



Sustainable School Food Toolkit Culturally Relevant Meals



Schools across Washington serve culturally and ethnically diverse student populations. In fact, nearly **half of the students in the state identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)**, with nearly half of those students identifying as Latino/Hispanic. When this diversity informs the foods served within cafeterias, we can not only incorporate students' lived experiences into our meal planning but help to simultaneously reduce food waste. [Serving Up Tradition](#), A Guide for School Food in Culturally Diverse Communities defines culturally appropriate foods "ingredients and preparations of foods that acknowledge and appreciate the experiences, traditions, and diverse preferences of a group of people."

Try This Best Practice

Culturally relevant menus are not hard to develop. One of the most beneficial and effective ways to create a culturally responsive menu in a school setting is to incorporate feedback and recipes from the students' families. Students who are served familiar foods they eat at home will eat more and waste less. The [Journal of Child Nutrition & Management](#) reports, "**Multicultural awareness among educators fosters appreciation and respect for the diverse eating habits among children and their families, thereby expanding learning experiences and nutrition services for children.**"

Did You Know?

Sanislo Elementary School in Seattle is the most diverse school in Washington state. Want to know how racially diverse your school is? Check out [OSPI's Report Card](#) to track the demographics of your school or district.



Success Story

Aaron Smith, Director of Nutrition Services and Emme Ribeiro Collins, District Executive Chef and former student, both of [Seattle Public Schools](#), have dedicated themselves to diversifying the school lunches they serve to over 50,000 students in the largest district in Washington state. From Chinese dumpling soup to chickpea tikka masala, the Nutrition Services department has begun incorporating cuisines that students partake in at home, ensuring that they are familiar with what they are being served at school.

Familiarity reduces the amount of discarded food and earns buy-in from the community. SPS has partnered with the City of Seattle to ensure that culturally relevant foods continue to be served while students are learning at home during the pandemic through boxed lunches coordinated for pickup by families.

If you have questions or want more information about how to adopt this practice at your school or district, contact Rosemary Martin with Nutrition Services at Seattle Public Schools at rjmartin@seattleschools.org.

50% of students in WA state identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color



Resources for Taking Action!

1. [A Guide for School Food in Culturally Diverse Communities](#): This resource provides a roadmap for incorporating culturally relevant foods into school cafeteria menus. It also provides case studies and recipes.
2. [School Meals Seasoned with Cultural Flavors](#): This article shares the importance of culturally relevant school foods.
3. [Ethnic and Cultural Food Pyramids](#): Explore food pyramids from around the world to inspire menu creation.