



Advocating for Salad Bars in Missouri Schools Talking Points

Both health behaviors **and** environment play a vital role in preventing childhood obesity. Where we live, learn, play or work is one of the most important things determining whether we end up fit and healthy or not. When people do not have opportunities to make healthier choices they often have poor health and a lower quality of life. Adding salad bars to the school lunch is one way to improve the school food environment and give students the chance to choose healthy foods. The information provided in this document will help you shape a conversation with your decision makers about getting salad bars into your school.



Key messages: **It's time to give Missouri's kids a healthy future.**

Our best opportunity for fighting obesity is to ensure that every child has access to fresh, wholesome food every school day. Using salad bars in school cafeterias is one of the best ways to achieve this.

Reasons why promoting salad bars in schools is important:

- Schools play a critical role in shaping children's health. They offer a safe and supportive setting with policies and practices that encourage healthy behaviors.
- Both research and actual experience in schools across the country and in Missouri are increasingly showing that salad bars are an effective strategy to increase children's intake of a variety of fruits and vegetables at school lunch every day.
- When offered a choice of fruits and vegetables, children respond by trying new items, adding greater variety into their diets and upping their daily fruit and vegetable intake.
- Our state's low intake of fruits and vegetables significantly contributes to the crisis of childhood obesity and other chronic diseases.
- Increased daily access to a variety of fruits and vegetables provides a personal experience about choices that can shape behavior far beyond the school lunch line. Children learn to make smart decisions, building a foundation for a lifetime of healthy snack and meal choices.
- Salad bars are an easy way for schools to meet the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed nutrition standards for school meals that emphasize serving more dark green, red and orange vegetables every week.
- Salad bars can bring a school-wide focus to the importance of an overall healthy school food environment.

- Salad bars can help schools make their meals healthier, implement their wellness policy, add to current nutrition education programs, and become eligible for recognition as part of USDA’s HealthierUS Schools Challenge (HUSSC).
- Missouri schools using salad bars have seen a decrease in food waste and labor cost and an increase in school meal participation.
- Developing a salad bar is a great opportunity to help the local economy by bringing more local food into your lunchroom.
- There is national support for using a salad bar in school meal programs. ***Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools*** is a grassroots public health effort to mobilize and engage stakeholders at the local, state and national level to support salad bars in schools. The goal is to significantly increase the number of schools across the country using salad bars until every child has the choice of healthy fruits and vegetables every day at school.

Factors That Contribute to Childhood Obesity

- Overweight and obesity are the result of a caloric imbalance—more calories are being eaten than burned—and are affected by various genetic, lifestyle and environmental factors.
- Missouri’s schools have room for improvement:
 - 79.3 percent of middle and high schools offer sugar drinks as competitive foods.
 - 56.3 percent of middle and high schools offer less healthy foods as competitive foods.
 - 61.1 percent of middle and high schools allow advertising of less healthy foods.
- Many of Missouri’s students live in an environment that makes practicing healthy behaviors hard:
 - While children are watching less television, DVD, computer, video game and internet usage combine to make their lives more sedentary.
 - While parents and caregivers play an important role in shaping a child’s eating habits, in this age of fast food and limited time, many families simply don’t have the access to fresh and healthy foods. According to [County Health Rankings.org](http://CountyHealthRankings.org), just 47 percent of all state zip codes have access to a healthy food outlet, such as grocery stores or produce stands/farmers’ markets.
 - Missouri has 207 census tracts identified as food deserts.