

School Lunches



Recent study from Columbia University's Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education and policy found that more than half of NYC public schools bring in external programs like nonprofits to educate kids about food and nutrition.

“Through nutrition education, students have exciting and engaging experiences gardening, cooking and critically thinking about our food supply,” wrote Tisch Food Center director Pamela Koch. “Students gain knowledge and skills to make food choices that promote health, ecological sustainability, and social justice. They gain confidence to navigate our challenging food environments and persuasive marketing of unhealthy foods.”

“All NYC students, no matter their age, borough or background, deserve to have access to great nutrition education,” added Koch.

The report found that 56 percent of the 1,840 public schools in NYC use external programs, mainly run by nonprofits, to educate students about food and nutrition. 815 schools in the city, or 44 percent, do not have any nutritional education programs at all.

School has always been about more than just learning traditional subjects like math or science - many public schools teach subjects like technology or personal finance to help students develop a more well-rounded education that's relevant to their lives.

Nutritional education is more relevant than ever. The number of children and adolescents who are considered obese has more than tripled since the 1970s, according to the data from the CDC. Data from 2015 to 2016 found almost 1 in 5 Americans between 6 and 19 were obese.

Beyond obesity, American's eating habits often don't meet the standards for a healthy diet. According to the CDC, most children don't meet the recommended intake of fruits and vegetables. Sugary, beverages reportedly account for 10 percent of U. S. children's caloric intake. Empty calories from sugars and fats account for about 40 percent of American kid's daily calories on average.

Obviously, finding time to talk about healthy eating in an already packed school day is a hurdle for nutrition education in schools. It's also unreasonable

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to ask for overworked, underpaid public school teachers who may not have formal nutrition education training to teach kids about healthy food habits.

The compromise that many schools have found is with programs like New York's Veggiecation, which uses cooking classes and hands-on demonstrations to introduce kids to new vegetables and promote healthy eating. While nonprofit nutrition education programs do a lot to help educate NYC's public school students about food, it's not the same as having regularly scheduled nutrition education integrated into school's curriculums - and many nonprofit programs simply don't have the resources to reach every school.

The report also found that schools, where black and Latino students made up 80 or more percent of the student population, had less access to nutrition education programs than NYC public schools overall.

The good news is that access to nutrition programs from external programs is increasing. In Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens the rate of elementary schools with at least one nutrition program increased by 82 percent since 2012.