

# THE PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE

## BUILDING A HEALTHY FOUNDATION FOR LIFE



**THIS TOOLKIT CONTAINS ONE CD**

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# THE PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE

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# INTRODUCTION

**The Preschool Initiative** is a food, nutrition and physical activity program for children based on the premise that it is never too early to start building healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

The program is based on The Food Trust's successful Kindergarten Initiative, a comprehensive food and nutrition education program that brings educators, parents and community members together to encourage young children to make healthy food choices.

The Preschool Initiative was piloted in five preschool programs in Philadelphia from 2009 to 2010. The Food Trust trained preschool center staff, provided nutrition education resources, conducted lessons and helped assess center environments. Preschool administrators and teachers worked toward changes in their centers to encourage healthy habits.

This toolkit is designed to be a resource for preschool teachers, teachers' aides and preschool center administrators interested in developing and providing a nutrition and physical activity program like the Preschool Initiative in their centers. We offer key components and guidelines for success and encourage centers to tailor the program to their own needs. Outside health and community organizations interested in nutrition and physical activity programming may find the last section of the toolkit helpful.

Our sincere hope is that this toolkit will help create programs that preschool students look forward to every day while helping them grow up healthy. Best of luck with this worthy endeavor!

Yael Lehmann  
Executive Director  
The Food Trust

## THE GOALS OF THE PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE ARE THE FOLLOWING:

### **Preschoolers will:**

- make and taste delicious, healthy food
- understand that farms are the source of our healthy food
- participate in physical activity as a fun and regular part of their daily routines

### **Preschool staff will:**

- understand the importance of early introduction of healthy food and physical activity opportunities for preschoolers
- acquire skills to provide healthy food and physical activity opportunities

### **Parents and Caregivers will:**

- participate in and be aware of these healthy food and physical activity opportunities
- be motivated to reinforce healthy behaviors at home

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## **CHECK OUT THE TOOLKIT CD**



Look for this symbol to direct you to resources on the CD. See inside the front cover.




## I. WHY STARTING IN PRESCHOOL IS IMPORTANT



**GOOD NUTRITION** AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING THE PRESCHOOL YEARS (AGES THREE TO FIVE) ARE VITAL FOR A CHILD'S PRESENT AND FUTURE WELL-BEING. Preschools can help lay a foundation for lifelong good health by creating a positive environment to ensure that young children are offered—and learn to enjoy—healthy foods and physical activity.

Many preschools do not have a well-developed food, nutrition and physical activity program. With half of all three- and four-year-olds attending preschool, centers can be a major influence in shaping the nutrition and physical activity habits of children<sup>1</sup>. It is more crucial than ever to foster good nutrition and fitness habits at an early age. In 2007-2008, two out of every ten children ages two to five were obese or overweight; the prevalence of obesity and overweight in this age group has doubled in the last thirty years<sup>2</sup>. Teaching healthy habits at a young age increases the likelihood that these behaviors will take firm root and last a lifetime<sup>3</sup>.

To facilitate the development of lasting healthy behaviors, preschools can ensure that young children receive regular physical activity and nutritious foods. Many preschoolers consume a substantial proportion of their daily food intake in centers. Reviewers of the newest Feeding Infants and Toddlers Study state that “the greatest cause for concern is the large proportion of young preschoolers who consumed low-nutrient, energy dense beverages, desserts, and snack foods<sup>4</sup>.” In other words, young children are consuming too many foods that are high in sugar and unhealthy fats and low in nutrients.  **For more nutrition information see CD section I.**

Since the diets of children tend to reflect larger household patterns, a family approach to fostering healthy eating habits is the key to success<sup>5</sup>. Preschool programming offers a significant opportunity to connect with parents and caregivers to reinforce healthy behaviors in children at this early age. In the Preschool Initiative pilot, caregivers were invited and encouraged to attend cooking lessons and join their preschooler on farm field trips. As primary role models, caregivers are instrumental in fostering healthy choices and behaviors in children.

## II. MAKING HEALTHY CHANGES IN YOUR PRESCHOOL CENTER



**A HEALTHY PRESCHOOL SETTING PROVIDES YOUNG CHILDREN OPPORTUNITIES TO EAT NUTRITIOUS FOOD AND BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE THROUGHOUT THE DAY.** Education and environment go hand-in-hand to guide preschoolers toward healthy habits.

It is important to review your center's current policies and practices surrounding nutrition and physical activity. Decide what changes you would like to make and develop an action plan to help reach your goals. One tool for assessing and making changes in your preschool center is the

Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) which allows you to see how well your center measures up against a list of suggested best practices. The practices outlined in NAP SACC range in complexity from small ones such as making drinking water

easily visible and available for children, to larger environmental changes such as making a wide variety of fixed play equipment available. The center director or a lead teacher should receive online NAP SACC training in order to facilitate the following process.

# NAP SACC STEPS

(NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR CHILD CARE)<sup>6</sup>

## SELF-ASSESSMENT

Complete a survey assessing 15 key areas in nutrition and physical activity at the center.

## ACTION PLANNING

Based on survey answers, choose three or four areas for improvement and map out an action plan for making these improvements.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION AND SKILL BUILDING

Provide four ready-to-use workshops for staff that include: Childhood Overweight, Nutrition for Children, Physical Activity for Children and Personal Health and Wellness for Staff.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Identify outside experts to deliver the continuing education and skill building workshops and to provide support and guidance in making the agreed-upon improvements.

## EVALUATE, REVISE AND REPEAT

Complete the NAP SACC self-assessment a second time to see what improvements have been made and what areas still need attention. Revise action plan to include new goals and objectives.



In our experience, preschool teachers and staff embrace the NAP SACC process of assessment and change because they see the positive effects that a healthy preschool setting has on their students. Please visit [www.napsacc.org](http://www.napsacc.org) for NAP SACC

materials. For Pennsylvania centers, Keystone Kids Go! is currently working to make NAP SACC materials and resources available on their website [www.panen.org/keystone-kids-go](http://www.panen.org/keystone-kids-go).





# 2010 DIETARY GUIDELINES: CONSUMER MESSAGES

## BALANCING CALORIES

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Avoid oversized portions.

## FOODS TO INCREASE

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.

## FOODS TO REDUCE

- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread and frozen meals—and choose the foods with lower numbers.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.



For more information see CD section II.



## Making Healthy Changes: Food in Preschools


Preschool centers that provide meals and snacks can ensure that children are offered healthy foods throughout the day. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend increasing the variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains and decreasing foods that are high in solid fats, added

sugars, trans fats and sodium. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federally-funded program based on the Dietary Guidelines that supports preschool programs and children up through the age of 18 by reimbursing high-quality nutritious meals in low-income settings. The CACFP nutrition guidelines ensure that children are provided with nourishing meals that meet daily recommendations. It has been recom-

mended that all childcare programs, even those that do not participate in CACFP, strive to meet the CACFP standards. For more information on CACFP and guidelines, which are currently being revised, please visit [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care). Make sure to check your state's guidelines as well; some states have more extensive nutrition standards than CACFP.

## Making Healthy Changes: Physical Activity in Preschools

Preschool centers should encourage physical activity throughout the day. The Caring for our Children Standards are considered an evidence-based source for best practices in health and safety in early education settings. They address nutrition, physical activity and screen time and are a good resource for implementation of healthy practices in the preschool setting. Guidelines address common barriers and offer practical strategies for creating and implementing policies. For more information and current guidelines please visit [www.nrckids.org](http://www.nrckids.org).

 For more information see  
CD section II.



## KEY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

**Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily.**

- **AEROBIC:** Most of the 60 or more minutes a day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week.
- **MUSCLE-STRENGTHENING:** As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.
- **BONE-STRENGTHENING:** As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.

**It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are enjoyable and that offer variety.**

Information from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at [www.hhs.org](http://www.hhs.org).



For more information see CD section II.

### III. PREPARING TO TEACH NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



**PRESCHOOLERS ARE THE IDEAL AGE TO LEARN ABOUT HEALTHY HABITS.** Curious, high-energy and independent, preschoolers naturally love to “play” with their food and move their bodies. Incorporating young children’s natural tendencies into a well-developed nutrition and physical activity program is a win-win. Kids will love it, parents will appreciate it and your preschool program will stand out!

#### **Keys to Successfully Teaching Preschoolers about Health**

When developing your program, consider these key strategies for teaching preschoolers about health:

##### **Focus on Fruits and Vegetables.**

Fewer than 50 percent of American preschool age children eat adequate

amounts of fruits and vegetables<sup>7</sup>. Exposing preschoolers to fruits and vegetables is an important part of preschool nutrition education and will introduce children to new tastes and textures. Reviewers of the Feeding Infant and Toddlers Study point out that “adequate fruit and vegetable intake are especially important, as diets rich in these foods have numerous health benefits. Given that food preferences start

early, are likely to continue through life, and are difficult to change in adulthood, providing high quality food during the early years is of paramount importance for one’s overall health<sup>8</sup>.” It is essential to be positive and encouraging, but never force children to try new foods. Allowing children to touch and smell new foods including fruits and vegetables before they eat them makes the foods less threatening.

# WHAT HEALTH MESSAGES SHOULD BE PROMOTED FOR PRESCHOOLERS?

**In the Preschool Initiative, there are some primary messages that are taught and reinforced:**

1. Healthy foods come from farms
2. Eat fruits and vegetables with every meal
3. Eat a rainbow (variety of colors) of fruits and vegetables every day
4. Eat whole grains
5. Eat low-fat dairy products and calcium-rich foods
6. Drink water throughout the day
7. Be physically active every day
8. Wash hands before eating



For more detailed nutrition information see CD section I.



**Preschoolers as Chefs.** In our pilot program of the Preschool Initiative, preschoolers became junior “chefs.” When given the opportunity to prepare food, children are more willing to try what they may otherwise reject. Preparing simple recipes makes foods more exciting and appealing to young tasters. While trying an apple and cabbage coleslaw that he had prepared in the Preschool Initiative, one child exclaimed, “I didn’t like cabbage, but I do now!” Such discoveries prepare children to be adventurous eaters and prime them for a lifetime of healthy eating.

## **Repetition, Repetition, Repetition.**

Repetition of simple health messages and multiple exposures to foods prepared in a variety of ways is another key to successful preschool nutrition education. Preschoolers may need to be exposed to a food 8 to 15 times before the new food is accepted <sup>9</sup>.

**Teach Children about Health in a Positive Environment.** Presenting healthy habits to preschoolers in an age-appropriate way that is fun and interactive encourages children to associate healthy habits with positive experiences. Singing songs, reading books, playing games and helping with food preparation are all ways to create excitement around tasting healthy foods. Creating these positive experiences in connection to healthy foods will make children more likely to try new things and will help them embrace healthy habits to continue throughout their lives <sup>10</sup>.

## **Promoting Healthy Habits All Day Long: Adults as Role Models**

Preschoolers are more likely to embrace health messages and adopt these habits if they see the adults in their lives demonstrating these same healthy habits. The NAP SACC evaluation tool (section II) can assist preschool programs in the development of a positive environment that includes healthy role modeling by teachers as well as caregivers. Teachers are encouraged to eat the same healthy foods that students are served, join them in physical activity, and talk about healthy foods in a positive and encouraging way. For both children and adults, new healthy habits are easier to stick with if everyone participates.





## PRESCHOOLERS AS CHEFS

Having preschoolers help with food preparation is a good way to encourage them to try new foods. Children are much less likely to reject foods that they helped make. Give them small jobs to do and encourage their efforts.

### A THREE-YEAR-OLD CAN:

- Add ingredients
- Talk about cooking
- Scoop or mash potatoes
- Squeeze citrus fruits
- Stir pancake batter
- Knead and shape dough
- Name and count foods
- Help assemble a pizza

### A FOUR-YEAR-OLD CAN:

**Do all that a three-year-old can do, plus:**

- Peel eggs and some fruits, such as oranges and bananas
- Set the table
- Crack eggs
- Help measure dry ingredients
- Help make sandwiches and tossed salads

### A FIVE-YEAR-OLD CAN:

**Do all that a four-year-old can do, plus:**

- Measure liquids
- Cut soft fruits with a dull knife
- Use an egg beater

Information from [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov)

## IV. TEACHING NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



**“WHEN YOU HEAR** SOMETHING YOU WILL FORGET IT. **WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING YOU WILL REMEMBER IT. BUT NOT UNTIL YOU DO SOMETHING WILL YOU UNDERSTAND IT.”** This Chinese proverb reflects the spirit and intent of the classroom nutrition and physical activity lessons developed as part of the Preschool Initiative.


Experiential learning is essential for this age group. When children are able to experience healthy foods and participate in physical activities, they realize just how enjoyable nutritious foods and physical activity can be.

In the Preschool Initiative pilot, nutrition and physical activity lessons were a weekly occurrence in the classroom. The Food Trust staff and teachers alternated teaching weekly lessons, with teachers doing simple follow-up activities after each lesson. Although The Food Trust

staff conducted lessons in the pilot program, the lessons presented in this toolkit are easy for preschool teachers to teach on their own. Lessons and follow-up activities meet Pennsylvania educational standards and can be adapted as necessary to meet the standards in your state.

## Preschool Initiative Nutrition and Physical Activity Lesson Overview

### 1. Reading a book with a health

**message.** Every lesson begins with a story. The stories present a health message to preschoolers in a delightful way that immediately captures the children's interest.  **For lessons see**

**CD section IV.**

### 2. Recital of a movement poem.

After sitting for ten minutes, it is time for the preschoolers to stand up and move their bodies. A movement poem


like *"Our Bones and Muscles are Growing Strong"* (below) is recited with every lesson. The short burst of physical activity not only allows children to re-focus for the next part of the lesson, but also teaches them about specific gross motor skills like bending, clapping, flapping, hopping, stomping and twisting.

**3. Exploring with an activity.** Once preschoolers have had the opportunity to move, the lesson continues with an activity. The activities include examining the insides of a sugar snap pea, going on a pretend berry picking expedition

or drawing pictures of healthy snacks. They are designed to reinforce the nutrition message of the day in a fun and engaging way.

**4. Hand washing.** After the activity, the children practice good food safety skills by washing their hands before they touch food.

**5. Tasting and "cooking" healthy foods.** The act of tasting at the end of every lesson is the cornerstone of this experiential program; it is essential that children have an opportunity to try healthy foods to discover that they enjoy them. One parent whose child participated in the Preschool Initiative reported that summer squash became one of her son's favorite snacks as a result of trying it in the classroom for the first time.

In many of the lessons, children help prepare the snack after watching a "chef" (adult) demonstrate a recipe such as a veggie roll-up or yogurt and fruit parfait. Preparing recipes individually or as part of a small group helps children develop fine motor skills and practice taking turns, using table manners and handling food safely. Children enjoy learning proper use of tools such as plastic knives, graters and rolling pins. Their efforts are rewarded with a sense of accomplishment, increased self-confidence and a snack they are usually eager to taste. There are many simple, healthy recipes that are easy for preschoolers to make and can be prepared right in the classroom without heat or expensive equipment.  **For lessons see CD section IV.**

## OUR BONES AND MUSCLES ARE GROWING STRONG

Your bones and muscles are growing strong.  
Eat good foods and you can't go wrong!  
Now move your body, count 1, 2, 3...  
Come along and hop with me.

Your bones and muscles are growing strong.  
Eat good foods and you can't go wrong!  
Now move your body, count 1, 2, 3...  
Come along and twist with me.

Your bones and muscles are growing strong.  
Eat good foods and you can't go wrong!  
Now move your body, count 1, 2, 3...  
Come along and bend with me.

Information and Communication Technologies in the College of Agricultural Sciences at The Penn State University, 2006

## Meeting Your State's Preschool Education Requirements

The Preschool Initiative lessons were adapted from several different nutrition curricula and developed using the Pennsylvania Education Standards for Pre-Kindergarten.

Although many of the nutrition lessons incorporate math and science standards, the only standards referenced in the lesson plans are those relating to health, wellness and physical development. Standards for preschool nutrition education vary by state.

The nutrition lessons included in this toolkit can be adapted to meet the appropriate education standards for your state.

# TASTE TEST FROM “Z IS FOR ZUCCHINI” LESSON: CRUNCHY VEGGIE ROLL-UPS

Makes 8 taste test servings (¼ wrap per person)

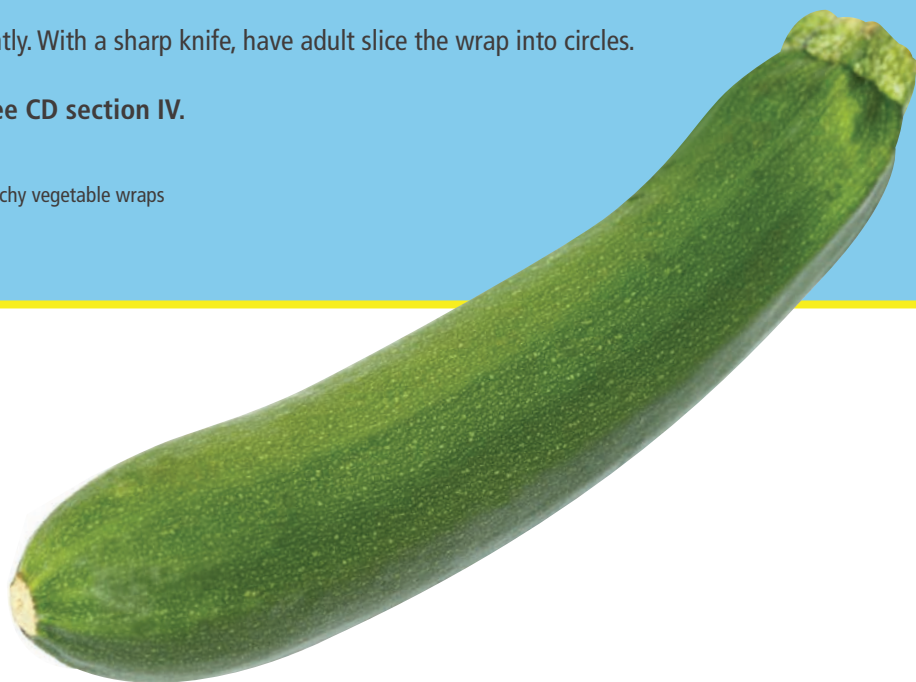
**INGREDIENTS:** 4 Tbsp low-fat whipped cream cheese, 2 whole wheat tortillas, ½ tsp ranch seasoning mix, ¼ cup broccoli, ¼ cup grated carrots, ¼ cup zucchini strips, ½ tomato diced, 2 Tbsp yellow bell pepper

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** Cutting boards, plastic knives, plastic bowls, graters, sharp knife, colander

1. Have children help to chop, cut and grate the vegetables. Children can use plastic or butter knives and grate with adult supervision.
2. Children can stir the cream cheese and ranch mix together and help spread on the tortilla.
3. Sprinkle the vegetables onto the cream cheese.
4. Have an adult roll the tortilla tightly. With a sharp knife, have adult slice the wrap into circles.

 **For the complete lesson, see CD section IV.**

Recipe adapted from USDA Recipe Finder: Crunchy vegetable wraps








**THE PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE** STRIVES TO **HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND** that food originally comes from the farm and that there are farms close to where they live.

### Bringing Local Food into the Classroom

Using local food as part of your classroom snacks is a good way to reinforce the message that area farmers produce food that is healthy to eat. Buying delicious, locally grown food also supports local farmers and is environmentally friendly. Preschool centers in the Preschool Initiative pilot received snacks twice a week including

local cheese, salad greens with dressing and a vegetable tray with low-fat dip. Produce was ordered from a local farmer's co-operative and was washed, cut-up and delivered by a local caterer. These weekly snacks gave children the opportunity to try new foods in a positive, secure environment.  **For sample menu see CD section V.**

If weekly local snacks are not possible, tasting new local foods a couple of times throughout the year would also be beneficial. Before you bring food into the classrooms, make sure to communicate all ingredients to teachers and parents in advance of serving. Food allergies and intolerances are not uncommon and clear communication in writing with verbal reminders is essential.

As part of our pilot program The Food Trust also coordinated several monthly “farm stores” with the preschool centers. Parents had the opportunity to order locally grown produce that their child had tasted in the classroom including zucchini, lettuce and sweet potatoes. Orders and money were collected by teachers. The Food Trust placed the orders with a local farmer and delivered the produce to the program sites, where parents picked up their orders. “Farm stores” provide access to local healthy produce and reinforce healthy eating in the home while supporting local farms. Ordering produce from farmers that participate in farmers’ markets in the community also helps to promote farmers’ markets as places to buy healthy food.

### Farm Experiences

Incorporating field trips to local farms into the educational program provides an exciting opportunity for preschoolers and their parents to learn about where their food comes from. At the farm, children and

parents create a “local food story,” learning how all food starts at the farm, how food grows, what the farmer needs to help it grow and how food gets from the farm to their tables. Visiting the farm at different times of the year helps children associate fruits and vegetables with their growing seasons. An added benefit is that children get to meet a real farmer and to make community connections that reinforce what they are learning in the classroom.

### Gardening Lessons

Growing food in the classroom is a good way to reinforce lessons learned at the farm and can also serve as a substitute for farm trips when a trip is not feasible. Gardening lessons can be structured in a similar way to nutrition lessons with a gardening book and related activity such as examining the inside of a bean. The main goal of gardening lessons is to help children understand that much of the food they eat grows in the ground. 🥬

**For ideas on successful gardening lessons see section V on the CD.**



At the farm, children and parents create a “local food story,” learning how everything we eat starts at the farm, how food grows, what the farmer needs to help it grow and how food gets from the farm to their tables.



## VI. ENGAGING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



**PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS** PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE SUCCESS OF NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS. In addition to being primary role models for healthy behavior, they have the ability to make positive changes at home and to reinforce habits that their children learn.

During the development of the Preschool Initiative, parents and caregivers were invited to focus groups to discuss and help shape the program. Giving parents and caregivers a voice makes them invested and more likely to participate. Continue to keep parents informed and invite them

to join in activities and lessons. By including parents in lessons, especially those that incorporate “cooking” with their preschooler, parents can share in the experience and see firsthand how excited their children are about preparing and eating fruits and vegetables.

Following several “cooking” lessons in the Preschool Initiative pilot, children were sent home with a *Read It and Eat It* bag to share with parents. This bag contained the recipe that was prepared in the classroom by the child, one of the main ingredients (fruit or vegetable)

in the recipe, an age-appropriate book about healthy habits and a short newsletter.



**For sample newsletters see CD**

**section VI.** These *Read It and Eat It* bags encouraged children to share with their parents what they had learned that day. The excitement surrounding the bags was obvious. At pick-up time, one preschooler proudly displayed his bag containing blueberries to his mother. He said, “Mom, can I have a blueberry right now?” and his mother laughed and said, “I didn’t even know you liked blueberries!”

Seeing their children enjoying healthy foods in the classroom and excited about eating fruits and vegetables gives parents confidence to purchase and prepare healthy foods at home. Continuing these food habits

at home reinforces positive behaviors for the preschool child as well as the entire family.

## Communicating with Parents

As all preschool teachers know, parents are busy people. The most effective way to communicate with parents is face to face. Share information about your program at times that you are already meeting with parents, such as parent orientation and parent-teacher conferences. You can also invite parents to cooking lessons and farm trips when they drop off or pick up their child. Directly asking parents to participate in the nutrition and physical activity program is the most effective method of communication.

Fliers, newsletters and reminders sent home to parents are other methods that encourage parents to participate in the program. Fliers should include only the essential information: what you are doing, when it is, where to go and how you would like them to participate.

While parent involvement is important to the broad reach of the program, parents may not participate on a regular basis at first. Continue promoting the program and inviting parents, and they will show up. Word of mouth about the fun and interactive program will encourage others to join. If resources are available, offer free gifts that help attract parents to participate. (For example: spatulas, oven mitts, measuring cups and spoons.)

Seeing their children enjoying healthy food in the classroom and excited about eating fruits and vegetables gives parents confidence to purchase and prepare healthy foods at home.





## Providing Nutrition Resources for Parents

When preschool teachers start discussing nutrition with their students, parents often want to learn about ways they can help their families be healthy. Nutrition information is sometimes confusing or inconsistent. A great resource for preschool educators and parents is the website [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov). It includes sample menus, snack ideas and downloadable handouts that address a range of common issues including handling a picky eater, trying new foods and how to be a healthy role model. When nutrition questions become too personal or involve specific medical issues, always refer the parent to their family healthcare provider for guidance.



## VII. INVOLVING YOUR COMMUNITY



**A SUCCESSFUL** FOOD, NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM includes children, parents and caregivers, preschool staff, as well as community members.

When you decide to start a preschool food, nutrition and physical activity program, share what you are doing with your community by writing a short article for your center's newsletter or local newspaper.

You could even start a blog where you share your successes with the online community. You might be surprised by how interested people are in preschool nutrition and physical activity education. All over the country,

preschool programs are beginning to educate their students about living a healthy life so join the movement!

## Engaging Community Members

Bringing farmers, Registered Dietitians, nurses, doctors, firemen, athletes and chefs into the classroom for a “health chat” is a good way for preschoolers to learn about and talk about healthy habits. These guests can be parents or local community members. When children see adults they know and respect talking about the value of eating fruits and vegetables, being physically active and eating nutritious foods, they are more likely to embrace these healthy behaviors.

## Who are the Preschool Initiative Partners?

**Preschool Teachers:** When all teachers actively participate in the program, it increases the likelihood that the program will succeed. Working together and sharing experiences will help strengthen the program. Teachers can also be wonderful role models of healthy habits for the children in their care.

### Preschool Center Food Service

**Personnel:** Food service staff, if present in a center, can reinforce nutritional messages by providing healthy foods, and help with storing and prepping fresh snacks.

### Preschool Center Administrators:

It is crucial for administrators and teachers to work together on the program. Besides needing encouragement and praise, teachers need help in securing resources.

**Parents and Caregivers:** Parents and caregivers need to be advocates, role models and allies in change. Role modeling has been shown to be the most effective way for parents to develop healthy habits in young children. Get parent input to help shape the program by hosting parent groups for discussion. Recruit parents to implement and participate in events and activities and promote the program to others.

**Community Members:** This should be a diverse group of partners who serve the specific needs of the program and who have an interest in the health of children. Examples include farmers, local food processors and/or caterers if snacks are being procured and neighborhood recreation center staff among others. Other community partners such as nonprofit groups working on food security and health issues and faith-based groups may also be interested in collaborating with the preschool centers on activities that support the well-being of the community.

**Local and State Politicians:** Politicians help sustain effective programs by proposing legislation and funding that supports the goals of programs such as the Preschool Initiative. They can also publicly promote the program and bring other partners on board.

## WHO ARE THE PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE PARTNERS?

- Preschool Teachers
- Preschool Center Food Service Personnel
- Preschool Center Administrators
- Parents and Caregivers
- Community Members
- Local and State Politicians





## VIII. HEALTH AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH PRESCHOOLS



### **THERE ARE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE INTERESTED IN PARTNERING WITH PRESCHOOL CENTERS**

to improve their food, nutrition and physical activity programming. This section is directed toward interested organizations with some suggestions on how to become involved.

#### **Identifying Partners**

When identifying preschool programs with which to partner consider choosing preschool centers in low-income neighborhoods that might not have the resources to

get started on their own. A first step would be to contact the center administrator to gauge interest and support. Make sure that the center has committed, enthusiastic administrators and teachers, as they are crucial to the success of the program.

#### **Identifying Resources for Program Implementation**

Look to external sources for grants that will help fund some of the program costs. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance



Education Program (SNAP Ed) provides funds for nutrition education in some states in areas in which greater than 50 percent of the children are eligible for free and reduced priced meals. Lesson plans in the Preschool Initiative meet Pennsylvania's SNAP Ed goals and objectives for preschoolers. Programs like the Preschool Initiative have broad appeal that extends to supporters of education, health and agriculture. Look to local businesses in the community that are interested in donating funds, fruits and vegetables for snacks or other materials.

### Preschool Staff Training

Hold an initial meeting with preschool center staff and administrators to discuss your potential partnership, review the program expectations and decide on next steps. Once the direction is agreed upon, assist the center with their self-assessment and set up a time for a training to allow teachers to review materials. You may also include demonstrations of lessons, physical activi-

ties, etc. as necessary. This helps teachers understand the scope of the program and is a good time to address any questions that they have about implementation. Then provide ongoing encouragement, support and communication regarding programming.

### Promote Taste Testing and Experiential Learning

If the center is interested and funding is available, provide preschoolers with the opportunity to taste a variety of healthy, local foods. Arrange to take children to visit local farms, farmers' markets, supermarkets, factories and other local food institutions where children can apply what they learn about fruits and vegetables in the classroom. A key to the success of a program like the Preschool Initiative is linking the community (farms, farmers' markets and community partners) with an educational strategy based on fundamental nutrition needs and experiential learning. (See section IV of toolkit for more on teaching nutrition and physical activity).

### Building Preschool/Community Partnerships

Involve parents and the community by maintaining regular communication. Parents are an important focus of the intervention; they can influence the amount of fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods their children eat every day and can provide opportunities for them to be more physically active. If the center is interested, bring the community on board by reaching out to the local media, chefs, supermarkets, physical activity programs and other local businesses. Using newsletters and surveys, establish a strong network of dedicated community partners. Use regular personal contact to ensure that children are receiving consistent messages about healthy habits. (See sections VI and VII of toolkit for more on involving caregivers and the community.)



# RESOURCES

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# THE FOOD TRUST: ENSURING THAT EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, NUTRITIOUS FOOD

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The Food Trust, a nonprofit founded in Philadelphia in 1992, strives to make healthy food available to all. Research has shown that lack of access to healthy food has a profound impact on food choices and, therefore, a profound impact on health.

For almost 20 years, The Food Trust has worked with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers to develop a comprehensive approach to improving the health of America's children. The Food Trust's innovative initiatives integrate nutrition education with increased availability of affordable, healthy foods.

This approach has been shown to reduce the incidence of childhood overweight; a study in the journal *Pediatrics*

found that the agency's School Nutrition Policy Initiative resulted in a 50 percent reduction in the incidence of overweight among Philadelphia school children.

The Food Trust is recognized as a regional and national leader in the prevention of childhood obesity and other diet-related diseases for its notable initiatives to increase food access in underserved neighborhoods, including the Healthy Corner Store Initiative and the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative.

For more information visit [www.thefoodtrust.org](http://www.thefoodtrust.org) or contact The Food Trust at 215-575-0444.







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