

Taste Testing

Have you heard that children need 12 to 20 exposures to a new food item before they will accept it? It's NOT a myth. Children can be resistant to new foods, especially ones that are advertised as "healthy." Taste testing is a great way to introduce students to new food items in a fun and interactive way. It can also allow students to feel as if their voice is being heard when school food menus are being created.



A good taste test:

- **Has goals:** Why are you taste testing a product
- **Is interactive:** Allowing students to truly participate in the taste test is important.
- **Involves students:** Allowing students to help out with the taste test can make a huge difference in their peers' acceptance of a food item.
- **Includes teachers and staff:** Your school's staff is your natural ally.
- **Is well advertised:** Advertising helps students answer the question of WHAT is being served and WHY.
- **Is limited in scope:** Taste tests focus on one or a few items at a time so students aren't overwhelmed by new items.

Small Group Taste Tests

- Should be run twice a year to evaluate products that may be menued in the future and to evaluate products currently being menued.
- Consider creating a student advisory board to take part in the small group taste tests.

Taste Tests in the Classroom

- The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program offers funding to schools for students to eat fresh fruit and vegetables. The program allows students to be exposed to new fruits and vegetables they might not have had before.
- Incorporating a school garden program helps teachers connect the food being offered in the cafeteria to their lesson plans.
- Arranging for chefs to visit classrooms and conduct a demonstration and taste test can create positive outcomes.

Taste Tests in the Cafeteria

Cafeteria-based taste tests can take three main forms: taste testing on the line, taste testing at a station and mobile taste testing.

- Many schools find it easy to add samples of product to their line during meal service.
- Station-based taste testing is incredibly easy to promote in a cafeteria-setting. Many schools set up a table in a corner of their cafeteria near a high traffic area and provide sample tastings to students.
- Mobile taste testing is an excellent way of eliciting feedback from students in a less-overwhelming environment. For this taste test set-up, staff walk through the cafeteria and hand out tasting samples to students in their seats.