



## TRY IT, YOU'LL LIKE IT! THE BENEFITS OF TASTE TESTING

### WHY TASTE TEST?

The *Michigan Nutrition Standards* emphasize nutrient-rich foods with specific health benefits such as dark green vegetables and lower sodium foods. Some children may not have had an opportunity to try these foods before. By nature, children are nervous to try new foods, this is called neophobia. They may be hesitant to take a new food at a school meal if they are not sure they will like it. Children want to make sure they are full at the end of the meal to prepare them for learning. A taste test or better yet, a series of taste-tests is a great way for students to experience foods they may see every day but never try or to try new healthier foods. Taste-testing is a strategy used by districts that piloted the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*.

### PLANNING TASTE-TESTS

Taste tests can be conducted in a variety of places including the cafeteria and classrooms. One resource that includes suggestions for conducting successful taste tests is *Fuel Up to Play 60 (FUTP60)*. The *FUTP60* website contains a “playbook” that is found on the top toolbar of the website. The “playbook” can be searched for different types of plays including Healthy Eating plays. Taste tests are just some of the Healthy Eating plays available. The *FUTP60* website contains a taste test tip sheet and stories on how other schools have successfully conducted taste tests with their students.

[www.FuelUpToPlay60.com](http://www.FuelUpToPlay60.com)

### CONDUCTING TASTE-TESTS—USEFUL TIPS

- Have students help conduct taste tests. Students are more likely to try a new food if asked by a peer and not an adult.
- Have a small group of student leaders (Middle School or High School) dress up as waiters/waitresses and pass out samples of new foods that meet the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* to taste during the lunch hour.
- Involve classroom teachers. School foodservice can provide classroom teachers with food samples and evaluation sheets.
- If students are old enough to read, pass out an evaluation sheet with the sample. If not, consider using a simple count of thumbs up or thumbs down, or use smiley face posters. You can also pass out colored strips of paper and ask students to vote by placing their votes (paper strips) in a bucket: green = I like it, and red = I don't like it.
- Provide incentives to students who participate in the taste tests. Inexpensive incentives include stickers, bookmarks, pencils, tattoos or a drawing for an extra class recess, lunch with the principal, or a donated prize.

Taste tests in the cafeteria and classroom provide a safe environment for children to try new foods before the foods are on the school menu.





## TASTE-TEST THEME

There are many ways to conduct a theme-based taste test using foods that meet the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*:

- Taste-test a new food-of-the-week, or food-of-the-month;
- Focus on taste-testing a certain color of food such as green foods, or red foods;
- Taste-test new drinks you are considering for school vending machines such as flavored milk or 100% juice blends;
- Try a new entrée item each week for a month. Collect evaluation data and let students know the results;
- Offer a taste-test of a new food the day before it is seen on the menu;
- Try a different food group for each taste test;
- Taste-test new, lower-sodium foods such as soups and entrées;
- Compare old favorites to new, more nutrient-rich options that meet the standards.

"When we have something new on the menu, we set up a taste-test for the kids so they can give input on the flavor and whether or not they like it."

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PILOT DISTRICT



Check out the Health School Meals Resource system for more ideas on how to conduct successful taste-tests and for already-created sensory food-tasting evaluation forms:

[http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=14&tax\\_level=1&tax\\_subject=230](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=1&tax_subject=230)

