

## 2 — Steps for Change

Implementing any change can seem overwhelming, especially with limited staffing and resources. Smarter Lunchrooms helps schools make simple changes that can have big impact. Most Smarter Lunchrooms strategies can be done without any cost or much effort, such as rearranging foods on the serving line, developing creative names for menu items, and using suggestive selling. The steps in this section help school nutrition programs be successful with developing, implementing and evaluating local Smarter Lunchrooms strategies.



### GETTING STARTED

Assess the lunchroom's current practices and consider what changes can be made to improve the cafeteria environment. Focus on offering **choices**, and making healthy foods more **visible** and **convenient** for students to choose.

**Start small.** Review the principles for improving eating behaviors in section 3, and the Smarter Lunchrooms strategies for success in section 4. Identify one or two things that can be done right now, for example, adding a fruit bowl to each cashier's station, moving white milk in front of flavored milk, or developing creative vegetable names for elementary school menus. Add more strategies to build on success.

**Enlist** school staff members and students to help with different strategies, as appropriate. For example:

- student groups could conduct a survey about the school nutrition program;
- art teachers could help students create colorful artwork and posters for the cafeteria walls;
- classroom teachers could conduct taste-tests of new menu items as part of classroom nutrition education activities; and
- the school's parent organization could help with promoting the cafeteria's healthy changes to families.

**Connect** Smarter Lunchrooms to existing school programs and collaborations such as the HealthierUS School Challenge: Smarter Lunchrooms ([HUSSC:SL](#)), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), Farm to School, [Fuel Up To Play 60](#), and [Chefs Move to Schools](#).

**Collaborate** with professional health organizations, wellness groups, community organizations, local businesses and others to obtain needed resources and support. For more information, see "[Step 4 – Identify Resources](#)" in this section.



### STEP 1 — IDENTIFY A SMARTER LUNCHROOMS LEADERSHIP TEAM

Schools will be more successful with implementing and sustaining Smarter Lunchrooms if they develop a collaborative approach that includes partnerships between food service and school staff. A local school leadership team helps to:

- evaluate cafeteria operations and identify priority areas for change;
- develop an action plan;
- identify resources;
- implement changes;
- promote awareness and buy-in from students, families and school staff;
- monitor implementation; and
- evaluate progress.

At a minimum, the team should consist of the food service director, cafeteria manager and school principal. The team can also include other members as appropriate to local needs, such as students, teachers, parents, school nurse, other school staff, and members of local community groups.

Think about **collaborations** that can enhance and support local Smarter Lunchrooms efforts, such as:

- student leadership groups and clubs, e.g., student government, National Honor Society and student service organizations;
- parent groups, such as parent teacher association (PTA) or parent teacher organization (PTO);
- the district's school wellness policy team;
- local community groups and programs; and
- nutrition and wellness organizations, such as [New England Dairy & Food Council](#) and [Cooking Matters](#).



## STEP 2 — ASSESS THE CAFETERIA

Identifying what needs to be changed is an important step in planning strategies to improve the cafeteria environment. Start with a **cafeteria walk-through** to see things from students' perspective. When the serving lines are completely set up for lunch, enter the cafeteria where students come in. Go through the serving line from the beginning, to the cashier's station, and then to the tables where students sit down to eat. Some things to consider include:

- What is the first thing you see – what draws your attention?
- Which foods are most convenient and least convenient?
- Is the serving line set-up customer friendly?

Seeing the cafeteria through students' eyes helps identify areas for improvement.

Use the B.E.N. Center's [Lunchroom Self-Assessment Score Card](#) to evaluate what the food service program is doing well, and identify opportunities for improvement. Other helpful B.E.N. Center evaluation tools include the [DPIE \(Diagnose, Prescribe, Implement, Evaluate\) General Observation Checklist](#) and [Evaluation Matrix](#).

Take photographs as part of the cafeteria assessment. When people regularly work in the same environment, it is sometimes difficult to see what needs to change. Photographs show things about the lunchroom that food service staff may not otherwise notice. Take the photographs from students' eye level, when food is on the serving line ready for service. Use the B.E.N. Center's Photo Checklist for guidance (see page 6).

### Use Existing Data

Use existing cafeteria data to determine potential areas for improvement, and identify appropriate Smarter Lunchrooms strategies. The school food service program already collects and tracks data that describes the cafeteria operations, such as meal participation rates, production records and food cost. For more information, see "[Step 8 – Evaluate and Maintain](#)" in this section.

### Collaborate with Other Schools

Consider collaborations with other schools and districts to assess the cafeteria and share strategies for success. It is often helpful to have someone from a different school or district do a cafeteria walk-through in your school. They will see the program operations with fresh eyes. Visit other schools that are successfully implementing Smarter Lunchrooms. Seeing Smarter Lunchrooms strategies in action helps to identify real-life actions that can be applied in your own school.

### B.E.N. Center Photo Checklist \*

Take photographs before and after implementing the Smarter Lunchrooms makeover, customizing this list to suit your lunchroom space. Try to frame the same shots each time to get the clearest before/after comparison. Take photographs when food is on the line, and from students' eye level. For legal reasons, collect signed consent forms or avoid photographing students. Ask before photographing adults.



#### Exterior/Approach to Lunchroom and Common Spaces

- Exterior/approach to lunchroom and common spaces”
- Doorways
- Wall space and bulletin boards
- Lighting
- Stations or tables in common space, e.g., lost and found or student groups
- Show traffic flow patterns (entering, lining up and exiting)
- Anywhere cleaning items are stored, such as mops, buckets and cloths
- Garbage, recycling and composting

#### Serving Lines

*Complete for each line*

- Overall view of area – “first glance”
- Counters
- Walls, especially where students line up
- Any decorations or signs, including posted menus and promotions
- Hot foods serving area
- Cold foods serving area
- Snacks/chips/cookies area
- Cooler, open and shut
- Freezer, open and shut
- Milk serving area
- Condiments
- Any other food or beverage serving area
- Registers, alone and with surrounding counter and walls
- Tray storage
- Cutlery storage

#### Snack Window

- Overall view of area – “first glance”
- Walls and counter spaces, especially where students line up to wait
- Any decorations or signs, including posted menus and promotional materials
- Any food or beverage visible to students
- Any used or unused wall space (outside or inside window) visible to students
- Register and surrounding view
- Condiments
- Tray storage
- Cutlery storage

#### Dining Area

*Can be done before or after a lunch period, to avoid photographing students*

- Overall view of area – “first glance”
- Tabletops
- Seats
- Wall spaces, used or unused
- Signs
- Garbage areas
- Cutlery storage

#### Optional Staff Areas

- Wall space, used or unused
- Work stations

\* Smarter Lunchrooms Movement and the B.E.N. Center.

## STEP 3 — PRIORITIZE NEEDS AND DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

The Smarter Lunchrooms strategies are intervention principles that school nutrition programs can customize and adapt for a variety of cafeteria environments. Use the cafeteria’s goals to determine the strategies that food service staff will implement. Examples of goals might include:

- increasing participation in reimbursable meals;
- increasing students’ consumption of vegetables;
- increasing students’ consumption of white milk;
- increasing students’ consumption of targeted entrees;
- decreasing plate waste; and
- reducing food cost.

Each school cafeteria has its own unique opportunities and challenges. The Smarter Lunchrooms strategies can be customized to meet the individual needs of different cafeteria serving and dining areas. Think about the **intent** of the strategy, and develop an alternate approach that meets this intent. The example below shows how to customize a Smarter Lunchrooms strategy.

**Strategy:** *Focus on Fruit – Make fruit available at two or more locations on the serving line, including the POS.*

**Intent:** To offer additional opportunities for students to self-select a fruit, which helps meet reimbursable meal criteria and increases the likelihood of fruit consumption.

**Challenge:** The cafeteria does not have additional space on the serving line or at the POS.

**Solution:** Use a moveable cart with attractive fruit displays next to the POS or just inside the serving line right before the steam table. Students will see the fruit first, and be more likely to select it.



Prioritize the areas for change identified in the cafeteria’s assessment, and address them in order of local importance by developing a Smarter Lunchrooms action plan. An action plan includes specific strategies and steps, identifies needed resources, indicates who is responsible, and identifies a target completion date for each task. A Smarter Lunchrooms action planning form is available on the CSDE’s [Smarter Lunchrooms](#) Web page.

## STEP 4 — IDENTIFY RESOURCES

Identify the resources needed to implement the cafeteria’s chosen Smarter Lunchrooms strategies, and where to find them. Some resources and materials to consider include Smarter Lunchrooms education and training materials, nutrition education materials, menu boards, signage, posters, and serving line display equipment such as attractive linens, colorful bowls and trays, tiered metal baskets and clear plastic frames for signs.

### Smarter Lunchrooms Materials

The B.E.N. Center’s [Smarter Lunchrooms](#) Web site provides many resources to assist schools with implementing Smarter Lunchrooms strategies, including handouts, videos and research summaries. Information on Smarter Lunchrooms research is available on [Cornell’s Food and Brand Lab](#) Web site. Other key B.E.N. Center Smarter Lunchrooms resources include:

- Cornell B.E.N. Center: <http://ben.dyson.cornell.edu/>
- Cornell Food and Brand Lab YouTube Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FoodandBrandLab>
- Smarter Lunchrooms Video Tips: <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/more-videos>
- Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Technical Assistance Providers’ Handbook: Available upon request from the B.E.N. Center at [ben@cornell.edu](mailto:ben@cornell.edu).
- Smarter Lunchrooms Movement No Time to Train: <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/training-materials>

For more resources, see the CSDE’s [Smarter Lunchrooms](#) Web page, and the CSDE’s Healthy School Environment and Nutrition Education resource lists on the CSDE’s [Resources for School Nutrition Programs](#) Web page.

### Signage and Posters

Menu boards and signage materials are available from a variety of commercial suppliers. Many nutrition education posters are available at low cost. For a list of companies and organizations that provide signs and posters, see the “Signage and Posters” section of the CSDE’s [Menu Planning and Food Production](#) resource list.



### Display Equipment and Supplies

Check with the school’s local equipment distributor for food display equipment and supplies such as attractive linens, colorful bowls and trays, tiered metal baskets and clear plastic frames. Other sources include local craft stores, department stores, discount stores and thrift stores.

### Funding

Look for potential local funding sources such as the school’s PTA/PTO, district organizations and local businesses. Consider local, state and federal grant opportunities such as Fuel Up to Play 60 and the New England Dairy & Food Council’s breakfast grants. For more information, see the “Grants and Funding” section of the CSDE’s [Wellness Policies for Schools and Child Care](#) resource list.

## STEP 5 — EDUCATE AND TRAIN SCHOOL STAFF

Based on the experience of the SLMP schools, buy-in and support from the following people are critical to successful implementation of a Smarter Lunchrooms makeover:

- food service director;
- cafeteria manager;
- food service staff (including all servers, cashiers and general workers who will be implementing the school’s Smarter Lunchrooms strategies); and
- building administrators, e.g., principal and assistant principal.

Smarter Lunchrooms cannot be successful unless the food service staff supports and consistently implements the planned strategies. It is important that staff understands **why** the changes are being made; **how** they benefit both students and food service staff; and **how** to implement them.

Cafeteria staff buy-in is critical to successful implementation. Include site staff in the planning process, and provide opportunities for their input.

**The food service director and cafeteria manager set the tone for success.** Positive leaders promote excitement and encourage their food service staff to be supportive. Encourage buy-in by providing ongoing education and guidance about Smarter Lunchrooms, and seeking staff input about implementation strategies.

**Staff training is critical for success.** All food service staff should receive training prior to starting the Smarter Lunchrooms makeover. As time goes on, staff may need additional training to provide reinforcement of the Smarter Lunchrooms strategies. For information on training materials, see “[Step 4 – Identify Resources](#)” on page 8.

**Administrative support is a key determinant of how well the cafeteria implements their Smarter Lunchrooms strategies.** Promote buy-in by educating school leaders about Smarter Lunchrooms, engaging them in the planning process, and sharing the cafeteria’s successes. The SLMP schools with strong support from the building principal and other administrative staff were most successful at making and sustaining healthy changes in the cafeteria.



*Stocking fruits and vegetables at East Hampton Middle School*

## STEP 6 — IMPLEMENT SMARTER LUNCHROOMS STRATEGIES

Use the cafeteria’s Smarter Lunchrooms action plan to implement the planned changes (see “[Step 3 – Prioritize Needs and Develop an Action Plan](#)”). Schools can begin implementing Smarter Lunchrooms strategies at any time during the school year. Start with easy changes – such as adding signage and posters to the serving line, moving the milk, and putting a fruit basket at the cashier’s stations – and build on their success.

If the school food service program conducts an extensive cafeteria makeover, the best times to start are at the beginning of the school year or after a school break. This allows adequate time for the food service program to:

- plan and conduct the makeover, such as purchasing supplies, creating signage, arranging decorative displays, and rearranging equipment and serving lines;
- provide staff education and training; and
- promote the healthy changes to students, families and school staff.

**Keep it fresh!** Students get bored with repetition. Keep students’ interest by changing the cafeteria and menus throughout the school year. Examples include daily updates of menu boards, seasonal rotation of decorations, posters and signage, and conducting special monthly cafeteria promotions and events.

## STEP 7 — BUILD AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

Educating the school community about Smarter Lunchrooms helps build support. Important groups to inform include school food service staff, building administrators, board of education, teachers and school staff, students, families, and school groups such as the PTA/PTO. The school’s Smarter Lunchrooms leadership team can help the food service program promote the cafeteria’s healthy changes and engage various groups. For more information, on the leadership team, see “[Step 1 — Identify a Smarter Lunchrooms Leadership Team](#)” on page 4.



*Colorful nutrition posters on the serving line at Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School in New London*

## STEP 8 — EVALUATE AND MAINTAIN

The food service director and cafeteria manager should regularly review whether the day-to-day cafeteria operations are consistent with the chosen Smarter Lunchrooms strategies. Evaluation determines how well the strategies are implemented, and if they are working.

A good evaluation plan does not need to be extensive or complicated. It can include the review of existing local data such as meal participation and production records, or new data such as plate waste and student surveys. Examples of evaluation data for Smarter Lunchrooms include:

- surveys of students, parents and staff;
- meal participation rates;
- fruit and vegetable consumption;
- consumption of white versus flavored milk;
- food waste;
- purchases of competitive foods (a la carte sales); and
- other local school nutrition program data.



*Vegetable selections at Cutler Middle School in Groton*

The Maryland State Department of Education’s [Project Refresh Toolkit](#) contains several survey tools, including student and food service staff surveys and a student/staff interactions observation tool.

### Promote Success

Conducting regular evaluation helps ensure the school’s ongoing success with Smarter Lunchrooms strategies, and can be used to promote the healthy changes to the school community. Use evaluation results to let students, families and school staff know about the cafeteria’s successes. Some examples include:

- testimonials from students and school staff;
- before and after photos;
- press releases for the media, e.g., local newspapers and television stations;
- articles in school newsletters, e.g., student/parent newsletters, and on the school/district’s Web site;
- information on the school’s social media accounts, e.g., Facebook, Twitter and Instagram;
- reports to the local board of education or school governing authority; and
- presentations to school groups, e.g., parent open house and school staff in-service days.

For information on effective communication strategies for school nutrition programs, see [“Tried and True Tips for Clearly Communicating Your Messages,”](#) by Dayle Hayes, M.S., R.D.

## Evaluation Resources

The resources below address Smarter Lunchrooms evaluation.

- Data (B.E.N. Center):  
<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/nttt-april-data-4.pdf>
- DPIE (Diagnose, Prescribe, Implement, Evaluate) General Observation Checklist (B.E.N. Center): [http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/dpie\\_evaluation\\_observation\\_checklist.pdf](http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/dpie_evaluation_observation_checklist.pdf)
- Evaluation Matrix (B.E.N. Center):  
[http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/dpie\\_lunchroom\\_0-5\\_evaluation\\_matrix.pdf](http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/dpie_lunchroom_0-5_evaluation_matrix.pdf)
- Lunchroom Self-Assessment Score Card (B.E.N. Center):  
[http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/lunchroom\\_self-assessmt\\_score\\_card.final\\_4-3-14.pdf](http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/lunchroom_self-assessmt_score_card.final_4-3-14.pdf)
- Putting Thought into Action: DPIE (Diagnose, Prescribe, Implement, Evaluate) (B.E.N. Center): <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/dpie.pdf>

For additional information on evaluation, see the “Evaluation” section of the CSDE’s [Wellness Policies for Schools and Child Care](#) resource list.



*Fruit and vegetable selections on the serving line at East Hampton Middle School*