

THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

A HEALTHY START TO A HEALTHY LIFE



The Kindergarten Initiative has been made possible through the generous support of the Claneil Foundation. The Claneil Foundation, Inc., is a private foundation incorporated in 1968 under the laws of the state of Delaware. The Claneil Foundation works to create healthy communities by supporting organizations that: make a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and the institutions that support them; develop an informed, educated, and engaged citizenry; and increase the understanding and appreciation of natural, built, and cultural assets.

Additional funding has been provided by the W.W. Smith Charitable Trust, Greenfield Foundation (Goldsmith Fund), Subaru of America Foundation and PENNSYLVANIA NUTRITION EDUCATION TRACKS, a part of USDA's Food Stamp Program. To find out how the Food Stamp Program can help you buy healthy foods, contact the PA Department of Public Welfare's toll-free helpline at 1.800.692.7462. This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

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INTRODUCTION



Since the Kindergarten Initiative began in 2004, I have watched children choose carrots over cookies, explain with enthusiasm where their food comes from, and prepare healthy snacks with their parents. The Kindergarten Initiative combines eating, farming, parent involvement and nutrition education into an integrated program that impacts how children think about and enjoy food. Children love healthy food, and when it is available to them in an appealing and fun way, they will eat it as quickly as they will devour candy. When children's senses are engaged, and they are encouraged to use their inquisitive nature to discover healthy food choices, they develop healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

As teachers, policymakers, and parents search for ways to teach our children about making nutritious food choices, we offer this toolkit as a valuable resource to help people who care about children do just that. This toolkit outlines the story of how The Food Trust created a program that promotes healthy eating through education, snacks from local farms, parent involvement, and community support. The program has proven so effective that in 2007, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed the "Healthy Farms, Healthy Schools" Act creating a statewide policy modeled after the Kindergarten Initiative.

The enclosed CD that accompanies this booklet gives more detail about how to implement a Kindergarten Initiative in your community. It provides useful resources that will save you the trouble of reinventing things that have worked for us. We've included classroom lessons, sample press releases, and planning guides that can be modified or used "as is" depending on your specific needs. While some educational materials on this CD were created with Pennsylvania educational standards in mind, any of them can be easily adapted to your area.

We encourage you to use the resources and information in this toolkit to create a program that will benefit the children and families in your community. Take this and make it your own: children will thank you!

With warm regards,



Yael Lehmann
Executive Director
The Food Trust

CHECK OUT THE TOOLKIT CD



Look for this symbol to direct you to tools and resources on your CD that will help you to start a Kindergarten Initiative in your school or school district.

In addition to the full text of this manual, the Toolkit CD contains both "How to" and "Resource" sections for each chapter to assist you in your efforts to help children grow healthier bodies and minds.

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I. LEARNING ABOUT THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

A. WHAT IS THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE?



WHO DOESN'T WANT CHILDREN TO FULFILL THEIR ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL POTENTIAL?


As educators, parents, advocates, and community members we know this is a complex goal that involves partnering with all who care about children's well-being.

At The Food Trust, we have developed a comprehensive program that brings all of these partners together so that students can, at an early age, begin to form lifelong healthy eating habits, a documented key to the fulfillment of academic and behavioral potential (Action for Healthy Kids, 2004, p.6). The Kindergarten Initiative is a creative way to get children to make healthy food choices, helping to ensure that their minds and bodies grow healthy and strong.

Research has shown that children are not getting the right kinds of food they need to grow up healthy and

strong; in particular, our nation's children do not eat enough fruits and vegetables. In fact, only 23% of Americans eat the recommended five servings a day of fruits and vegetables (Lin, 2004, p.1-2). Such unhealthy eating habits contribute to increased rates of diabetes, heart disease and even some forms of cancer (American Heart Association, 2007). While candy, soda and chips are readily available to our nation's children, fresh fruits and vegetables too often are not.

A well evaluated program, the Kindergarten Initiative brings the best practices and research in public health

and nutrition education together to create a program that really works and that children, teachers and parents enjoy. Through formal research studies, involving surveys and classroom assessments, we have seen increases in knowledge and behavior changes in teachers, students and parents, as a result of the Kindergarten Initiative.  **LOOK ON THE CD FOR EXAMPLES OF SURVEYS AND OTHER ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS USED AS WELL AS THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT.**

In response to a survey question about whether or not the Kindergarten Initiative benefited students, one teacher wrote:

“Without question. When I signed on for this program I didn’t realize it would benefit the children as much as it did! I hope my children will continue to make good choices in the future.”

Combining classroom education, healthy fresh food, parent involvement and community connection helps children make healthy choices and educates them about where their food comes from

“When I signed on for this program I didn’t realize it would impact the children as much as it did! I hope my children will continue to make good choices in the future.”

(Contento, 2002, p.2). It makes eating and learning enjoyable—not just for children, but for their teachers and their parents too! In the words of Terry Gillespie, a participating kindergarten teacher in the Norristown Area School District in Pennsylvania, “Children [who were served the program’s healthy snacks] were saying ‘asparagus, yum!’ and popping

cherry tomatoes in their mouths like candy.” Terry believes that by participating in the Kindergarten Initiative, she is providing her students with an important boost up on the ladder of academic success.

The Kindergarten Initiative not only helps children change their behavior, but also creates a healthier and more supportive food environment in the classroom and at home. How? By taking an integrated, holistic approach to educating children about food and growing. The Kindergarten Initiative includes:

- Integrating nutrition and agriculture education into regular lessons
- Feeding children well
- Connecting children to growing
- Partnering with parents
- Bringing the community on board



I. LEARNING ABOUT THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

B. STARTING A KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE IN YOUR AREA

THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE USES A HOLISTIC APPROACH to foster healthy eating habits in children. By bringing together schools, parents, and communities to educate children about healthy eating and to experience nourishing food, the Kindergarten Initiative makes a strong impact on children.

The information in this guide and the resources available on the included CD will be useful in beginning a Kindergarten Initiative in your area. Your Kindergarten Initiative, however, will be different from the one described in this manual because you will tailor it to suit your particular needs. In addition, your planning will include challenges that will be unique to your educational setting and geographic area.

This toolkit shows how The Food Trust implemented the Kindergarten Initiative in southeastern Pennsylvania and demonstrates options for implementing the program in your area. The toolkit will help you:

1. Identify your school and community partners and make sure everyone understands their role in creating, implementing and sustaining a successful program.
2. Explore ways to integrate nutrition and agriculture education and gardening into your regular curriculum.
3. Create a system for getting healthy snacks to your students on a regular basis and include some locally grown fruits and vegetables.
4. Develop a Parent Program that includes regular monthly activities and events to maximize parent involvement.
5. Establish a relationship with a local farmer who can host farm field trips and who is willing to work with you to create appropriate farm and nutrition lessons.
6. Design and implement easy and useful ways to evaluate your program's success, which will assist you in finding champions who want to sustain your program.



“I hope that this program continues. It has had a profound effect on my students. This establishes a healthy snack foundation for children.”

A FEW KEY POINTS THAT SHAPE THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

A FOCUS ON LIFELONG HEALTHY HABITS:

Children need fruits and vegetables to grow up healthy and strong. The Kindergarten Initiative not only provides access to delicious, fresh, local fruits and vegetables, but also motivates students to want to eat them. Research done by Dr. Jennifer Fisher of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston shows that “young children learn to prefer foods that are familiar and ones presented as “acceptable” in their homes.” By addressing children’s nutrition in the classroom, home and community, we can have a real impact on their eating habits (Fisher, 2001, p. 12).



A “SENSE”ABLE APPROACH TO LEARNING: Learning theory tells us that children use all their senses to learn. So what better way to help them learn what’s good for them than by tasting healthy foods? When all their senses are engaged in making healthy choices, children will choose food that nourishes them. By experiencing the farm seasonally, smelling and tasting fresh produce during snack time, cooking with their parents, and exploring a variety of healthy foods on a regular basis, children more easily learn and retain knowledge about nutrition and agricultural concepts (www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/keys/The_Importance_of_Sensory_Experience.pdf).

A “HOME AWAY FROM HOME” IN THE CLASSROOM: For most young children, home is where they find safety and security, and where they build trusting relationships with adults. Good teachers capitalize on this by extending the idea of the classroom as the children’s home away from home and by being the adult that children trust in this new setting. Research in the UK has shown that environmental factors can strongly influence taste preference in children. (Breen & Wardle, 2006, p. 443-7). That means if students are given the right environmental cues in the classroom, they will trust that environment to be one in which to enjoy new foods. The Kindergarten Initiative works to expand this circle of home and trust by having children establish a relationship with the farmer who grows their food. When children develop this friendship bond, they get just as excited about strawberries, apples and even broccoli as they do about candy and chips! As part of a kindergarten’s learning experience, they are taught about their community and environment. Learning about where food comes from broadens their concept of community and helps them develop a positive connection to their environment.

Read on to learn how The Food Trust brought five components together to create an effective program to help children develop healthy eating habits early in life.

II. IMPLEMENTING THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

A. INTEGRATING NUTRITION AND AGRICULTURE EDUCATION INTO A STANDARD CURRICULUM

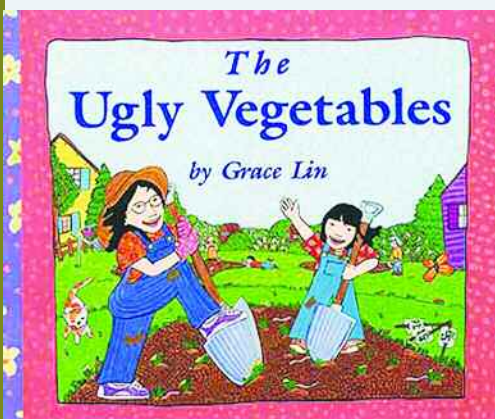


KINDERGARTEN IS A TIME FOR **CHILDREN TO LEARN**

the fundamentals of who they are and what's around them. Food fits in naturally with these themes. Because food touches every aspect of our lives and society, it's easy to make these connections in social studies, science, math and literacy. With the Kindergarten Initiative, educators don't have to add nutrition and agriculture education to their daily teaching routine, they just have to integrate it.

Nutrition and agriculture education fits well into reading, writing, story sequencing, journaling and list making—just some of the skills that kindergarten children are required to learn as part of their Language Arts curriculum. For example, reading **“Bread and Jam for Frances,”** a popular story book for kindergarteners, takes on a whole new significance, but not additional teaching time. Teachers can highlight the food and nutrition aspects of stories by asking children about food choices while reading. In math, activities such as graphing, charting, and classifying that use food are just as easy as those that use animals or toys...and more delicious! Lessons about family can incorporate eating traditions and show how different families are similar in their efforts to stay healthy. Lessons about community include places to buy or grow food and the people who provide these services. Science is a cinch when we consider the needs of living things, how people and plants grow and change, and how weather affects our everyday lives as well as our food supply.


“The children looked forward to the snacks and enjoyed them much more than I thought they would. It changed a lot of how they thought and changed what they brought to school for lunch.”



THE UGLY VEGETABLES

Ms. Meredith, a kindergarten teacher at H.R. Edmunds School in Philadelphia, brings it all together in one amazing nutrition-centered learning experience. After reading her children the multicultural book **“The Ugly Vegetables,”** Ms. Meredith asked her children to share their own


favorite family and cultural food traditions. She talked with the class about the variety of vegetables and the many kinds of vegetable recipes that different cultures have. As a fun conclusion, the class made two kinds of soup—one from Asian vegetables and the other from local produce. Then the class compared the two soups using a Venn diagram and graphed their taste preferences.

The Kindergarten Initiative provides educators with a way to integrate nutrition, healthy habits and food into their daily lessons. Through the *Curriculum Alignment Plan* and the Kindergarten Initiative *Framework*  **SEE CD FOR THESE AND OTHER HELPFUL CLASSROOM TOOLS AND RESOURCES**, teachers are shown how nutrition topics fit into a standards-based curriculum and how these topics follow the kindergarten year thematically. The *Curriculum Alignment Plan* is a teacher-informed resource that enables teachers to get more out of the same amount of teaching time. The *Framework* guides the teacher through the year by establishing a

sequence for presenting concepts. By using the *Curriculum Alignment Plan* and *Framework* to map out how nutrition and agricultural concepts connect with what teachers are already being asked to teach, the Kindergarten Initiative can help teachers bring healthy eating ideas into every part of the kindergarten experience.

The Kindergarten Initiative offers a series of lessons that fit into the *Curriculum Alignment Plan* and *Framework*. These lessons address how students grow, who is in their family, and how they make decisions—in other words, all the things that kindergarten teachers cover with their students, and all

the things that build the foundation for learning why good food is important and how to choose it wisely. Many teachers start by using these lessons, but find that over time, they begin to naturally integrate nutrition and agriculture-related ideas into their daily lessons. Children help in this process as well, finding connections in books and stories that seemingly have nothing to do with food or healthy eating. For example, in response to the question “What did the bear take over the mountain?” during a shared reading time, one child responded “a healthy snack.” Of course, the teacher couldn’t pass up this opportunity to have her children interact with the story, so she asked them to name all the healthy snacks they could think of!

Lessons are not the only way to bring nutrition into the classroom. Teachers have used songs and other creative activities to engage children in thinking about healthy eating.  **YOUR RESOURCE CD HAS LINKS TO WEBSITES WHERE YOU CAN FIND SONGS AND POEMS AS WELL AS ONES THAT TEACHERS IN THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE HAVE CREATED.** Teachers can use the songs provided or come up with new ones with their own students!





WHERE DO CARROTS GO?

Hmm....In what group do carrots belong? That's a question you might hear in Ms. Wismer's classroom at Hamilton Disston School as children explore chart making and classifying skills.

GOOD FOODS TO EAT

BY JOANNE COLOSIMO, TEACHER F.S. EDMONDS SCHOOL, PHILADELPHIA, PA
(To the tune of The Adam's Family)

Good foods to eat (snap, snap)
Good foods to eat (snap, snap)
Good foods to eat, good foods to eat,
Good foods to eat (snap, snap)

There are carrots, corn and broccoli,
Cheese, milk, grapes and spaghetti
There are apples and tomatoes,
And then there's Cheerios.

Good foods to eat (snap, snap)
Good foods to eat (snap, snap)
Good foods to eat, good foods to eat,
Good foods to eat (snap, snap)

Sometimes I eat some candies,
Cake, soda, chips and cookies,
But they don't keep me healthy,
Don't give that stuff to ME!

Good foods to eat (snap, snap)
Good foods to eat (snap, snap)
Good foods to eat, good foods to eat,
Good foods to eat (snap, snap)

II. IMPLEMENTING THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

B. FEEDING CHILDREN WELL



EXPERIENCING A VARIETY OF DELICIOUS, NUTRITIOUS AND LOCAL SNACKS

is one of the key components of the Kindergarten Initiative. Learning theorist John Dewey understood that “the learner needs to do something; that learning is not the passive acceptance of knowledge which exists “out there” but that learning involves the learner’s engaging with the world” (Dewey, 1916).

Children in the Kindergarten Initiative not only learn in interactive ways about nutrition and agriculture concepts, but they also experience and enjoy local

snacks such as roasted squash, apple blueberry sauce, and pumpkin bread. Sharing these healthy snacks together in the safe environment of their classroom allows stu-

dents to try new things that they might never try at home. Bringing healthy snacks into the classroom is also a good way to initiate change in the school and home environ-



ments. Teachers have used the Kindergarten Initiative as a way to encourage healthier policies on a schoolwide basis, initiating healthier fundraisers or supporting school wellness councils. Parents have taken cues from children who come home shouting, “I had this orange fruit in school, cantaloupe, and I loved it!” Fresh fruits and vegetables that once did not excite their children’s palates now can be a wonderful new addition to the family menu.

The Kindergarten Initiative incorporates local food into lessons and also ensures that children have the nourishing foods they need to grow up healthy and strong. In the Kindergarten Initiative, food has an educational and nutritional value. Don’t just tell kids. Show them! Instead of simply telling children

what to eat, the Initiative involves children in the act of eating healthy foods. Studies have shown that when children are given the

“I am absolutely certain that my children are much more aware of choosing healthier foods since they will discuss this of their own volition on non-Food Trust snack days.”


option of fresh, local produce, they will choose and consume more servings of fruits and vegetables (Mascarenhas & Gottlieb, 2000, p.5). Children’s senses are engaged as

they smell, touch, and taste fruits, vegetables and other nutritious snacks. For this reason, snacks in the classroom 2-3 times a week

have been an integral part of the Kindergarten Initiative.

There are different ways of doing this depending on resources available. Possibilities include rotating parent responsibilities for snacks or working with the cafeteria staff to provide snacks in the classroom. You can also consider partnering with a local non-profit group that addresses nutrition, if one exists in your area.

The daily routine of snacks in the classroom helps to expand chil-

dren’s taste preferences, influencing their ability to make healthy food choices.  **SEE RESOURCE CD FOR SNACK MENUS AND “SNACK TALK” CARDS.**


I KNOW WHAT GROWS IN PENNSYLVANIA

During center time in one classroom, Bonnie Hallam, the Kindergarten Initiative director, noticed children playing with plastic fruits and vegetables. Children were able to identify apples, corn and pumpkins as food grown in Pennsylvania because of what they had seen growing on the farm. They could also tell you, from their own experience at the farm, that bananas do not grow in Pennsylvania!



“The farm trips were wonderful. My children do not get the opportunity to go on a trip like this and see food growing at the source.”

Food grown in your region has a special ability to serve as an educational tool. Fruits and vegetables help children understand larger topics such as the weather they see outside their window every day. For example, through the Kindergarten Initiative, you can explain the cycle of the seasons, and how the area's climate and weather affect the food that can be grown there. Reading about how a pumpkin grows from a seed to a giant orange squash and then showing how this happens by visiting a local farm and picking pumpkins from the pumpkin patch brings an understanding to children far greater than just discussing the growth cycle of plants.

Ending the lesson by munching on seeds that came from a pumpkin you just picked is not only nourishing and enjoyable, but helps children understand how their purchase helps to support their friend, the local farmer.  **FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WHY USING LOCAL PRODUCTS IS IMPORTANT AND HOW TO INCORPORATE THEM INTO YOUR PROGRAM, SEE THE TOOLKIT CD.**

Food from other regions also has an important educational value. Just as local food can teach children about their environment, food from farther away can teach children about other cultures, geographies and climates. In

this case, comparing apples and oranges is a great thing. At the same time that children can touch and taste an apple from Pennsylvania and learn about how it grows and how it gets to them, they can also touch and taste an orange from Florida and learn all about a different area. You can even bring in some bananas, pineapples or other food grown abroad as part of a lesson about what grows in other parts of the world.

II. IMPLEMENTING THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

C. CONNECTING CHILDREN TO GROWING



ASK A CHILD WHERE **THEIR FOOD COMES FROM**

and invariably the response will be “the supermarket!” Ask a child who has gone through the Kindergarten Initiative the same question and he or she will tell you “the farm!” Knowing where food grows and who grows it is key to increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among young children. The growing experience is a vital component of connecting children to good food and creating memories that last.

“These farm trips were very helpful for students and parents. Parents often spoke about the child asking for carrots at the supermarket.”

The Kindergarten Initiative incorporates growing activities in two ways: trips to a local farm and growing activities in the classroom and school. Children usually take trips to a local farm three times a year to experience a working farm during all its seasonal changes. These trips are fun and educational.

Teachers and other partners work with the farmer to ensure that the lesson on the farm reflects the nutritional messages children are also learning in the classroom. Children come away with a better understanding of what it takes to grow good food after they have experienced the farm and met the farmer.

The connection to growing engages children on an intuitive level. Later on when children are asked to identify foods that are good for them, they often draw on what they have seen at the farm. When asked to try a new food that their friend, the farmer, has grown, they eagerly take this brave step forward.

Farm trips provide parents and caregivers with an opportunity to share enjoyable experiences with their children that center around healthy food. Considering that many of the other places parents are likely to go with their children—movies, amusement parks, beaches—tend to include a lot of junk food, farm trips offer a way to demonstrate how good food can be a part of happy memories. They also become important learning experiences for caregivers who may never have heard of “spaghetti squash” or seen how potatoes grow under the ground.





Allowing children to take on the role of farmer by gardening in the classroom fosters an experiential connection to agriculture (McAleese, 2007, p. 663). Our experience shows that children who grow food want to eat the food they grow. Seeing a child, tasked with harvesting cherry tomatoes, pick one off and pop it into her mouth while carefully looking around so she doesn't get caught could warm the heart of any teacher or parent! Children have participated in simple indoor greenhouse projects as well as outdoor gardening when possible. These kinds of activities are not out of the ordinary for kindergarten classrooms.

What is distinct about how they play out in the Kindergarten Initiative is that they are part of a much larger context that reinforces healthy eating and helps to broaden the palates of young children. Indeed, research has shown that fruit and vegetable consumption actually increases among children who participate in gardening activities!

VEGGIE FEAR FACTOR

VEGGIE FEAR FACTOR AT SOLLY BROTHERS FARMS:

Schools in Philadelphia have visited a nearby working farm. Farmer Bob plays vegetable fear factor with children and parents who agree to be blindfolded and taste all kinds of unusual vegetables. The highlight of the game is seeing children encourage their parents to eat healthy vegetables!



“My
children
would often
repeat what
they had
heard the
farmer
say!”

II. IMPLEMENTING THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

D. PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES TO CREATE CHANGE



AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE, MORE THAN 90% OF RESPONDING KINDERGARTEN PARENTS FELT THAT THEY HAD CHANGED the way they shop, cook, or talk to their children about food, and more than 80% of parents reported increased awareness around providing healthier snack options for their children.

Reinforcing messages about healthy eating at home is an important part of creating lifelong healthy habits for children (Ogden & Brown, 2004, p. 261). Parents have been integral to the success of the Kindergarten Initiative. In order to reinforce what children are learning and experiencing in school, The Food Trust has engaged parents in a variety of activities and events. The Food Trust also found that by inspiring children, we have been able to change some of the ways that parents think, act and shop.

Cooking demonstrations in the classroom have been a popular way to engage caregivers in activities centered on healthy eating. With help from the local chapter of the Women's Culinary Guild in Philadelphia, The Food Trust has conducted a number of cooking demonstrations, some with children and some just for parents. Cooking in the classroom has been well received by parents because they love doing things with their children. Parents have made tortilla pinwheels, tomato and basil salad, fall fruit sundaes and other



“I am trying to eat more vegetables at dinner with her so she can see I am trying to eat healthier too.”

A BUSHEL FULL OF GOOD APPLES!

During November and early December, more than 50 Kindergarten Initiative parents attended our first Cooking Demonstration and Workshop: **An Apple a Day....Does It Keep the Doctor Away?** Parents who attended not only walked away with a new heavy-duty apple peeler and a bag of apples, but they also learned to make a wonderfully simple, quick, low cost, versatile, and DELICIOUS Apple Compote! Parents learned how to change the “flavor notes” by adding a variety of ingredients to apples that were cut into thin wedges and cooked in a pot. We got to taste Orange Zest Apple Compote, Cranberry Burst Apple Compote and traditional Cinnamon Spice Apple Compote.

Chefs Jill Horn and Betty Kaplan, both members of the Women’s Culinary Guild, graciously brought their culinary skills, and their great ideas to a number of the sessions. The Food Trust staff, Dr. Sandy Sherman, nutritionist, and Tegan Hagy, Kindergarten Initiative Project Associate shared nutritional information about apples.

healthy treats with their children during school time.


 **Look for healthy recipes in the resources CD.**

Parents take these recipes home after the event, so their children can enjoy and benefit from them again.

These cooking classes also serve as a way to get nutrition messages across to parents that reinforce what their children are learning in school. By cooking together, parents and children can develop positive associations around food. Instead of assuming that children will only consider chips and candy as a treat, parents have seen that a yummy snack of fruit can be every bit as much of a treat for kids as a bag of cookies.

Parents want the best for their children, so when approached with effective ways to learn about how

to help children make healthy food choices, parents enthusiastically participate. The Kindergarten

Initiative connects the classroom and the home through a variety of outreach activities. For example, the Initiative regularly sends home a newsletter that informs parents about what their children are learning and lets them know about upcoming events.  **Look for samples of parent newsletters on the resources CD.** The Kindergarten Initiative also involves parents on trips to supermarkets, a place they may believe they know very well. Local chefs have conducted tours of supermarkets showing parents how they can “shop the perimeter”

of the market to find the most affordable, nutritious foods. They can also suggest recipes that are easy to make, inexpensive, and sure to appeal to their children.

“My daughter usually tells me what food group a certain food belongs to. She tells me whether a food is good or bad for her. She tells me what she has learned when we are eating and she doesn’t ask for soda or sweets as often ”

A FUN RECIPE FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

TORTILLA TWIRLS

This is a familiar wrap that can be fun for children to help make at home. One can use many different favorite and new foods in a tortilla. They are fun to make and to eat and can help children to be adventurous and try new foods. Add chicken to make a whole meal instead of a snack....Jill Horn

INGREDIENTS

- 4 flour tortillas
- 3 ounce package cream cheese
- 1 cup grated cheddar cheese
- fresh spinach leaves
- 1 red pepper cut into thin strips
- grated carrots (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix half of the cream cheese with the grated cheddar. Spread the top third of the

tortillas with the plain cream cheese—put one quarter of the cheese mixture across the middle of each tortilla.

2. Lay out spinach leaves below the cheese—the red pepper strips (3 to 5) go near the bottom of the tortilla—start rolling from the bottom of the tortilla with the red pepper in the first bend.
3. Continue to roll, pushing the spinach into the roll as you go. The plain cream cheese will act as the “glue” to hold the twirl together.


4. Cut into 2 to 4 pieces remembering that the ends have to be longer and have enough cream cheese to hold it together.
5. If you use grated carrots sprinkle them in a long row next to the cheese mixture or you could mix them with the cream cheese and cheddar or eliminate the cheddar and just use carrots.

The middle cuts will have a multi-colored twirl—healthy and eye appealing to tempt your children to enjoy healthy options!

As children learn about the importance of local foods in their classrooms, parents become interested in learning more about this as well. They also want to find out where to buy local foods.

The Kindergarten Initiative makes sure that parents know where to find farmers' markets in their neighborhoods and even provides them with a way to purchase local produce in their school. Participating teachers run Kindergarten Farm Stores that work much like book clubs. Parents are invited to order a variety of local, seasonal foods three times during the school year. Partners work with local farmers who supply the produce.


The orders are delivered to the school where the students learn about each item, sort and pack the fruits and vegetables and make sure that recipes and nutritional information gets into their parents' bag. Parents pick the bags of local produce up when they come to pick up their children at the end of the school day. Teachers find this a perfect opportunity for children to learn to read new words, count, gather information from a chart and work cooperatively. Parents find it the perfect opportunity to bring delicious, fresh fruits and vegetables into their homes!

 **Look for templates on the Toolkit CD that will help you hold a Kindergarten Farm Store in your school.**

PLANNING A PARENT EVENT



“My daughter is enjoying more vegetables with dinner and she likes to give things at least a small taste before she decides she does or doesn’t like it.”

- Find out from your parents what times work best for them (during the day, evenings, or weekends).
- Pick a fun activity. It can either be just for parents or with parents and children. We have found that the best activity is one in which parents can participate with their children or watch their children perform.
- Send out an invitation about three weeks ahead of time and ask for an R.S.V.P.
- Send out a reminder one week ahead of time.
- Combine fun activities with nutritional information and incentives that parents can bring home.
- Get feedback  **See CD for tools to gather parent feedback**

II. IMPLEMENTING THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

E. BRINGING THE COMMUNITY ON BOARD



THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE **ATTRACTS ATTENTION.**

The combination of good food, children, and healthy habits causes people to get interested in what you are doing. This support is an important part of implementing and sustaining the program.

Attracting the media helps to get the community involved in the Kindergarten Initiative. In terms of garnering support, radio talk shows, newspapers and television stories are all important ways to involve the community outside of schools in championing healthy

habits for children. One possibility is to send out media advisories and press releases for Kindergarten Initiative events that are particularly appealing. Farm trips and gardening experiences are sometimes events that local media will find interesting. When dealing with tele-

vision stations, make sure to emphasize any particular visuals that they will see at the event, such as kids on a hayride or parents and children planting seeds.

Many areas also have morning talk radio programs that invite guests to discuss current events. Look up the stations in your area and see what talk shows they have.

Although the media can seem intimidating, most of these hosts are local community members who are interested in talking to their neighbors about the good work going on in the community.

Chefs, supermarkets, and other local businesses are important community partners. Chefs are often willing to come into the classroom for a cooking demonstration either with children, parents or both. Having a

“guest chef” from a local restaurant can be a big draw for both parents and children. In Philadelphia, The Food Trust worked with the Women’s Culinary Guild to find chefs to

participate in classroom activities. You can ask at local restaurants, particularly those that emphasize using fresh, local ingredients if they have suggestions about guest chefs who might participate in the program.

“Children would talk about healthy foods and parents also said their eating habits were impacted for the positive.”

Supermarkets can support the Kindergarten Initiative by offering tours to children and parents, donating food, or using the store for workshops to promote healthy eating habits in children.

Supermarket tours are a very useful way to educate parents about how to make healthy and economical food decisions for their families. Many parents were surprised to learn that by shopping the perimeter of the supermarket you

can find almost all of the major food groups while avoiding the more expensive, less nutritious, processed food in the middle aisles. Most supermarkets stock produce, dairy, meat, and bread along the walls. These items are usually less expensive than many of the center aisles that are full of cookies, chips and soda. Of course there are exceptions, but that’s why a supermarket tour is so useful.

Community health centers and hospitals also have a stake in building good eating habits in children and are natural partners



“The students are much more aware of healthy foods for healthy bodies. The percent of “junk” foods have decreased.”

for a program such as the Kindergarten Initiative. Hospitals and community health centers are realizing more and more that preventive medicine, in the form of healthy eating habits, is vital to their mission. Usually the best person to reach out to is someone charged with community relations or public affairs, but contacting anyone with whom you have an existing relationship is a good place to begin a conversation with a healthcare facility.

Senior centers and community organizations with intergenerational programs may also be helpful community partners. Senior citizens often have tremendous enthusiasm and knowledge about food traditions that they can share with young children. Senior citizens and children can work on projects together such as creating picture books, storytelling, and gardening. This is another example of how the Kindergarten Initiative makes it easy to incorporate nutrition and agriculture messages into other curricular areas. Senior/child teams are often a good way of connecting schools to communities, and in this case they can emphasize food and nutrition.



WHO ARE THE KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE PARTNERS?

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS: When all the kindergarten teachers in a school work together on this program, it increases the chances of the program's success and ensures that the highest number of students will benefit. Common planning time, shared experiences, interchange of ideas and camaraderie greatly enhance teacher effectiveness.

SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE PERSONNEL: As an important ally, food service staff can reinforce nutritional messages, provide help in storing or possibly prepping fresh snacks, work with classrooms to develop new foods to serve on the cafeteria line, and provide a variety of resources to classroom teachers.

SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT

ADMINISTRATORS: It is crucial that principals and school district administrators support the efforts of the teachers involved in this program. Besides needing words of encouragement and praise, teachers will need help in securing resources.

PARENTS: Parents need to be advocates, learners and change agents. Role modeling has been shown to be the most effective way for parents to change habits in children. Parents can be recruited to plan and implement events and activities, to participate in activities and to promote the program to others.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS: This should be a diverse group of partners who serve the specific needs of the program, as well as community members who have a natural interest in the health of children. This group would include farmers, local bakers and food processors and/or caterers, distributors, supermarket and farmers' market managers, community health center and hospital administrators, local university community liaisons, and neighborhood recreation center personnel. In addition, non-profit organizations working for community food security, branch offices of national health organizations, farmer and agriculture groups and community development organizations could be helpful partners as well. Other community partners such as faith-based groups, banks and neighborhood businesses are often eager to work with schools on projects that contribute to the well-being of the community.

LOCAL AND STATE POLICY MAKERS: Policy makers help sustain effective programs. They can propose legislation that supports the goals of the Kindergarten Initiative. They can publicly promote the program and bring others on board to support and sustain programs in their service areas. Their offices can provide information and useful resources.

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