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FIGURE 1 Kids can be reluctant to try new foods, but taste tests delivered with energy and excitement can convince them to try!

TASTE TESTS!

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Taste tests are a great way to get the whole school involved in trying something new! Whether you want to reach the whole school or just your classroom there are steps, tips, and tricks to help it go smoothly. From having students create advertisements for the taste test, to having students help make/bake your food, to having students assist with the taste test itself, there are many ways to make taste tests student centered!

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are you going to involve the whole school, or keep the taste test within the classroom?
- Do you want to do a taste test of something that is already on the menu in order to increase student participation?
- Do you want to feature something totally new and different?
- Do you want it to connect to curriculum in some way?
- Who will be involved?
- Will you need volunteers?
- How much will it cost?
- What supplies/materials/appliances do you think you'll need?
- Will the taste test have a theme like harvest of the month or a holiday?

Depending on some of your answers and the overall setup you are going for, you'll want to do things a bit differently for different situations.

CAFETERIA TASTE TEST FEATURING AN EXISTING MENU ITEM

For any taste test you do in the cafeteria you are going to want to build a relationship with the cafeteria staff.

1. Contact your cafeteria manager and set up a meeting outside of lunch and lunch prep time just to talk to them. The staff is a wonderful group of people who are very invested in their students. They will know better than anyone what items are not popular among students. Having buy-in from your staff will also help you promote all types taste tests throughout the year.
2. After discussing with your manager what items would be good to promote, pick a date that one of those items is being served. Make sure that your cafeteria manager is able to prepare extra of that item on that day for testing.
3. Leading up to your taste test day you'll just want to check in with your cafeteria staff periodically to see if there is any support you can lend.
4. On your end, you'll want to make sure you have any supplies and materials you need ready to go.
5. You will most likely have to provide sample cups and small utensils (if needed).
6. Make sure you will have access to a table or cart for your samples.



FIGURE 2 Encourage youth to vote on the taste-test.



FIGURE 3 Taste testing can be a good way to try out new dishes.

7. A great thing to have is a poster board featuring the food item your testing. Look up fun facts, the history, origin, all the fun things about the food!
8. Another fun thing for kids to participate in is a survey, have a large poster or paper labeled with "loved it, liked it, tried it" and some stickers so that students can vote on the featured item.
9. On the day of your taste test it would be helpful to have at least one volunteer with you if not two, especially if you are testing a hot item. You may even want to include student volunteers.
10. You will need someone to serve up the item, someone to pass out the item, and then the last person can help with the voting.
11. If you do not have access to a table, bring a fold out one if you are able. Set it up with your promotional board and table cloth if you have one.
12. Talk to your staff about where the best spot to set up would be. Often times setting up near the entrance can be helpful in reaching the most students, but it can also cause a bit of a traffic jam with build up of students around your station. So talk to your staff to get their input.
13. If you have a cart with wheels, you can even go table to table to pass out samples.
14. Make sure that each student who participates is also able to make their vote.
15. Another tip, have fun, be excited! The more excited you are about the taste test the more into it and excited your students will be.
16. Once your taste test event is over try and help your cafeteria staff clean up as much as you can. You want to make sure you do not add a lot of work to their already busy day.
17. You also want to make sure to "publish" your taste test results. Hang them up somewhere in the cafeteria for everyone to see! You can even have some of your students share the results on the morning announcements.

TASTE TEST WITH A NEW ITEM

First, you should decide if you want to test an item that you are trying to get on the menu or if you just want to test something new and interesting for the students.

1. For this type you will want to follow a lot of the same steps for testing an existing item. If you want to eventually try to add this item to the menu it's best to start with your cafeteria staff and your school nutrition office to get input from them.
2. There may be some barriers with featuring outside food so that will be another thing to discuss with your school nutrition office.
3. Your school nutrition office may also have access to produce/items that are not currently on the menu but could eventually be added.
4. You will also need to figure out how and where you will be getting ingredients for your taste test. Is child nutrition providing? Does your cafeteria have access? Are you getting them donated? Will you have to pay for them?
5. Another aspect you will need to be cautious of is food safety (including allergies).
6. If you are preparing your item outside the cafeteria you will want to be extra attentive to food safety guidelines.
7. Additionally, you will need to make sure you have a head count of how many students are in the school (don't forget about your teachers too!) and you should prepare enough food, so that in the unlikely event that every student wants a sample, you will have enough.
8. You should also prepare extra to leave some for your cafeteria staff just to show a little appreciation.
9. It would also be a good idea to have copies of the recipe for students to take home if they wish.
10. Lastly, just have fun with it! There will be a lot of working leading up to the event, but your students really will enjoy and appreciate it.