



Eat Real School Food Certification Program

 Eat Real

www.eatreal.org

A quick note before we start

THANK YOU for all you do.

7 Billion meals per year

This is how many meals school food leaders like you are providing our nation's kids.

With federal regulations, an ever-changing food policy environment, limited infrastructure and more – we know change does not magically happen nor does it look the same for every operation.

OUR VISION

We believe every child deserves a healthy, delicious future and we are here to help make that possible.



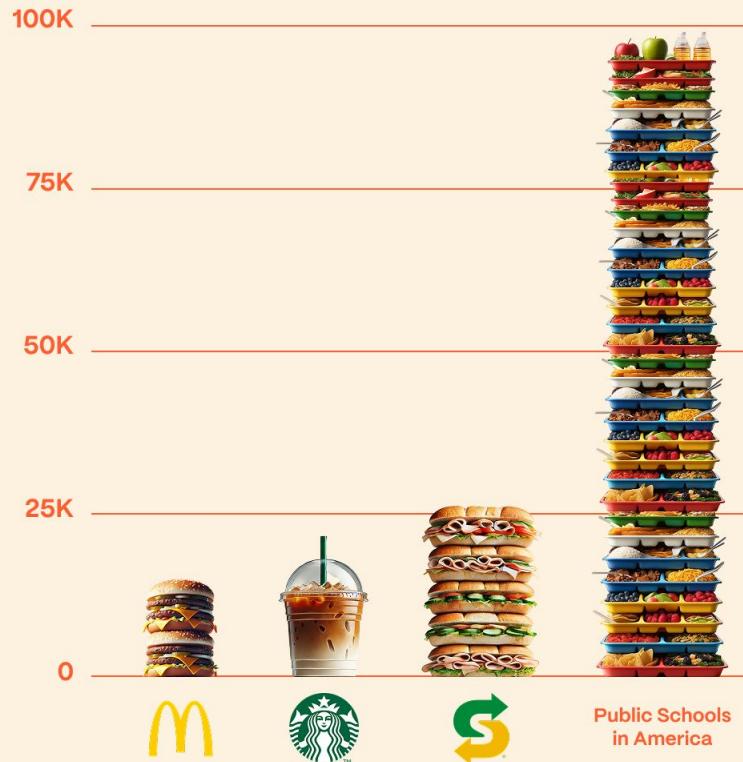
Schools have the power to change the future

Together, America's public schools serve **7 BILLION meals per year** across nearly 100k locations.

If we can shift what's on our cafeteria trays, we can:

- Improve the **health** of our nation's kids, and prevent disease before it starts.
- Keep dollars in their **communities** by increasing local sourcing.
- Reduce our impact on the **planet** our students will inherit.

Largest Restaurant Chain in America



For our kids.

The math speaks for itself...

3 in 5

youth will be obese
by the age of 35.

67%

of children's calories
come from ultra-
processed food.

30M

children rely on public
school meal programs
to supply 50% or more
of their calories.

If we shift what's on school lunch trays, we change the trajectory of our children's lives.

WHAT WE DO

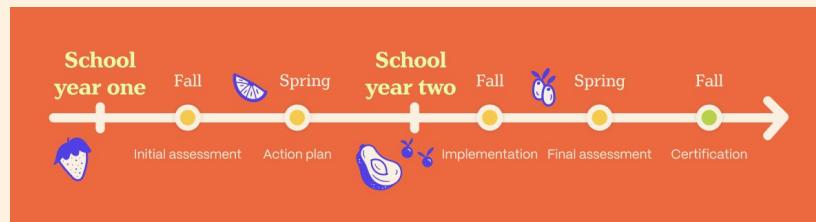
Eat Real harnesses the power of school food to deliver a fast, scalable, and enduring upstream solution to America's children's health crisis.



Our mechanism for change: K-12 Certification Program

Every district is different. Eat Real understands the reality and complexity of school food. Our standards, process, scoring, and tiers are all designed to provide multiple pathways to success.

The 10 Eat Real Standards	
 Reduced Sugar Reducing consumption of added sugar and artificial sweeteners	 Menu Variety Providing students with a variety of relevant and appealing choices
 Whole Grains Encouraging intact whole grains and whole-grain flour products	 Sustainable Produce Championing sourcing strategies that support local communities and protect the environment
 Fresh Choices Increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables	 Responsible Proteins Choosing proteins that maximize animal welfare and minimize environmental impact
 Healthy Fats Encouraging fats from the healthiest possible sources	 Waste Prevention Implementing food and solid waste prevention and recovery strategies that put resources to their best use
 Minimal Processing Replacing ultra-processed items with scratch cooking and minimally processed alternatives	 Real Food Education Connecting students to their food through farm to school, culinary, and nutrition education

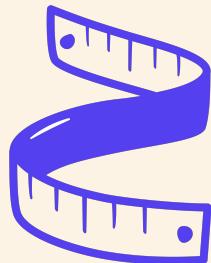


How We Do It



Mirror

Get the birds-eye view of your meal program that's difficult to see when your time and resources are limited.



Measurement

Use real data from your program to drive high-impact decisions and help you demonstrate your achievements.



Map

A clear action plan and an empathetic accountability partner can help guarantee that you'll reach your goals.



Megaphone

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Reduced Sugar

Reducing consumption of added sugar and artificial sweeteners

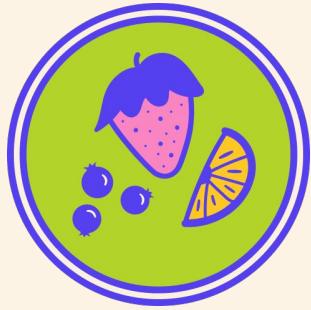
KPI #	What's Covered	What's Measured
1.1	Calories from Added Sugar	% Calories from added sugars at breakfast across a sample week
1.2		% Calories from added sugars at lunch across a sample week
1.3	Grains	% Grains that contain more than 6 grams of added sugar per 1 oz equivalent and/or artificial sweeteners across a sample week
1.4	A La Carte	% A la carte items that contain more than 6 grams of added sugar per serving and/or artificial sweeteners across a sample week
1.5	Processed Fruit	Frequency of processed fruit that contains more than 6 grams of added sugar per half-cup equivalent serving and/or artificial sweeteners across a sample week
1.6	Sweetened Yogurt	Frequency of sweetened yogurt that contains more than 6 grams of added sugar per 4 oz serving and/or artificial sweeteners across a sample week
1.7	Flavored Milk	Frequency of sweetened flavored milk across a sample week

Why this matters

American children eat a bathtub of added sugar (65+ lbs) per year. That's roughly 14% of total calories from added sugars. This exceeds the American Heart Association's recommendation to limit total calories from added sugar to less than 6% daily and the World Health Organization's conditional recommendation to less than 5% daily.

Eating added sugar can impact children's ability to focus and learn by dysregulating their blood sugar levels. Overconsumption is linked to the development of long-term chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. The increasing presence of artificial sweeteners has the potential for adverse outcomes, such as increased preference for sweet foods and increased risk for obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Most school breakfasts and nearly two-thirds of all school lunches exceed public health recommendations for added sugar, presenting an impactful opportunity for school districts to improve health outcomes for children.



Fresh choices

Increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables

KPI #	What's Covered	What's Measured
3.1		Frequency of fresh fruits offered across a sample week
3.2	Fresh Fruit Offerings	# Different varieties of fresh fruit offered across a sample week*
3.3.		Frequency of fresh vegetables offered across a sample week
3.4	Fresh Vegetable Offerings	# Different varieties of fresh vegetables offered across a sample week*
3.5	Fruit & Vegetable Accessibility	% Cafeteria sites with salad bars in use during a sample week
3.6		Frequency of fresh-sliced, cut, or bite-sized fruit served across a sample week
3.7	Reduced Juice Consumption	Frequency of juice offered across a sample week

Why this matters

Less than 50% of children in the United States consume enough fruits, and less than 12% consume enough vegetables.

Ensuring children consume a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables—specifically opting for whole fruits over fruit juice—provides essential dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals needed for proper growth and development. Increasing fresh fruit and vegetable consumption improves mood, concentration, energy, and academic performance and decreases the long-term risks of developing cardiometabolic diseases and some cancers.



Minimal Processing

Replacing ultra-processed items with scratch cooking and minimally processed alternatives

KPI #	What's Covered	What's Measured
5.1	Breakfast Items	% Breakfast menu components that are minimally processed across a sample week*
5.2	Lunch Items	% Lunch menu components that are minimally processed across a sample week*
5.3	A La Carte Items	% A la carte menu components that are minimally processed across a sample week*
5.4	Scratch Cooked Offerings	Frequency of offerings made from scratch across a sample week**

Why this matters

Ultra-processed foods make up two-thirds of the calories consumed by children. These foods undergo extensive industrial processing to be highly palatable, energy-dense, and appealing. They typically have higher amounts of added sugar, saturated fats, sodium, refined starches, and food additives, while being low in protein, dietary fiber, and micronutrients. Children's overconsumption of ultra-processed foods is linked to obesity, micronutrient deficiencies, and increased cardiometabolic risks and can lead to a preference for these foods over minimally processed, nutrient-rich alternatives.

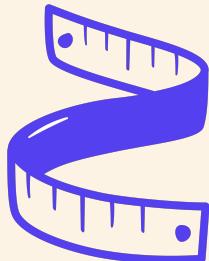
Incorporating scratch cooking and using whole, minimally processed ingredients or a balanced mix of fresh and pre-made products can significantly improve the nutritional quality of school meals and reduce reliance on ultra-processed foods.

How We Do It



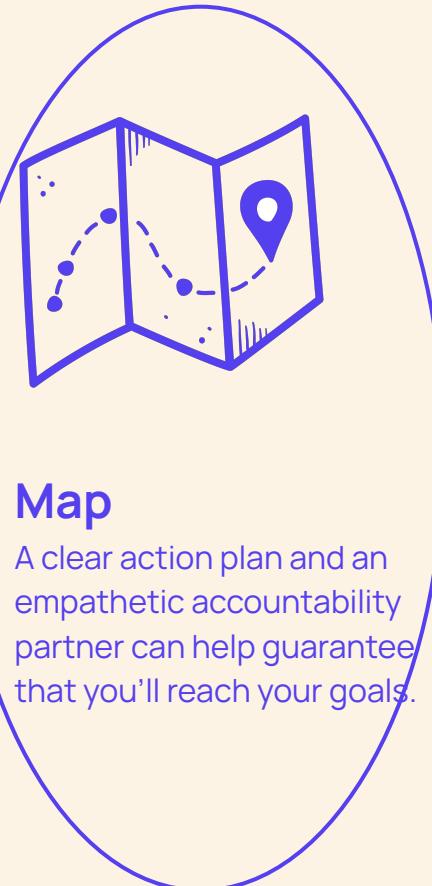
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A support system — of your peers

Nutrition Services is among the toughest jobs in the country. It helps to be among like minds.

Eat Real works with school food leaders in 20 states. When you join us, you become a member of our community.

We convene quarterly to talk shop, trade tips, share resources (ie. recipes, equipment, vendors), and support each other in finding new solutions to the challenges so no one has to reinvent the wheel.



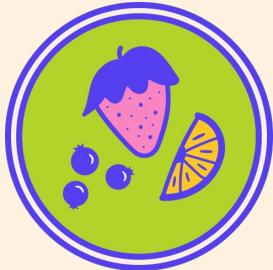
Food service directors from Washington, California, and Idaho touring a California district's kitchen operations.



Reduced Sugar

Reducing consumption of added sugar and artificial sweeteners.

Original Item	Swapped	Outcome
Vanilla Yogurt Parfait	50:50 plain and vanilla yogurt	Less added sugars while maintaining original flavor
Chocolate milk daily	Chocolate milk 1-3 times per week	Keep a student favorite while reducing frequency
Packaged sweet breakfast bread	Savory breakfast (burrito, bagel with cream cheese)	More protein, fiber and reduced sugar



Fresh choices

Increasing the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Original Item	Swapped	Outcome
Whole fruits (apple, orange)	Sliced or bite-sized pieces	Increased consumption, more variety on trays
Dried fruit	Whole fruit	More fiber, less sugar and fuller bellies per serving
1 vegetable option in grab and go boxes	2+ vegetable option in grab and go (ex:carrot sticks + cherry tomatoes)	More variety and exposures each day



Minimal Processing

Replacing ultra-processed items with scratch cooking and minimally processed alternatives.

Original Item	Swapped	Outcome
Canned vegetables or fruits in syrups or other undesirable ingredients	Canned fruit or vegetables in water or own juices	Reduced sugars and undesirable ingredients
Premade dressings and sauces	Move to scratch recipes	Reduce likelihood of undesirable ingredients (ie: food dyes) and added sugars
Pre-packaged cheeseburgers	Sourcing whole grain buns and pre-cooked patties	Add more nutrients and decrease the number of additives. *Potential to source local patties and buns

More Ideas

Impactful changes for starting a real food journey.

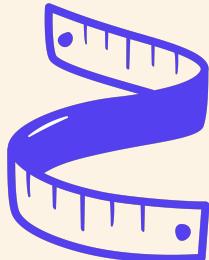
Action	Outcome
Review SKUs	<p>Many Eat Real districts have found they have multiple skus for the same items (cheese sticks, buns, sour cream and more.)</p> <p>Streamlining skus and using existing to meet component needs across school sites can lead to volume-related savings and less paperwork to track.</p>
Check added sugars	<p>Check recipes and spec sheets to see if added sugars are listed and work with teammates to get that data into a menu software system (if you have one).</p> <p>This work, though not insignificant, can set up well for future audits and seeing where the largest contributors of added sugars are.</p>
Connect with local farmers in your region	<p>Built relationships with local farmers through community connections or farmer's market visits. What is growing in your region? What does volume look like? What is the product delivery system?</p> <p>If you have the funds and freezer space: purchase local, seasonal produce in a higher volume than needed, process (wash and cut) and then freeze it in gallon bags to put out on the salad bar in the off season.</p> <p>The same can be done for local meats if freezer and prep space allow!</p>
Identify allies	<p>Take advantage of a teacher, administrators or parent's passion for nutritious and delicious food and ask for capacity with help like student surveys, organizing farmer visits and other nutrition education activities.</p>

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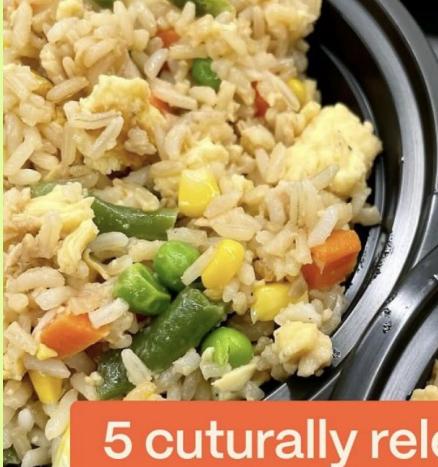
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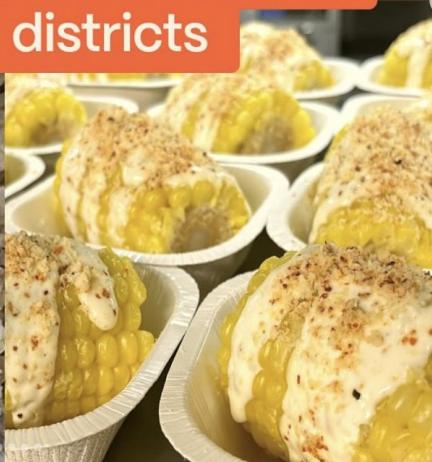
Celebrating your achievements, now and in the future.

You're already moving mountains to improve your meal program, but parents can't see it.

Eat Real can help. We celebrate you all along your journey with us, so you can educate, illuminate, and celebrate your work to get the recognition you and your team deserve.



5 culturally relevant meals at Eat Real districts



See more at <https://www.instagram.com/eatrealcertified/>

Make an impact beyond your district

Through our advocacy work, we provide district leaders with the opportunity to provide data and testify on behalf of state and national school food legislation.

We are also able to invite district leaders to join us onstage, telling their stories at events like state and national school food events, prominent health conferences like Hatch and NextMed, and culture-driving events like SXSW.



Eat Real district leaders advocating for Healthy Meals for All and key legislation including banning [Red No. 3](#) and [CA AB 1264](#), as well as [West Virginia's HB 2354](#).



Discussion and Questions



For our communities.

Schools can be the best, most delicious, most locally sourced restaurants in town.

Eat Real helps schools deepen relationships with local farmers and businesses to:

- Increase nutrient density**
- Reduce food miles**
- Reduce food waste**
- Provide income stability**
- Keep dollars local**

THE BIG WIN

To create a stronger, more resilient local economy



Founded by doctors

Eat Real was founded by two prominent physicians who recognized that our kids were getting sicker, sooner.

They sought an upstream solution to the looming American health crisis.

Our Medical Advisory Council includes leading experts in childhood nutrition, pediatric health, and mental health.



From top left: our founders, Dr. Robert Lustig and Dr. Jordan Shlain. And a few members of our Medical Advisory Council: Dr. Uma Naidoo, Dr. Michele Meitus-Snyder, Dr. Deepti Agarwal, Dr. Christopher Palmer, Dr. Hemalee Patel, Dr. Michael Goran, Dr. Bojana Weatherly.