

A close-up photograph of a young boy with dark skin and short hair, wearing a denim jacket over a white shirt. He is holding a blueberry in his right hand and about to eat it. In the foreground, a white school lunch tray is visible, containing compartments with fried chicken, raspberries, and blueberries. The background is blurred, showing other students and school supplies.

Increasing Student Engagement Through Taste Tests

Taste Test Tips

Taste tests can help expose students to new foods and increase participation in school meal programs¹. Nutrition services and school administrators can use taste tests to increase student engagement and collect feedback about new and existing food and beverages offered on school menus.

¹ Hecht, A.A., Olarte, D.A., McLoughlin, G.M., Cohen, J.F.W. (2022) Promising strategies to increase student participation in school meals. Healthy Eating Research, <https://healthyeatingresearch.org>.

Tip 1:

Create a Positive Experience with Food

Working with food can help students build healthy habits, explore diverse cultures, and connect to their local food system. Since food often has a deeply personal meaning, it is important to teach students and staff how to approach foods with curiosity and model respect for others' preferences, cultures, and access.

- Let students decide if they will try the food and how much of the food they will eat.
- Teach and model respectful ways to say that you don't care for the food.

o "I tried it, and this is spicier than I like."

o "I liked how crunchy it was, but it was too sweet for me."

- Remember that all students do not have the same access to or relationship with food. Students may experience an emotional or behavioral response when trying food. Practice responding with compassion by taking a **PAUSE**.
- Consider that some students are sensitive to sensory stimuli such as tastes, smells, or textures. Consider evaluating your students' **sensory profiles** to help inform the lesson.

Tip 2:

Focus on Presentation

One of the first things we notice about a new food or beverage is how it looks. Make sure to present taste test items in a way that informs students about the food and makes them curious to have a taste.



- **Labels:** Use attractive labels with each food or beverage offered.

o Be sure to include the name of the item, as well as an enticing (but brief) description of the food or beverage. This helps to ensure that students are not turning the item down due to uncertainty about what it is.

o List any common allergens that might be contained in the item as well as any dietary restrictions that apply such as vegetarian, lactose-free, or halal.

- **Food:** If food or beverages look good, students are more likely to try it.

o Consider how the food is plated to increase attractiveness. A variety of colors and textures enhances attractiveness.

o Make sure the food or beverage is ready to consume! Prepare the food by cutting into bite-sized portions and pre-plating to ensure the item is easy to eat.

o Serve items with an appropriate garnish, sauce, or dressing. Ensure condiments or accompaniments are easily accessible by students.



Tip 3:

Collect Feedback

Determine the best method for collecting feedback on the items in each taste test. Use inclusive language on feedback surveys to ensure all students feel represented. Remember, you want as many students as possible to provide feedback, so make it easy and quick!



- Feedback Survey:
 - Capture feedback using a physical or digital survey. Use a QR code to make the digital survey even easier to access.
- Voting Poster or White Board:
 - Use a colorful posterboard or whiteboard to see which students tried it, liked it, or loved it. Let students put their vote on the board by using stickers or markers.
 - Posters are a great way to compare which item students preferred if offering multiple items. Students can make their mark by voting for their favorite!
- Get creative with what you've got:
 - Have students vote for their favorite food or beverage item by putting an item in the corresponding jar. Have students vote with their forks (literally!) by placing their used fork or napkin into one of two jars. Make sure to wear gloves to count the final votes.
- Analyze the results to help inform your decision about which foods and beverages to offer in the future. Be sure to communicate the results with your school community.
- Collect feedback anonymously so that students can be honest without being identified.

Tip 4:

Involve the Whole School Community

Collaborate with teachers, families, and caregivers to enhance student engagement.

- Connect with teachers to host the taste test in the classroom.
- Work with teachers to integrate nutrition education into existing lesson plans.
- Offer taste tests during family engagement events to gather input from the whole community.
- Send recipe cards to families and caregivers to recreate the dish at home. You can also turn the recipe cards into a Community Cookbook that includes recipes from students, families, and caregivers.

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Need support? Visit our Get Help page, call 1-888-543-4584 or e-mail help@healthiergeneration.org.



Del Monte Foods

Taste Test Survey

Let us know what you think! Circle or color the emoji that shows how you feel about the food.



I tried it!



I liked it!



I love it!

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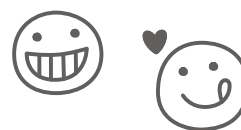


I love it!



Taste Test Survey

Let us know what you think!



How does the item **look**?

How does the item **smell**?

How does the item **feel**?

How does the item **taste**?



I tried it!



I liked it!



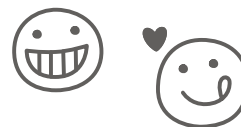
I love it!

Is there anything you would change to the item you just tasted?



Taste Test Survey

Let us know what you think!



How does the item **look**?

How does the item **smell**?

How does the item **feel**?

How does the item **taste**?



I tried it!



I liked it!



I love it!

Is there anything you would change to the item you just tasted?

I Tried a New Food Today!



I tried:

My favorite thing about the food was:

Draw a picture of the food to share with your family!

I Tried a New Food Today!



I tried:

My favorite thing about the food was:

Draw a picture of the food to share with your family!