

4 — Strategies for Success

Food service staff can help students choose healthy foods and increase their selection of reimbursable meals by using three key behavioral economics concepts: **location, visibility and choice**. These concepts drive the Smarter Lunchrooms strategies.

This section includes strategies from the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement and the B.E.N. Center that help school food service staff to increase students' selection of fruits, vegetables, white milk, targeted entrees, and reimbursable meals.

Most strategies require little time and money, and can help schools make immediate changes. If funds are available, schools can maximize their success by purchasing supplies that enhance Smarter Lunchrooms implementation, such as:

- attractive menu boards;
- serving line signage including display frames and static-cling signs;
- display equipment and supplies for the serving lines and POS, e.g., colorful bowls, attractive linens and tiered metal baskets;
- clear containers and attractive labels for grab-and-go foods; and
- nutrition education posters for the serving and dining areas.

These purchases add value to Smarter Lunchrooms implementation by enhancing the cafeteria's appeal, and creating an attractive, pleasant and welcoming environment. The SMLP schools used a variety of these supplies to enhance Smarter Lunchrooms implementation. For information on potential funding sources for supplies, see "[Step 4 – Identify Resources](#)" in section 2. For information on the SLMP, see the CSDE's [Report on Connecticut's Smarter Lunchrooms Makeover Pilot](#).



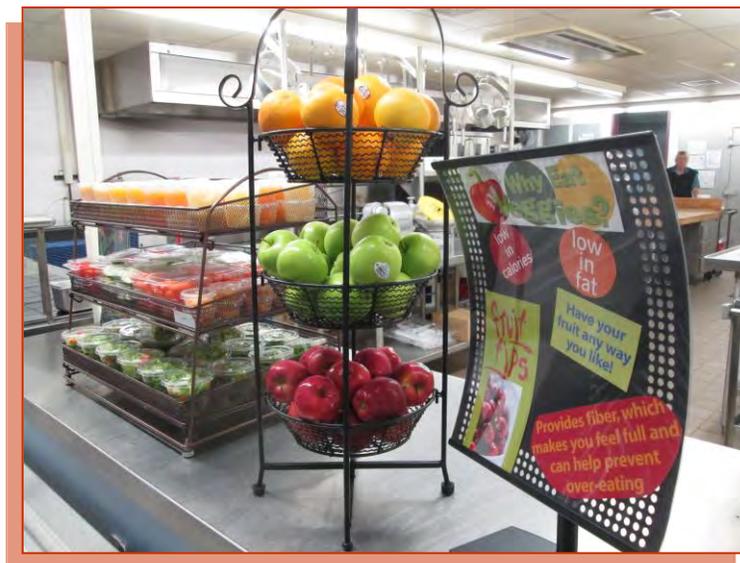
Location • Visibility • Choice

Fruits

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF FRUITS

Strategy 1	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Display fruit in at least two locations per line, including near the cash register. *</p>	<p>Students often overlook fruit because it is hard to see and reach, hidden under a sneeze shield in a drab metal bin.</p> <p>Move fruit into the spotlight! Increasing students' exposure to fruit (especially in traffic-jam areas like near the register) increases the likelihood they see it, which increases their chances of taking and eating it.</p>	<p>Make fruit available at least twice along the lunch line, either by repeating options or by offering two or more options in different places.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible locations include on a salad bar, in a cooler, on a snack rack and beside the register. • Display canned fruit and fresh fruit separately. • Highlight fruit offerings with a sign, e.g., "Last chance for fruit!" or "Fresh fruit today!" For more information, see "Improve Visibility" and "See the Signs!" in section 3. 	<p>TIME 10-30 minutes (moving the fruit, creating reminder signs)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-3 (no cost to move the fruit, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see "See the Signs!" in section 3.</i></p>

* **Food Safety Note:** Connecticut's Public Health Code 19-13 B42 requires that food is "protected." Schools should check with their local health department regarding how to display fruits and vegetables so they meet the state requirements.



Fruit and vegetable selections at East Hampton Middle School

Fruits

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF FRUITS			
Strategy 2	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Display whole fruits in a bowl or basket instead of stainless steel bins or trays. *</p>	<p>Bright and contrasting colors make food look more appetizing, and the appearance of variety prompts people to eat more.</p>	<p>Place whole fruits in an attractive bowl or basket to draw students' eyes. Use color to make foods pop and look more appealing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use brightly colored ceramic or plastic mixing bowls, woven baskets or tiered metal baskets. • If metal steam table chafing pans are the only option, line them with brightly colored cloth napkins or placemats, and place on contrasting color tablecloths. • Create color contrast by mixing whole fruits, e.g., apples with oranges, bananas with pears or all whole fruits together. • If desired, wrap edible-peel fruits (like apples) in clear plastic, or slice and place in baggies. * 	<p>TIME 5-15 minutes (moving the fruit, wrapping in plastic, if desired *)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-15 (check thrift stores and discount stores for inexpensive bowls, linens and supplies)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase tiered metal baskets to display fruits.</i></p>
<p>* Food Safety Note: Connecticut's Public Health Code 19-13 B42 requires that food is "protected." Schools should check with their local health department regarding how to display fruits and vegetables so they meet the state requirements.</p>			



Fruit baskets on the serving line at CREC International Magnet School in South Windsor

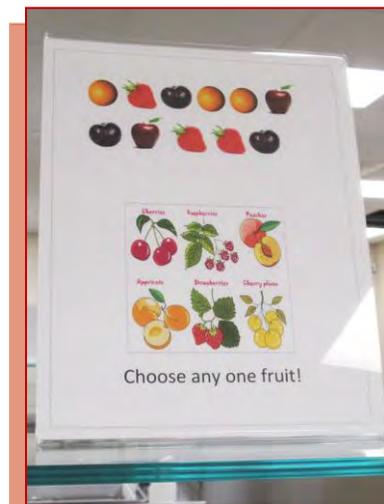
Fruits

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF FRUITS

Strategy 3	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Employ signs and verbal prompts to draw attention to fruit and encourage them to take it.</p>	<p>Signs grab students' attention and direct it to the fruit options.</p>	<p>Create brightly colored signs to grab students' attention. Post near fruit. Direct food servers and cashiers to remind students that fruit is included with their meal.</p> <p>Avoid simply placing fruit on a student's plate, as it will likely go uneaten. Letting students choose to take fruit increases the likelihood they will eat it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible locations for signs include on a menu board ("Today's Fruit Specials"), hanging above the fruit stations ("Fresh fruit today!," "Last chance for fruit!," "Fruit included with meals!") and by the register ("Did you grab some fruit for later?") • Be creative! Use school colors and mascots to personalize your message, e.g., "[Mascot] says, Don't forget fruit!" • Train food servers, cashiers and lunchroom monitors to smile and prompt students to take fruit. Place reminder cards with sample prompts at all work stations. For more information, see "Tips for Suggestive Selling" in section 3. 	<p>TIME 30 minutes (creating reminder signs and staff reminder cards, staff training)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-3 (no cost to move the fruit, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase static-cling signs for the serving line or standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see "See the Signs!" in section 3.</i></p>



Static-cling fruit sign on the serving line at CREC International Magnet School in South Windsor



Signage promoting fruit on the serving line at Ilkling Middle School in Manchester

Vegetables

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF VEGETABLES

Strategy 1	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Give vegetables creative/descriptive age-targeted names and display the names on cards next to or with the vegetables on the serving line *</p>	<p>Students often overlook vegetables because they are hard to see and reach, hidden behind a serving counter or under a sneeze shield. Drab, boring names like “beans” or “corn” downplay their appeal.</p> <p>Move vegetables into the spotlight! Increasing students’ taste expectations increases their likelihood of noticing and taking vegetables, and eating them.</p> <p>Additionally, signs grab students’ attention and direct it to the vegetable options.</p>	<p>Add a fun or descriptive adjective in front of vegetable names. Place the names on cards on the serving line near the vegetables.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make names age-appropriate. Younger students like fanciful names like “<i>x-ray vision carrots</i>” and “<i>super-strength spinach</i>.” Older students prefer descriptive adjectives like “<i>succulent summer corn</i>” and “<i>crisp celery and carrots</i>.” For more information, see “Name that Veggie” in section 3. • Create brightly colored name cards for the vegetables. • Display name cards on the lunch line. Fold and place on counter, or attach to serving window or ledge with tape (on back only), magnets or magnetic clips. 	<p>TIME 20-30 minutes (renaming vegetables, creating name signs)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-3 (no cost to rename veggies, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see “See the Signs!” in section 3.</i></p>

*** Food Safety Note:** Connecticut’s Public Health Code 19-13 B42 requires that food is “protected.” Schools should check with their local health department regarding how to display fruits and vegetables so they meet the state requirements.



Vegetables choices at Cutler Middle School in Groton

Vegetables

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF VEGETABLES

Strategy 2	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Display the creative/descriptive age-targeted names on a poster or menu board outside the cafeteria.</p>	<p>Students often overlook vegetables because they are hard to see and reach, hidden behind a serving counter or under a sneeze shield. Drab, boring names like “beans” or “corn” downplay their appeal.</p> <p>Move vegetables into the spotlight! Increasing students’ taste expectations increases their likelihood of noticing and taking vegetables, and eating them.</p> <p>Additionally, signs grab students’ attention and direct it to the vegetable options.</p>	<p>After renaming the vegetables, display the new names where students will see them, before entering the cafeteria. Get students thinking about the vegetables while they are hungry and planning their purchases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible locations include on a poster, menu board or bulletin board outside the cafeteria. • A great location idea is on the wall where kids wait in line to buy lunch. • Attractiveness counts! Print or write or neatly, and use brightly colored ink. For more information, see “See the Signs!” in section 3. 	<p>TIME 5-20 minutes (writing names daily, creating a poster or menu board)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-5 (possible ink/paper costs to make a poster or menu board)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase static-cling or professionally printed signs for the serving line.</i></p>



Static-cling vegetable sign on the serving line at CREC International Magnet School in South Windsor



Sign promoting vegetables on the serving line at CREC International Magnet School in South Windsor

Vegetables

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF VEGETABLES

Strategy 3	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Create a Student Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC) of students responsible for naming vegetables and creating signage.</p>	<p>A group of motivated students is more likely to understand what appeals to their peers. Engage students to help make lunchroom changes that truly appeal to young people. An added benefit is free help to maintain your changes!</p>	<p>Create a SNAC of six to ten members. Give them a list of the most common vegetables served in the lunchroom and ask them to create age-appropriate names.</p>	<p>TIME 2-4 hours (to organize student SNAC and hold a renaming meeting)</p> <p>MONEY \$0</p>



Fruit and vegetable selections on the serving line at Cutler Middle School in Groton

Entrees

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF TARGETED ENTREES			
Strategy 1	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Make the entree with the greatest nutrient density the first or most prominent in line.</p> <p>Nutrient-dense foods are relatively rich in nutrients for the calories contained.</p>	<p>Hungry students are more likely to select the first item they see. Use this behavior to give healthy "target entrees" an advantage.</p>	<p>Rearrange serving pans to place a targeted healthy entree first in the serving line.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a target hot entree first in the hot lunch serving line. • Place healthy sandwiches and prepackaged salads in a prominent position by the grab-and-go window. Place less healthy snacks away from the window. • For added appeal, place vegetables near the target hot entree, and coordinate vegetables to complement the entree. 	<p>TIME 5-10 minutes</p> <p>MONEY \$0</p>



School lunches at CREC International Magnet School in South Windsor

Entrees

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF TARGETED ENTREES			
Strategy 2	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Give targeted entrees creative/descriptive age-targeted names and display the names on cards next to or with the targeted entrees on the serving line.</p>	<p>Students often overlook healthy entrees (especially new recipes) because they are hard to see, hidden behind the serving counter. Drab, boring names like “bean burrito” or “turkey” downplay their appeal.</p> <p>Students trust known foods like burgers and pizza. They need a prompt to try something new and different.</p> <p>Move targeted entrees into the spotlight! Increasing students' taste expectations increases their likelihood of noticing and taking new dishes, and eating them. Additionally, signs grab students' attention and direct it to the targeted entrees.</p>	<p>Add a fun or descriptive adjective in front of targeted entree names. Place the names on cards on the line near the entrees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make names age-appropriate. Younger students like fanciful names like “super tuna noodles” and “big bad bean burrito.” Older students prefer descriptive adjectives like “Tuscan tomato pie” and “savory turkey dinner.” • Create brightly colored name cards for the targeted entrees. • Display name cards on the lunch line. Fold and place on counter, or attach to serving window or ledge with tape (on back only), magnets or magnetic clips. • Avoid using the word “healthy” in food names. Cornell’s research has shown that giving a food the title “healthy” actually decreases its sales. For younger students, focus on fun associations or taste. For older students, focus on texture. 	<p>TIME 20-30 minutes (renaming vegetables, creating name signs)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-3 (no cost to rename veggies, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see “See the Signs!” in section 3.</i></p>



Signs identifying sandwiches at Bennie Dover Middle School in New London

Entrees

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF TARGETED ENTREES			
Strategy 3	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Display the creative/descriptive age-targeted names on a poster or menu board outside the cafeteria.</p> <p>Additional Tip: Create a SNAC of students responsible for the naming targeted entrees and creating signage.</p>	<p>Signs grab students' attention and direct it to the targeted entrees.</p>	<p>After renaming the targeted entree, display the new names where students will see them before entering the cafeteria. Get students thinking about the targeted entrees while they are hungry and planning their purchases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible locations include on a poster, menu board or bulletin board outside the cafeteria. • A great location idea is on the wall where kids wait in line to buy lunch. • Attractiveness counts! Write or print neatly and use brightly colored ink. 	<p>TIME 5-20 minutes (writing names daily, creating a poster or menu board)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-5 (possible ink/paper costs to make a poster or menu board)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, have signs professionally printed.</i></p>



Signs identifying sandwiches at Bennie Dover Middle School in New London

Milk

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF UNFLAVORED MILK

Strategy 1	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
Place white milk first in the milk cooler, in front of flavored milk. *	Students are more likely to take the first item they see if it is easy to grab.	Reorganize the milk coolers so that white milk is in front of all flavored milk choices, and is the most visible and easiest to grab. Stock coolers at least 50 percent full of white milk. Use posters and decorations that encourage milk consumption.	TIME 5-10 minutes MONEY \$0 (potential cost for posters)

* The USDA regulations require that schools must offer at least two different varieties (fat content and/or flavor) of unflavored low-fat (1%) milk or fat-free milk (unflavored or flavored). Whole, reduced-fat (2%) and flavored low-fat milk cannot be served



White milk prominently displayed in the milk cooler at Bennie Dover Middle School in New London

Reimbursable Meals

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF REIMBURSABLE MEALS			
Strategy 1	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Place the components of a reimbursable meal at the snack window. * Add a reimbursable meal grab-and-go bag to the window.</p> <p>* Do not include deserts, snacks, or competitive foods in this line.</p>	<p>Convenience counts! During a busy lunch period, time is students' most valuable commodity. Students will often grab a snack or skip lunch altogether, rather than wait in a long line for a full meal, even when they are hungry.</p> <p>Hungry, time-pressed students are more likely to order foods that take little time to serve and select. Use this behavior to give healthy reimbursable meals an advantage, while improving meal participation and income.</p>	<p>Rearrange or create a snack window and place grab-and-go reimbursable meal components right in front, where students will see them. Pre-assemble reimbursable meals in convenient grab-and-go bags. Move snacks away from the window to make room for reimbursable meal foods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include healthy, convenient reimbursable meal foods that sell well such as sandwiches/subs, prepackaged salads, yogurt parfaits (yogurt with fruit and granola), bagged lunches, finger-food sides (raw veggie packs, whole fruits and sliced fruits in bags or cups), milk and juice. • Place snacks behind the counter or against a back wall to make room for reimbursable meal components in front. • Highlight the new offerings with a sign, such as "Short on time? Try this line!" or "In a hurry? Sandwiches and salads are grab and go!" 	<p>TIME 10-30 minutes or more (rearranging window and making signs takes about 10-30 minutes; possible added prep time for bagged lunches varies per kitchen)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-5 (no cost to move food, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see "See the Signs!" in section 3.</i></p>



Grab-and-go cooler with healthy meals and a la carte choices at East Hampton Middle School

Reimbursable meals

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF REIMBURSABLE MEALS			
Strategy 2	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Move all competitive foods – such as chips and cookies – behind the serving counter in the regular lunch line so they are available by request only.</p> 	<p>Children and adolescents are impulsive and will frequently grab snacks even when they planned to eat a full meal. With limited funds, students end up replacing the meal with snacks rather than supplementing it. As a result, the lunchroom loses money by losing reimbursable meal sales.</p> <p>By placing snacks where they are only available by request, reimbursable meals regain the time advantage and students think twice before replacing meals with snacks. This can nudge students to make healthier choices without eliminating snacks.</p>	<p>Rearrange snack displays so students must ask for items instead of selecting them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place snack racks on table or desk behind the serving counter or hang on a back wall. For an additional health bonus, offer finger-food sides (raw veggie packs, whole fruits and sliced fruits in bags or cups) on the same rack as snacks. Give healthier snacks the price advantage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make healthier snacks less expensive than less healthy snacks. Even 5-10 cents will make a big difference in promoting healthy snack sales. Advertise this cost difference by posting prices directly on the rack next to the snacks. Use printed signs and brightly colored ink to grab students' attention. Avoid bundling less healthy competitive foods such as cookies and snacks.. Use a la carte pricing strategies to make school meals the best deal. For more information, see "Set Smart Pricing Strategies" in section 3. Place healthiest items at eye level and less healthy items lower. For example, finger-food sides (raw veggie packs, whole fruits and sliced fruits in bags or cups) at eye level on middle shelves, and cookies and baked chips at the very top or bottom. 	<p>TIME 5-15 minutes (moving the rack, rearranging snacks and posting price signs)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-3 (no cost to move items, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see "See the Signs!" in section 3.</i></p>

Reimbursable Meals

INCREASING STUDENTS' SELECTION OF REIMBURSABLE MEALS			
Strategy 3	Why It Works	How To Do It	Cost
<p>Create a HEALTHY-CHOICES ONLY convenience line or window stocked with a variety of healthy foods such as milk, fruits, veggies, premade sandwiches and salads and entree items lowest in fat and sodium. *</p> <p>* Existing snack lines or windows can often be converted to a "healthy choices" line. Do not include desserts, snacks, or competitive foods in this line.</p>	<p>Convenience counts! During a busy lunch period, time is students' most valuable commodity. Students will often grab a snack or skip lunch altogether, rather than wait in a long line for a full meal, even when they are hungry.</p> <p>Hungry, time-pressed students are more likely to order foods that take little time to serve and select. Use this behavior to give healthy reimbursable meals an advantage, while improving meal participation and income.</p>	<p>Convert one line or window to healthy items only service. Stock with a variety of snacks and entree options, with the focus on grab-and-go service that is as quick as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrees: Offer sandwiches/subs, prepackaged salads, yogurt parfaits (yogurt with fruit and granola) and bagged lunches. Offer the lowest fat and sodium entree, if possible. Food Safety Note: <i>Schools should check with their local health department regarding temperature regulations for entree foods.</i> • Drinks: Offer milk, juice and water. • Snacks: Offer finger-food sides such as raw veggie packs, whole fruits and sliced fruits in bags or cups. If offering snack foods such as cookies, chips and ice cream, place behind healthy foods. • Advertise! Place an attractive, brightly colored sign above the line or window that emphasizes students can get full reimbursable meals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emphasize the time savings: <i>"Short on time? Pick this line! Sandwiches and salads are grab and go!"</i> ○ Avoid using the word "healthy" in menus. Cornell's research has shown that giving a food the title "healthy" actually decreases its sales. Better options are signs like <i>"Fresh Bites," "Fresh Express"</i> and <i>"Fast & Fresh."</i> • Offer less healthy snacks in regular lines only. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cover the transparent top of ice cream freezers with decorative paper. ○ Place snacks on rack behind counter or on back wall, where students must ask for them. ○ Offer snacks only after the meal service. 	<p>TIME 30-60 minutes (rearranging snack window and regular lines, creating signs)</p> <p>MONEY \$0-5 (no cost to rearrange foods, possible ink/paper costs to make signs)</p> <p><i>If funds are available, purchase standing plastic frames to display signs. For more information, see "See the Signs!" in section 3.</i></p>