nutrition to all appropriate child care personnel, such as program consultants and food service personnel.
- Use appropriate personnel (including registered dietitian consultant, health consultant, early childhood education consultant and food service director) and the community (including registered dietitians and other health professionals) to promote awareness and serve as a resource to staff members for nutrition, nutrition education and the CACFP. For more information, see *Partnering with Community Organizations* in section 8.
- Take advantage of Internet-based training, such as online courses and seminars. The National Food Service Management Institute provides online training on a variety of topics related to the USDA Child Nutrition Programs. For more information, see *Training for Teachers and Staff Members* in section 10.
- Educate staff members regarding the importance of providing nutrition information based on current science and national health recommendations, not personal beliefs.
- Use only qualified health personnel (e.g., registered dietitian or registered nurse) to provide specific dietary guidance. Staff members providing nutrition education should not advocate dieting behaviors or any specific eating regimen to children, families or other staff members.

### FINDING CONSULTANTS

#### Education consultants:

Connecticut Early Education

Consultation Network

<http://ctconsultationnetwork.org>

#### Health consultants:

Connecticut Nurses Association

<http://www.ctnurses.org/>

#### Registered dietitian consultants:

Connecticut Dietetic Association

<http://www.dietetics.com/cda/>

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### Resources

*Care Connection*, National Food Service Management Institute, 2009:

<http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=199>

*Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program*: <http://www.cdacouncil.org/>

*Connecticut Charts-A-Course Early Childhood Professional Development System and Registry*:

<http://www.ctcharts-a-course.org/>

*Connecticut Community Colleges*: <http://www.commnet.edu/>

*Connecticut's Approved Education Preparation Programs*:

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Cert/guides/ap\\_ed\\_prep\\_prgms.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Cert/guides/ap_ed_prep_prgms.pdf)

*Education and Training Materials Database*, USDA:

[http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Resource\\_Cafe/Resource\\_Search.php](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Resource_Cafe/Resource_Search.php)

*From the Trainer's Tablet — Lessons for Family/Home Child Care Providers Food Safety in Child Care*, National Food Service Management Institute, 2003:

<http://www.nfsmi.org/DocumentSearch.aspx?type=advance&title=From%20the%20Trainer>

*National Food Service Management Institute*: <http://www.nfsmi.org/>

*Online Courses*, National Food Service Management Institute:

<http://www.nfsmi.org/> (click on "Online Courses")

*Team Nutrition*, U.S. Department of Agriculture: <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/library.html>

For additional resources, see *Training for Teachers and Staff Members* and *Training for Food Service Personnel* in section 10.