

Supporting the Whole Child: Connecting Brain Health, Systems, and Practice

Growing Healthy Habits: Youth Nutrition and School Food Systems

June 10th, 2026
Session #5



What This Series Is

- An ongoing, twice-monthly learning series
- Grounded in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework
- Interactive and case-based (not just presentations)
- Designed for multiple disciplines and perspectives
- Focused on real-world practice and collaboration

A space to learn, share, and problem-solve together in support of the whole child



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Today's Session

Focuses on...

- Youth nutrition fundamentals
- Building healthy eating habits
- School-based nutrition and Farm-to-School programs

WSCC component(s): Nutrition Environment and Services & Health Education



Learning Objectives

1. Identify practical approaches for supporting healthy eating habits in children and youth
2. Identify practical strategies for encouraging healthy eating habits and helping children become more adventurous eaters
3. Explain how schools and Child Nutrition Services can improve access to nutritious foods and nutrition education through innovative programs and community partnerships
4. Recognize how nutrition, education, and food systems can work together to support a whole-child approach to student wellness



What is the number one veggie eaten by kids?



What is the Number one Veggie Eaten By Kids?

Potatoes! (mostly eaten as french fries)

- 27% of kids don't eat a single veggie in a day
- By the age of 2 most children have established taste preferences and eating habits that will last their entire life



What Should a Healthy Meal Look Like?

Cobb Salad

Their Plate



My Plate



- At each meal we are looking for a Protein & Plant
- Always have a safe food
- Continued exposure to new foods



Behind the Scenes

Adults	Kids
Eating vegetables and whole foods because they are good for you, not always because you like them.	Children eat food that tastes good, not what is good for them
Limit foods (or not limit) and then have the opportunity to have them later	Doesn't have control over when they may have a food again
Self aware and can navigate social situations	Lack of self awareness making social food experiences challenging



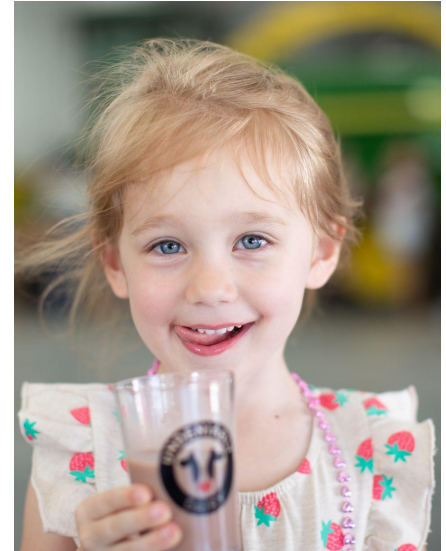
Protein

Age	Grams of Protein/Meal*
1-3	4 grams
4-8	6 grams
9-13	11 grams

* based upon 3 eating opportunities per day

Common Foods

- 15 grams = ½ cup cottage cheese
- 10 grams = ½ cup greek yogurt
- 8 grams = 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 8 grams = 1 cup of milk
- 7 grams = ¼ cup nuts
- 7 grams = 1 oz cheese
- 6 grams = 1 egg
- 5 grams = 1 cup oatmeal
- 4 grams = ½ cup green peas
- 3 grams = 1 chicken nuggets



Fruits & Veggies

Age	Veggie/Fruit Per Meal*
Toddler	3 tablespoons
5-8	½ cup
9-13	½ cup - 1 cup

* based upon 3 eating opportunities per day



Examples

	Protein	Plant
Tacos		
Burgers		
Spaghetti/Pasta		



Examples

	Protein	Plant
Tacos	Meats, Beans, Cheese	Beans, avocado, Fruit
Burgers	Meat, cheese	Lettuce, tomatoes, fruit
Spaghetti/Pasta	Meat, cheese, lentil pasta	Spinach, fruit, beans



How to Build Adventurous Eaters

- Pressure-free environment
- Food offered in small portions
- Offer new foods with familiar foods
- Don't compare to others
- Eating shouldn't have a reward
- Fun environment
- Expectations are set



Growing Student Wellness Through Farm to School



The Challenge

Nutrition is foundational to:

- Learning
- Physical Health
- Mental Wellbeing
- School Attendance
- Academic Success



Our Solution

What if schools could:

- Feed students
- Grow fresh produce
- Teach nutrition
- Build workforce skills
- Strengthen community partnerships

All at the same time?



Learning Beyond the Classroom

Students Learn:

- Plant Science
- Nutrition
- Hydroponics
- Sustainability
- Teamwork



Exposure Changes Acceptance



"Familiarity breeds acceptance.
Exposure creates opportunity."



Supporting the Whole Child

- Nutrition Access
- Education
- Workforce Development
- Community Connections
- Student Engagement



Case Discussion

“Marcus”, age 9, lives in a rural community and relies on school breakfast and lunch during the academic year. During the summer months, his caregivers noticed a decrease in the variety of foods he is willing to eat.

Marcus spends his days with his grandparents, who allow him to eat whenever he feels hungry and keep the kitchen stocked with many of his favorite snack foods. As a result, he tends to graze throughout the day, eats very little at family dinners, and frequently snacks again in the evening.

Concerned about his limited food variety and eating patterns, his caregivers scheduled an evaluation with his pediatrician. After an assessment, the pediatrician determined that Marcus's eating behaviors were consistent with picky eating. They are unsure how to help him going forward.



Case Discussion

Discussion Question 1

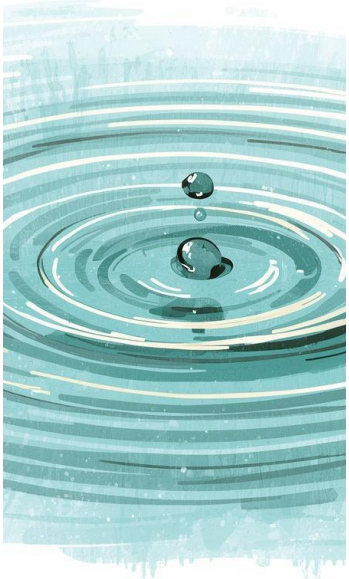
What factors may be contributing to Marcus's limited food variety, and which individuals or systems could help address those factors?

Discussion Question 2

How can schools, healthcare providers, and caregivers work together to increase a child's acceptance of new and nutritious foods?



Today's Ripple



- Keep nutrition simple: focus on a protein and plant
- Helping children become adventurous eaters starts with encouraging them **how** to eat not dictating what to eat
- Child Nutrition Services can be a leader in innovation
- Food production and education can co-exist



Feedback Requested



What's Next

Navigating Pediatric Medical Complexity in School-Based Settings

Join us June 25th, 2026 at 12 PM CST with Timothy Ryan Smith & Deb Cook!

