



Taste Testing

Getting Started Guide

Taste testing events help to meet two school nutrition goals. They expose kids to new foods, or foods that may be prepared differently. They also help to find out about preferences, which will increase efficiency and decrease waste.

To increase participation for a taste testing event, the key is to implement strategies that build interest.

The Basics



Prime - Get students excited about taste testing day. Here are some ideas to promote the event:

- Create signs to promote the taste testing event, include a creative name of the item being taste tested
- Post signs in the entrance of heavily trafficked areas
- Designate a set day of the week for taste testing, such as "Try it Tuesday" or "Veg Out Wednesday"
- Highlight appealing features of the items: fresh from our garden, local tomatoes today
- Create student announcements about the event using creative adjectives to describe the item being taste tested



Prompt and Place - Place your taste testing station in the pathway of students and prompt students as they walk by.

- Create a station in the lunch line, pick a place where students purposely have to walk by, have them taste test the sample
- Partner with teachers to offer samples during the class period directly before the lunch period
- Recruit volunteers to hand out samples
- Use verbal prompts to entice students to try a sample



Appeal - Make the sample item desirable to students. Encourage participation through visual appeal.

- Samples should appear fresh without browning, bruising, or wilting
- Use three contrasting colors in the sample; the container can be counted as a color
- Use creative names/descriptions to engage interest
- Serve samples in an attractive cup or package
- Use bite size portions for simple self-serve
- Sample two different items to increase participation
- Take a picture of the sample items to take a look at the appeal

Naming Vegetable Items

Students are more willing to grab a vegetable if it has a creative name. Here are a few adjectives to include in the name and description:

Crunchy	Juicy
Zesty	Delicious
Fresh	Natural
Sweet	Tasty
Ripe	Exotic

Prompting Students

As students walk past the taste testing station encourage them to try a sample. Here are a few ideas:

- Would you like to try a sample today?
- Provide a fun fact about the item.
- Try "named item," it goes great with the entrée of the day!

Evaluating your Success

To measure the success of your event, participation and feedback results should be documented. There are multiple techniques to receive feedback from students. Utilize comment cards, simple surveys, take a student vote, or simply listen to verbal responses provided by the student body. Choose the option that works best for *you and your staff*.

The feedback technique chosen will determine the level of complexity and measurement accuracy. **Level 1** methods use existing information and indirectly measure student response. **Level II** methods require a bit of extra work and directly measure student response. **Level III** methods measure both use of the taste tested item and student response toward the item. For **Level III** measures, the item performance on the school menu should be evaluated and may require assistance from partners.

Below are the appropriate process and reporting steps for each level of measurement.

Level I Measurements

- Record the name of sampled items and number of samples served
- Circulate and ask for student feedback
- Report out the number of samples taken by the students
- Provide a brief summary of feedback responses

Level II Measurements

- Use student surveys or comment cards to identify student preferences
- Report out the number of responses in favor of the new food item/s
- Report out the number of responses against the new food item/s
- Add sampled item to the menu, document how well it does

Level III Measurement

- Complete a plate waste study to evaluate the performance of the new item on the school menu
- Report out waste and consumption findings

For detailed information about taste testing events, access the Taste Testing in School Toolkit, provided by Action for Healthy Kids, from:

<http://www.ohioactionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/OAFHK-2012-Taste-Testing-Toolkit-WEB.pdf>



OHIO Smarter Lunchrooms Getting Started Guides are produced by Wright State University, Master of Public Health Program. To access additional resources, visit:

OHIOsmarterlunchrooms.com

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Reinforcement

A behavior that is positively reinforced is likely to be repeated. Utilize student feedback to make menu decisions. Taking action shows students that their opinion is important, which makes them more likely to participate at the next taste testing event.

Reinforce student participation with verbal praise and recognition, stickers, or other rewards and prizes.

The form is titled "Official TASTE! TESTER" and features illustrations of a carrot, a tomato, and an apple. It includes the following sections:

- 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:** _____
- List one word to describe the food I tried:** _____
- The food looked:** Three smiley faces (happy, neutral, sad).
- The food tasted:** Three smiley faces (happy, neutral, sad).
- The food smelled:** Three smiley faces (happy, neutral, sad).

At the bottom, it says: "For more resources visit www.OHIOsmarterlunchrooms.com"

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