



Children's
Health, Safety and Well-Being

A young girl with voluminous curly brown hair is smiling broadly at the camera. She is wearing a white polo shirt and holding a white tray with a red rim. The tray contains a plate of food including green peas, broccoli, and orange carrots. The background is a brightly lit school cafeteria with other children and tables visible.

**Improving
Children's
Food
Security**

“The impact of healthy, nutritious school meals reaches far beyond the cafeteria—reducing obesity, increasing attendance, and giving kids the fuel they need to stay focused and engaged in the classroom.”

—AFT PRESIDENT RANDI WEINGARTEN



A Union of Professionals

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OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

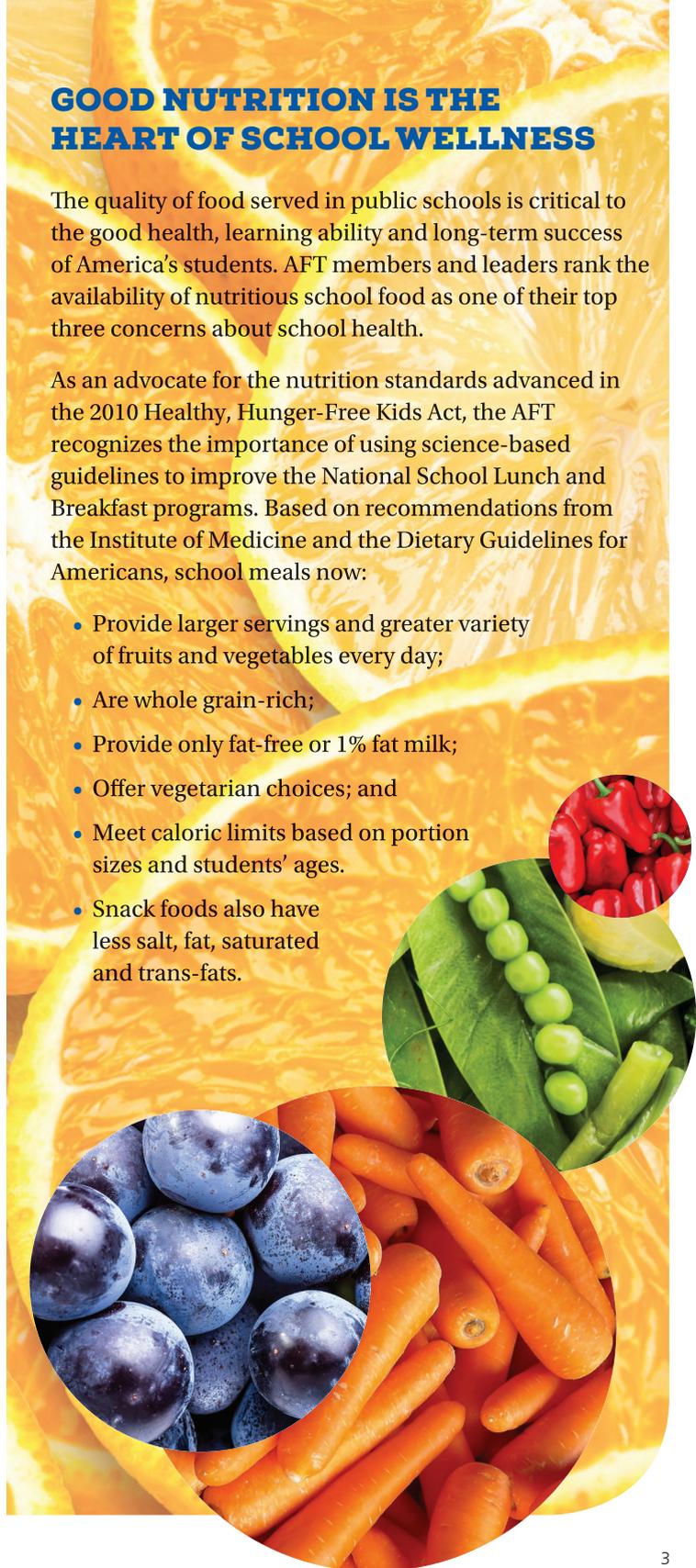
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GOOD NUTRITION IS THE HEART OF SCHOOL WELLNESS

The quality of food served in public schools is critical to the good health, learning ability and long-term success of America's students. AFT members and leaders rank the availability of nutritious school food as one of their top three concerns about school health.

As an advocate for the nutrition standards advanced in the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, the AFT recognizes the importance of using science-based guidelines to improve the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs. Based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, school meals now:

- Provide larger servings and greater variety of fruits and vegetables every day;
- Are whole grain-rich;
- Provide only fat-free or 1% fat milk;
- Offer vegetarian choices; and
- Meet caloric limits based on portion sizes and students' ages.
- Snack foods also have less salt, fat, saturated and trans-fats.



Student Diets Are Improving

Over 90 percent of schools are meeting these new guidelines, and at most schools, food revenue has increased. Parents generally favor the new food standards, as well. Importantly, research shows that the new rules have improved the nutritional quality of students' diets.

Scientists at the Harvard School of Public Health looked at how the new standards affected students' diets at four elementary schools in the Boston area. The researchers reported in 2014 that after the new rules took effect, the percentage of students selecting a fruit had increased. Numbers of students choosing an entrée and a vegetable was the same, but kids ate more of their meals—entrée and vegetable consumption increased. Food waste, while high, did not increase.

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Washington has been cooking from scratch in Syracuse since he became a cook, in 1988. He and nine other cooks make the food for seven schools, about 25,000 meals a day.

"We've been ahead of the curve here," Washington says. "We started making whole wheat pizza and wheat bread five years ago. We stopped offering whole white milk then, too. We have skim milk and low fat chocolate milk." Washington and his staff make their own salads, salad dressings, and mayonnaise, and all soups served are homemade. "I enjoy seeing a meal well prepared, and to look out in the cafeteria and see the kids eating everything."

The work of AFT members and leaders has played a major role in the success of the new nutrition standards. Bernard Washington, President of Food Service Unit 7 at the Syracuse Teachers Union, is a good example. A tireless advocate for healthy school food,

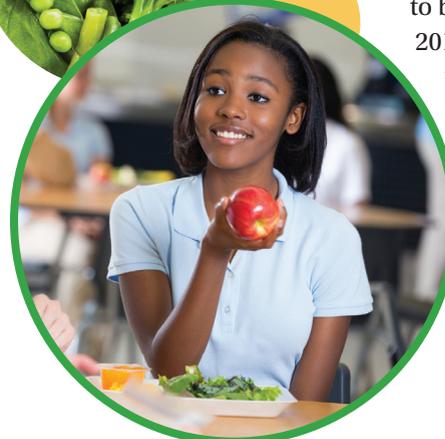
High Quality Food Requires Equipment and Training

90 percent of school food service directors surveyed by the Pew Charitable Trust in 2013 said they are meeting the new school food rules, but still face major challenges doing so. One-third lack adequate equipment, and one-quarter need upgrades in their kitchens' electrical or plumbing capacity.

The AFT recognizes that providing more fruits and vegetables, cooking from scratch, and building meals around fresh, local food requires both well-equipped school kitchens and staff training. The union has long advocated for more funding for school food programs to bring kitchens and staff into the 21st century.



In 2009, with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, USDA offered \$125 million in grants to schools for upgrading, renovating or replacing food service equipment. These were the first grants available to school food facilities for nearly 30 years. However, grant applications exceeded \$630 million – five times the money available. Since 2009, another \$60 million has been awarded to states for upgrading kitchen equipment in schools.



USDA is providing an additional \$25 million in grants for school kitchen upgrades to be awarded from 2015 to 2017. Importantly, this new set of grants includes \$5.5 million for training food service workers on meal planning, creating smarter lunchrooms, and developing nutrition education strategies.

Good Nutrition Leads to Academic Success

School food is not just about eating. It's also about learning. "The impact of healthy, nutritious school meals reaches far beyond the cafeteria—reducing obesity, increasing attendance, and giving kids the fuel they need to stay focused and engaged in the classroom," says AFT President Randi Weingarten.

Research shows that children consume about 50 percent of their daily calories at school. School food has a major impact on their attention span, memory, ability to learn, and academic achievement.

A study of the eating habits of students in four junior high schools in Canada, for example, showed that kids who ate more fruits and vegetables had higher average grades than those who ate fewer. Similarly, 5th

graders scored higher on standard literacy assessments if their diets were made up of more

fruits and vegetables, and less fat. The link between students' academic achievement and a diet rich in fruit and vegetables, and low in fat and sugar, has been confirmed by scientists worldwide.



Most Important Meal of the Day

Much of the research done in the U.S. linking nutrition to academic performance has centered on the pivotal role breakfast plays in learning. Research shows a healthy breakfast:

- **Improves** memory, concentration and attention to tasks;
- **Boosts** test scores and grades, particularly in math;
- **Lowers** rates of tardiness, absenteeism, and suspensions;
- **Reduces** visits to the school nurse; and
- **Improves** students' classroom behaviors.



When free school breakfast is available, students eat more fruits and vegetables, more fiber and less sugar. Students' ability to concentrate improves, and academic performance is enhanced. Yet, in most schools, only a small percentage of students have time to get to the cafeteria for breakfast before the bell, often fewer than 20 percent.

To expand access to free breakfast, many school districts have initiated Breakfast in the Classroom programs. Meals are delivered to each classroom and passed out by teachers, or are offered at Grab-And-Go stations where students pick up breakfast on the way to class. Los Angeles, New York, Memphis, Houston, Chicago, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Albuquerque, and many other large districts have switched to BIC programs. All report sizable increases in the rate of students eating breakfast – often as high as 90 percent.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, began offering free, universal Breakfast in the Classroom in 2012. "Children are calmer and more focused early in the day," says David Binkle, Director of Food Services for the Los Angeles County Unified School District, an AFT member, and a teacher of culinary arts. "We see far less junk food in the classroom in the early morning."

Food Insecurity

For some kids, what they eat at school is the majority of their daily diet. “For far too many children, the only reliable meal they receive is at school,” says AFT President Randi Weingarten.

- One in five children live in a household without enough food.
- Seventy-three percent of public school teachers report they are teaching students who come to school hungry.
- Teachers spend an average of \$37 a month out of their own pockets buying food for hungry children at school.
- Hungry kids can’t concentrate, lack energy, have behavior problems, and can’t perform academically.

“I have kids who come to school every day, and they’re hungry, says Marvin Callahan, a first-grade teacher at Comanche Elementary in Albuquerque, NM, and an AFT member. When Callahan heard kids say they didn’t want to go home on weekends because there wasn’t food to eat, he brought the issue to Comanche’s guidance counselor. Together, they started a program to send food home with some of the hungriest kids in special backpacks they made up of meals for the weekend and two snacks.

Funded largely by the teachers and staff at Comanche, along with donations from local businesses and nonprofits, the backpack program has improved the lives of school’s neediest students.

“It’s a joy to see these kids when they get their backpacks on Friday,” Callahan says. The problem is that the teachers and staff are paying for the program out of their paychecks.

1 in 5

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Community Eligibility

One important new tool for schools like Comanche is called Community Eligibility Provision. Part of the 2010 Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act, the provision took effect nationwide in 2015.

Any public school, where 40 percent or more of the student body is eligible for free, or reduced priced meals, can be certified to be “community eligible.” The whole school receives free breakfast and lunch—and the cost is reimbursed to the district by USDA on a per meal basis. There is no separate application required of parents, no added paperwork for schools or districts.

Schools that have adopted CEP find far greater participation in all school food programs by students. Administrative costs are reduced. Reimbursement fees to school districts are greater, expanding school nutrition budgets.

The promise of CEP is that it can not only reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition for all students, it may eliminate the stigma some kids feel by eating free or reduced priced meals. The program could ultimately eliminate “cheese sandwich” policies, where students who have not paid their school food bills are given alternative “cheese sandwich” lunches – or no food at all.



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Innovative Programs Exist

All school personnel can advocate for programs to help their school's food service professionals provide fresh and healthy food to students. Innovative programs exist. Some of these are:

Let's Move Salad Bars 2 Schools:

Launched in 2010 to increase children's access to fruit and vegetables, Let's Move Salad Bars 2 Schools has donated 2800 salad bars as of 2014, with a goal of placing salad bars in 6000 schools. Funded by the fruit and vegetable industry and Whole Foods Market, any K-12 school that participates in the National School Lunch Program is eligible to apply for funding for a salad bar at: www.saladbars2school.org.

Farm to School:

The USDA's Farm to School grant program awards up to \$5 million a year to help schools connect with local food producers and teach students where their foods comes from. Farm to School grants can be used for many types of projects, from establishing school gardens to working with farmers to get produce into schools. For information: www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program:

The USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program gives schools \$50 to \$75 per student per year to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables for snacks between meals. Elementary schools where 50 percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced price school meals are eligible for the program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ffvp/fresh-fruit-and-vegetable-program>.



For more information on these and other aspects of school nutrition, go to: www.aft.org/childrens-health/nutrition.

Combat Food Insecurity

School meal programs help fight hunger and improve nutrition. We can help students **THRIVE!**



Teach the value of nutrition.

Find resources for classrooms, cafeterias and gardens at www.fns.usda.gov/tn/myplate and Share My Lesson. Nutrition education encourages students to select and eat more healthy options, and reduces consumption of calories and fats.¹



Harvest the fruits of farm labor.

Farm-to-School programs that unveil the farm-to-tray process for students boost consumption of healthy foods, drive local economic growth and establish life-long habits.



Redesign school cafeterias.

Visit SmarterLunchrooms.org to learn more about research-based low- and no-cost strategies to promote nutritious eating and reduce plate waste.



Invest in 21st century school kitchens.

Change policy or fundraise to bring the new equipment, full-time positions and appropriate training, school food service workers need to implement ambitious goals to end child hunger and improve nutrition for all.



Value national nutrition standards.

The 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act set science-based dietary guidelines for meals and snacks in schools—a historic step forward for children's health. More than 90 percent of schools are meeting the standards. Tell your Congressional representative about your success.



Encourage robust meal participation.

Boost breakfast for all students. Also, find out if you work in one of the 50 percent of schools that can use the USDA's new Community Eligibility Provision to offer free, nutritious meals to all students.

¹ Food and Nutrition Service Nutrition Education and Promotion. 2010. The Role Of FNS In Helping Low-Income Families Make Healthier Eating And Lifestyle Choices. Alexandria: FNS. www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NutritionEdRTC.pdf



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