

PRIORITIZING FOOD EDUCATION IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

TWO-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT



NYC
Eric Adams
Mayor

Two-Year Reflection

In June 2023, the [Mayor's Office of Food Policy](#) (MOFP) and [New York City Public Schools](#) (NYCPS) released New York City's [Food Education Roadmap](#)—an ambitious, citywide strategy aimed at helping students learn more about nutrition and increase their access to and consumption of healthy food in schools. It also provides community members—educators, staff, food service workers, and families—the resources they need to promote student wellness.

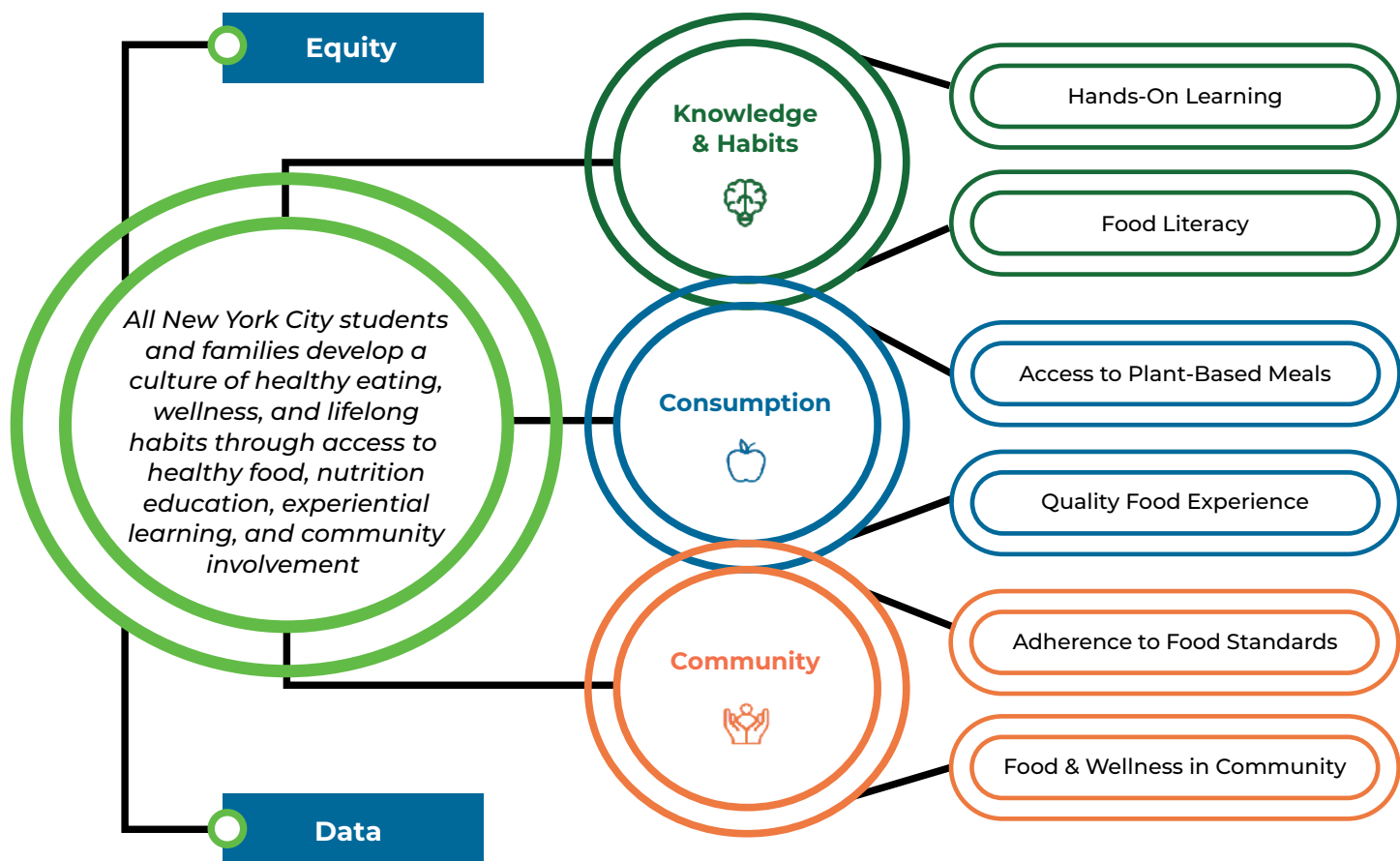
Two years into implementing the Roadmap, we not only expanded the reach of the strategies but have begun institutionalizing essential components to ensure lasting impact. The Food Education Grant Program more than tripled its reach, bringing hands-on learning into 190 schools across the city. The Chefs in the Schools program concluded its final year, developing 34 scratch-made, plant-forward recipes and supporting school kitchen staff through culinary training. Meanwhile, OFNS's Cook Ambassadors program is now a permanent initiative, embedding culinary training and professional development across the school districts. NYCPS also launched its new Nutrition Collaborative initiative, giving nearly 6,000 students, parents, and the school community a clear ability to help shape school menus and engage more deeply with healthy eating through interactive tastings and dialogues with school chefs.

Structurally, NYCPS's Food Education Team was placed within the [Office of Food and Nutrition Services](#) (OFNS), strengthening the connection between what students learn and what they eat in the cafeteria. This shift allows for deeper integration between food education and school meals, positioning OFNS as a central driver in advancing nutrition education systemwide.

Finally, NYCPS is modeling how food education can become more than an add-on, and instead a core part of the curriculum. Central to this effort, the Food Education team is developing comprehensive, citywide food education standards for pre-K through 12th grade. The NYCPS Food Education Standards will provide a roadmap and common language for educators to use to ensure consistent and equitable learning experiences for all students. All educators will have a clear understanding of what students should be learning about food throughout their educational journey.

Together, these efforts are part of a larger push to move food education beyond short-term or one-off initiatives toward becoming a permanent, integrated part of what students learn and experience every day. None of this would be possible without our teachers, principals, administrators, and nonprofit partners. It's thanks to your dedication, tireless advocacy, and on-the-ground work that we are making such significant progress towards expanding and institutionalizing food education across our school communities.







GOAL 1



Students build knowledge and habits about healthy eating and wellness.



63%¹

Schools that offered food education programming



3500+²

Educators that participated in food education professional learning sessions



69³

Nonprofit partners on NYCPS's Food Education Service Providers Airtable

FOOD EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAM EXPANSION

Students are digging in—literally and figuratively—as food education becomes a more vibrant and integrated part of school life. From planting seeds in garden beds to preparing meals from scratch, students are exploring where their food comes from and how it connects to their health, culture, and sustainability.



1. Percentage of schools offering food education programming during the 2024-24 school year, based on a survey completed by 1,232 New York City public schools.

2. Number of educators that participated in professional learning sessions since the publication of the One-Year Progress Report in July 2024.

3. Number of nonprofits currently featured on the Airtable.

This progress is fueled by NYCPS's Food Education Grant Program. Designed to connect schools with nonprofit organizations specializing in food education, the program brings high-quality, hands-on learning directly to students through cooking classes, gardening, hydroponics, and nutrition education. In its second year, the program expanded from 60 to 190 schools—more than tripling its reach from the previous school year—with participating schools partnering with nearly 40 nonprofit organizations.

To help ensure this work is grounded in strong, evidence-based practices, MOFP, in collaboration with NYCPS and the [Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy](#), developed [Guidance for Food and Nutrition Education in New York City Public Schools and Early Childhood Centers](#). This resource outlines best practices for implementing high-quality food education that results in changing and supporting behaviors in how students think about and engage with food. The guidance was distributed across schools, nonprofit partners, and other stakeholders to support effective implementation of food education across the City, while trusting our partners to do what they know best: generate enthusiasm and provide meaningful learning opportunities about food.

“Schoolwide, we were able to bring school food nutrition to the forefront of our health curriculum. This increased the number of students eating school lunch from 30% to 75% across grades 6-8. Also, more students joined the nutrition club on Wednesdays to learn about cooking healthy.”

-Michael Abbey, Principal, 12X383

“What an amazing experience we had this year! We continued the work from previous years in that our third graders experienced “Farm to Table” firsthand. They learned about gardening and pollinators, planted and harvested herbs, and practiced preparing and cooking healthy snacks. Recipes came from various countries around the world to help increase students’ understanding and appreciation of other cultures. The year culminated with a trip to Hill Top Hanover Farms in Yorktown Heights.”

-Greta Ratjen, Principal, 08X072



Students prepare a veggie wrap and learn about the health benefits of vegetables with [Plant Powered Metro New York](#).



Third-grade students learn to make hummus—a daily offering in the cafeteria—with the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#).

Tracking Youth Nutrition Behaviors: Promising Trends and Ongoing Challenges

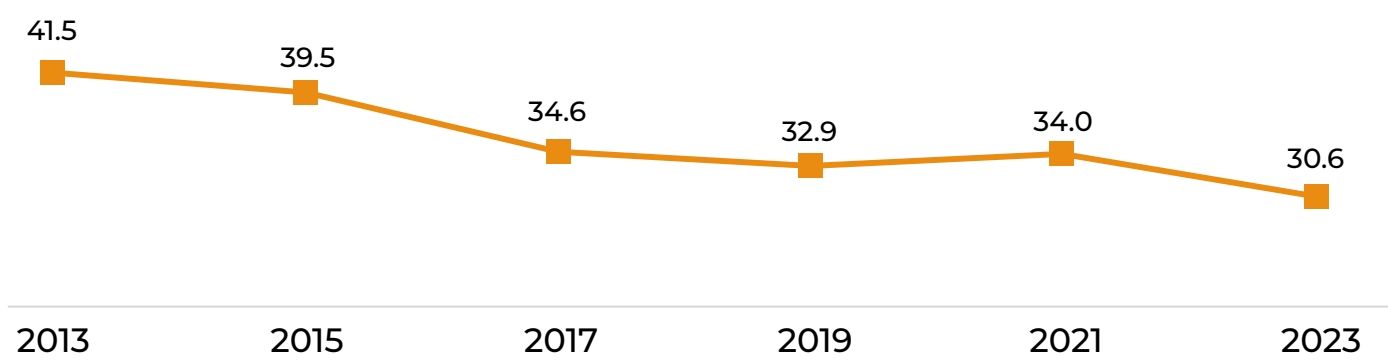
Food education is about more than teaching nutrition facts—it's about helping young people build lasting habits that support their health and well-being. While behavior change can be difficult to track, surveys like the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and the [NYC KIDS Survey](#) from the [NYC Health Department](#) (the Health Department) offer valuable insights into what public high school students and children ages 1 to 13 are eating and how those patterns are evolving over time.

The latest data from the YRBS and KIDS surveys reveal progress and ongoing challenges. A notable success is the significant drop in sugary drink consumption among public high school students between 2013 and 2023, with declines seen across every age group, grade group, sex, and ethnic group. Additionally, processed meat consumption is also on the decline—an encouraging finding, given its association with chronic diseases like heart disease and certain cancers.

But the data also point to areas that need continued focus. Fruit and vegetable consumption has remained flat among both students and children, and rates of food insecurity risk are climbing among both children and adults. These findings underscore the need for continued focus on education and access.

Conducted on a biennial cadence, the 2025 high school YRBS will be administered in the fall, with results forthcoming. As food education efforts continue citywide, these surveys are essential for tracking impact, playing a critical role in helping the city understand how young people’s diets are shifting—and where additional support may be needed. Continued leadership in administering the YRBS and publishing this data will help ensure our efforts remain informed, effective, and equitable in the years ahead.

Between 2013 & 2023, there was an overall significant **downward trend** in the consumption of **1+ sugary drinks per day** among NYC public high school students.



In 2019, NYCPS removed processed meats from all school menus. Building on that progress, the Health Department’s [2022 Food Standards](#) mandated a citywide phase-out of processed meats, effective July 2025.

Since the launch of the Food Education Roadmap in 2023, over 4,500 NYCPS teachers have participated in food education professional learning sessions, featured on NYCPS’s [Food Education Professional Learning Catalog](#). The catalog offers 3K-12 educators lessons developed by a diverse range of NYC-based nonprofit providers—ranging from building food literacy to engaging high school students with political issues of the food system, including school breakfast and lunch policy and advocacy, citywide composting, and the environmental impact of the food system. Each year, the OFNS Food Education Team adds new sessions and learning opportunities to the catalog, and, looking ahead to the 2025–26 school year, the team plans to offer professional learning opportunities for educators every Monday afternoon.



GOAL 2⁴

Students have access to and consume healthy food in schools that meet their needs.



1662

Students who
taste-tested new
recipes



41

New plant-based
recipes developed
and menued



534

Schools that
completed WITS
culinary training



\$2.5M

Invested in new CEE
renovations



100%

Halal kitchen
requests completed



4. Progress achieved since the publication of the One-Year Progress Report in July 2024.

Nutrition Collaboratives

In cafeterias across the city, students are pulling up chairs not just to eat, but to shape the menus themselves. Through NYCPS's new "Nutrition Collaborative" program, a first-of-its-kind collaboration between NYC Public Schools and the DC 37 labor union, the City is committing \$3,000,000 per year to expand access to food education. In its first year, the program served 200 schools, with each receiving \$14,500 to bring students and culinary staff together for a series of meetings focused on delivering nutrition education, providing feedback on the menus, and building relationships between staff and students. During these sessions, students sampled plant-forward menu items like Pasta & Peas, Falafel, and Confetti Corn Salad—offering feedback, asking questions, and learning about nutrition.

One of the goals for this groundbreaking program is for our students to participate more regularly in NYC's school lunch program, which serves some of the healthiest meals of any school system in the country. Through making

connections between what students are eating in the cafeteria and what they are learning in their classrooms, we hope to see shifts in student habits and choices.

Through surveys, many schools reported increased enthusiasm about healthy eating among students because of this program. Students became more open to trying new foods and, in some cases, made healthier choices outside of school—like swapping soda for water and opting for fresh fruits and vegetables instead of packaged snacks. For example, some schools noted increased visits to the salad bar and improved participation in school meals on Fridays.

With more than 300 meetings held this year and nearly 6,000 students, staff, and family members involved, this program is helping to ensure that school food is increasingly shaped by the voices of those who eat it. The initiative will continue over a five-year period, with new schools participating each year.



“Our experience with the nutrition collaborative in our school was incredibly positive, especially for our fifth-grade students. Each month, they genuinely looked forward to the food tastings. We transformed the cafeteria into a welcoming space by setting up tables with tablecloths and centerpieces, creating an environment that felt special and engaging.

Before each tasting, we taught the students about the health benefits of the featured vegetable. Then, students had the opportunity to sample the food. After tasting, they were given a ticket to place in either the “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” bucket to indicate whether they liked it. To further reflect on their experience, they completed an exit ticket explaining why they liked or didn’t like the food. Both students and teachers loved the tastings and couldn’t wait for the next one. It was a fun, interactive, and educational experience that sparked curiosity and enthusiasm around healthy eating...

Students became more open to trying new foods and demonstrated a greater awareness of the health benefits of vegetables. Teachers reported that students were more engaged in related science and health lessons, and they often made connections between what they learned during the tastings and what they were seeing in their daily lives. The program also fostered a sense of excitement around healthy eating, which helped shift some attitudes and habits in a positive direction.”

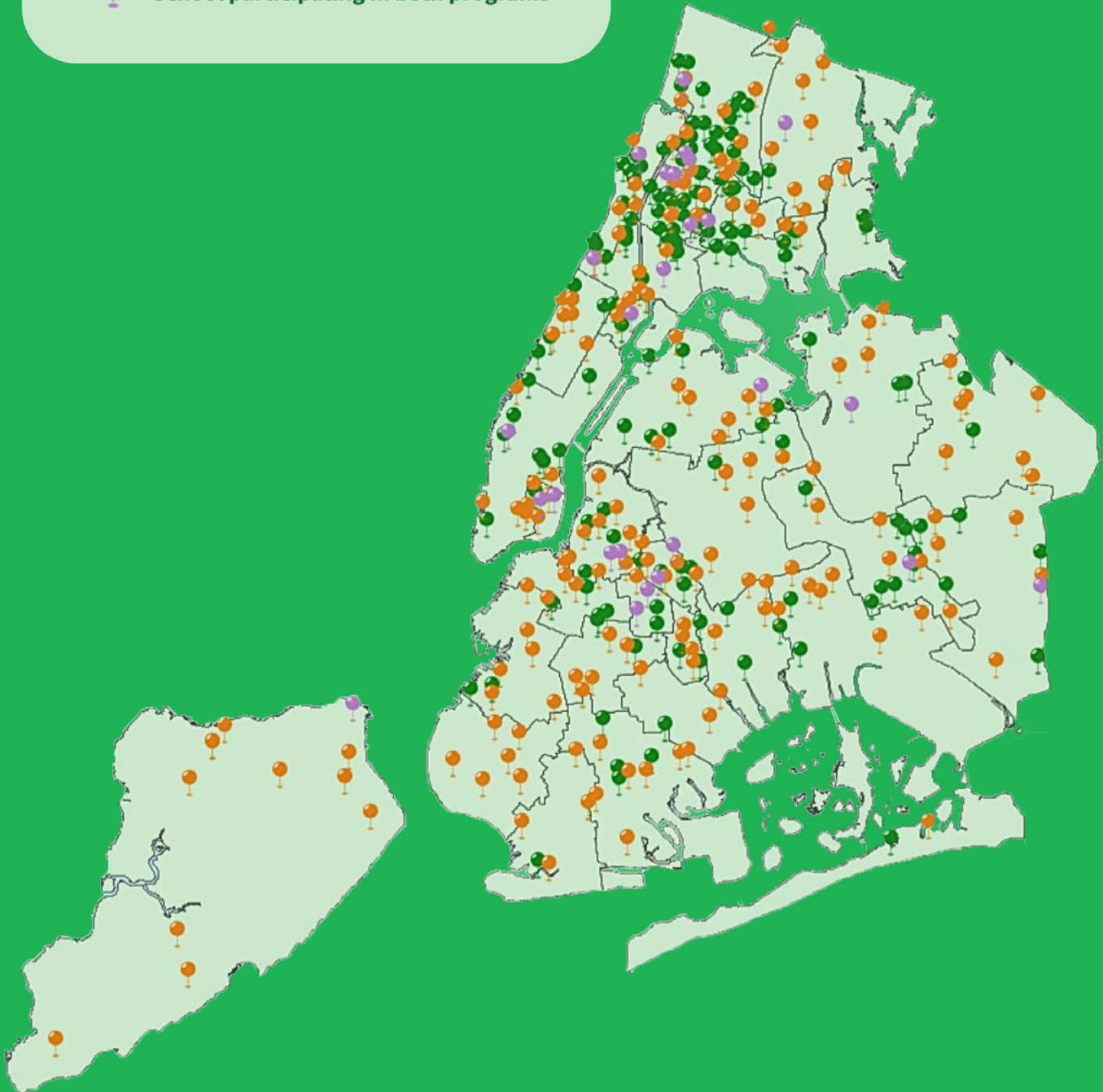
-Kerry Botta, Speech Therapist, 29Q181



Key

(2024–25 school year)

-  School participating in the Food Education Grant Program
-  School participating in the Nutrition Collaborative Program
-  School participating in both programs



Since the launch of the Food Education Roadmap in 2023, more than 56 new plant-based recipes have been developed and incorporated into school menus, and more than 3,300 students have taste-tested new recipes.

Culinary Training in Schools

The 2024-25 school year marked a successful and final chapter for [Chefs in the Schools](#) (CITS), the innovative recipe development and culinary training partnership between [Wellness in the Schools](#) (WITS) and OFNS. During this time, 534 additional schools received culinary training from WITS chefs, reaching a total of nearly 1,100 schools citywide. The program also introduced 34 recipes onto citywide menus in the last year. The 51 standout dishes added over the course of the partnership include a Chickpea Shawarma, Arugula Pesto Pasta, and Fajita Veggie Burger.

As CITS concludes, the work continues through institutionalized culinary skill development: OFNS' "Cook Ambassadors" program trains one OFNS chef in each school district to act as a peer mentor. These ambassadors, in turn, equip fellow chefs with the skills, confidence, and ongoing support needed to deliver high-quality, student-approved meals in every cafeteria across the city. From February 2025 and June 2025, OFNS completed approximately 140 hours of one-on-one individualized support through this program. Sessions covered a wide range of topics, including culinary fundamentals, effective communication, and technology.

Students hold "I tried it" signs after sampling a new recipe in the cafeteria.

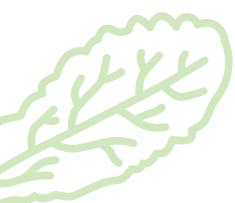


“Walking into this kitchen, I knew immediately that this kitchen was truly special. A small but mighty team—Rowan, Sonia, Wendy and Gordon. They ensure that their students are fed by preparing delicious and tasty food. Rowan and Sonia are spectacular in following recipes, and Wendy prepares salad bar with such intention.

They took my tips and “tricks” eagerly to help elevate the food and make their work more efficient than it already is. I emphasized how garnishing and small touches in presentation will make dishes more appealing to the students. I demonstrated knife skills, computer skills, and showed them resources to use online if needed.

The sampling was a total hit! To our surprises, we had students encouraging lunch aids to try lentil bolognese, and now both kids and adults enjoy this dish! Kudos to team PS303!”

- WITS Chef Erin Mallare-Lee





GOAL 3

The community (food service workers, educators, staff, and families) has the knowledge and resources to be advocates for healthy habits and wellness.



1078⁵
OFNS staff
impacted by
Chefs in the Schools



50+⁶
NYCPS teachers
and administrators
contributing to the
development of the Food
Education Standards



52%⁷
Schools that had
a garden



37%⁸
Schools that had
an active School
Wellness Council

5. Number of staff impacted since the publication of the One-Year Progress Report in July 2024.

6. Number of teachers and administrators contributing since the publication of the One-Year Progress Report in July 2024.

7. Percentage of schools that had a garden during the 2023-24 school year, based on a survey completed by 1,232 New York City public schools.

8. Percentage of schools that had an active School Wellness Council during the 2023-24 school year, based on a survey completed by 1,232 New York City public schools.



New School Wellness Policy

In February 2025, NYCPS published [*Empowering Strong and Healthy Students: The NYCPS School Wellness Policy*](#), developed with and for students, families, and school communities. Written in plain language and currently available in more than 10 languages, the policy outlines how schools and communities can work together so that students feel nourished, energized, valued, and safe. The policy, which is required of all school systems that participate in the federal meals program, has been reimagined as a set of wellness expectations that are actionable and easy to understand. The policy asserts the important connections among food, physical activity, health, and sustainability, recognizing the role schools play in preparing students to navigate changing environmental conditions that may impact how we eat, play, work, travel, move, and breathe. The policy, along with a [guide](#) for school staff, sets school and community expectations for nutritious school meals, nutrition and food-education instruction, learning experiences that highlight food systems, how food is integral to resiliency and sustainability, and staff expectations that make a collaborative and healthy food environment for students. The policy also lists central staff responsible for collaborating on components of the policy, and outlines the roles of superintendents, principals, and school staff for implementing it, helping to institutionalize and activate the City's commitment to food education and access for students and families.

Citywide Food Education Standards

To truly institutionalize food education in schools, it must become part of what students learn every day—not just an add-on, but a core part of the curriculum. That's why the Food Education team at NYCPS is focused on developing comprehensive, citywide food education standards for pre-K through 12th grade.

The NYCPS Food Education Standards will provide a roadmap and common language for educators to use to ensure consistent and equitable learning experiences for all students. All educators will now have a clear understanding of what students should be learning about food throughout their educational journey. At the highest level, the standards will cover six main competency areas, which cut across all core subject areas:

- **Food and Identity:** We can learn about our own and others' cultures, identities, and histories through food.
- **Where Food Comes From:** Knowing about where food comes from and how it gets to our plates can help us have lifelong tools to make a positive impact on our environment, our communities, and our bodies.
- **Food and the Environment:** Our food both relies on our environment and has impacts on our environment. Understanding how food and the environment are interconnected can deepen our understanding of our role in our food system.

- **Internal and External Influences:** Our food choices are influenced by internal and external factors. By tuning into our own body's influences on our food choices and understanding how external factors impact our personal food choices, we can make informed decisions for ourselves.
- **Food and Health:** Understanding the role that food plays in our physical and mental health can help us to make food-related choices and set goals now and in our future to support our well-being.
- **Culinary and Food Chemistry:** By applying principles of chemistry, we can prepare food in different ways.

In partnership with [Pilot Light](#), whose Food Education Standards have served as a blueprint, NYCPS convened subject-matter experts from ELA, Social Studies, Health, and Science to design standards that will allow food education to be integrated across all academic subjects. The development process is collaborative and iterative, with input from educators, school staff, and community members helping shape the content.

Beginning in the fall, educators across the city will have the opportunity to learn how they can begin to integrate this work into their classrooms. OFNS will host professional learning sessions throughout the year, as well as office hours where teachers virtually “drop in” and talk to experts about these new instructional ideas and tools. Over time, OFNS will develop content-specific, asynchronous professional learning sessions so that any teacher can learn about these concepts on their own time.





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PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS: Coalition for Healthy School Food, Plant Powered Metro New York, Tisch Food Center, The Hort, Wellness in the Schools