

# Choose a Complete Meal!

## A Lesson Plan for Engaging Students in the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement



### EDUCATOR INFORMATION

#### Smarter Lunchrooms Background:

This lesson plan will help students increase the selection of nutritionally balanced meals ('complete meals') to support growth, health, academic, and athletic success. This will be done by using behavioral economics concepts from the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement.

#### Smarter Lunchrooms Process:

This lesson follows the 4-Step Path to Building a Smarter Lunchroom. This lesson plan should be used after Step 1 of the 4-Step Path has been completed by one or more persons in the school where this lesson will be taught. Step 1 includes completion of the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard, taking 25-30 photos as indicated on the photo checklist, and reviewing the photos. By assessing the cafeteria and service lines, students can identify opportunities to encourage the selection of a complete meal at lunchtime.

#### Please review these resources:

- > [Smarter Lunchrooms Handbook](#)
- > [Montana Smarter Lunchrooms Success Stories](#)
- > [Montana Educational Standards](#)

#### LESSON TIMEFRAME:

This lesson requires 3 (50-minute) class periods to complete.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

#### Students will:

- Identify how the school lunchroom environment influences behavior and food-related decisions through the promotion of balanced and nutritious meals (Behavior Economics Principle 4).
- Review the USDA's Choose MyPlate. Review the five food groups and steps to build a healthy plate.
- Understand the meaning of a USDA reimbursable meal. (A reimbursable meal is three of five food groups, including one fruit or vegetable and is also referred to as 'complete meals'.)
- Understand the motivation for schools to serve more reimbursable meals. More reimbursable meals served means more money for schools and more balanced meals for students.
- Analyze the results from the Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard and discuss ways that the school lunchroom could increase consumption of complete meals that incorporate three or more food groups into each meal.
- Learn about the importance of building complete meals and how obtaining proper nutrients can sustain and improve the human body.
- Discuss ways to measure the success of the steps taken to increase the sales of complete meals.
- Discuss ways to work cooperatively with school staff to advertise and promote healthy, complete meals.

### LESSON MATERIALS, PREPARATION, & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### For this lesson, the following items will be needed:

- Equipment to show YouTube videos if possible (internet, screen, speakers)

- Completed Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard displayed for students via projector and photos from the photo checklist
- A photo presentation of photo checklist results displayed through a PowerPoint
- Copy of school lunch menu
- Poster board and markers
- Pen and paper

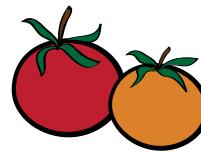
#### Helpful hints and further resources:

- Inform the Food Service Director about this Smarter Lunchrooms lesson, and invite her/him to collaborate with you on it.
- Schedule a time for your class to go to the lunchroom and meet the Food Service Director. Or, invite the Food Service Director into your classroom. Ask the Food Service Director to explain what a reimbursable meal is and why it helps the food service program to serve more reimbursable meals.
- It is ideal to have the students visit the lunchroom and/or complete part of the lesson in the lunchroom so that they can visualize the layout.
- Consider providing extra credit to students who eat a school meal in the lunchroom during this lesson, as it provides opportunity for hands-on observation.
- Consider eating a reimbursable meal with your class together in the lunchroom as part of this lesson.

- Learn more about the five food groups from the [USDA Choose My Plate website](#)
- [10 steps to building a healthy meal](#) and examples of complete meals and recipes
- [Video on how to build a well-rounded meal](#)
- [Sample plate video from Michigan Team Nutrition](#)
- [Explanation of a USDA reimbursable meal](#)

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## Introduction to the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement

Say: **“Today we are going to look at ways we can make small changes to encourage students to select, eat, and enjoy healthier foods in school without eliminating their choices.”**

### Questions for students:

- Why do you think eating healthy foods is important?
- How do you think food choices impact our health?
- We make food choices every day. What do you think influences the food-related decisions that we make on a daily basis?
- Do you think our school environment impacts our food decisions? If so, how?
- Do you think there are ways we can improve our school lunchroom environment or the lunch line itself to encourage healthier choices?

Say: **“Today I’m going to introduce to you the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, which is a project that works to promote healthy eating in the lunchroom, without adding cost for schools or taking away choices for students.”**

Introduce the Smarter Lunchrooms project. Consider reviewing or showing the [Smarter Lunchrooms Makeover video](#).

Say: **Let’s look at how Behavioral Economics influence behavior and choice in the cafeteria.**

Summary of the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement: <https://www.smarterlunchrooms.org/sites/default/files/documents/SLM-Flyer-Inkjet.pdf>

## Step 1: Spot

Say: **“Today we are going to talk about what constitutes a well-rounded, reimbursable meal, also called a ‘complete meal’ and how we can promote the selection of complete meals in the lunch line. The goal of this lesson is to use Smarter Lunchrooms techniques to nudge students into selecting more diverse, colorful, and complete meals.”**

We have invited our Food Service Director into our classroom today. (Name) will teach us more about what a reimbursable meal is, the importance of serving reimbursable meals (\$\$), maintaining participation, and any technical terms from the Scorecard. (Name) will also tell us how the school meals program currently promotes reimbursable meals.”

The terms ‘reimbursable’ and ‘complete meal’ have the same meaning. Both terms refer to a school lunch meal which meets the National School Lunch Program requirements (the meal includes three of five food groups, one of the three being a fruit and/or vegetable). Food Service Directors use ‘reimbursable meal’ terminology. Students, school staff, and other customers would be more familiar with a ‘complete meal.’

### Questions for students:

- What are the five food groups?
- What is meant by choosing a complete meal? What constitutes a complete meal?
- Why is it important to have a variety of foods on your plate?
- Reflect on what your lunch tray has looked like over the past week. Has it been colorful and balanced with a variety of items?
- How can the lunchroom environment promote complete meals?
- What is a reimbursable meal and how does it help a school save money?

Say: **“Promoting complete meals in the cafeteria can have a positive effect on how students grow, their overall health, their academic success, and their athletic success.”**

Remind students that a complete meal is made up of at least three of the five food groups including at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit or vegetables. Introduce the idea of a complete meal by reviewing or showing the following video(s) and links:

- Learn more about the five food groups from the [USDA Choose My Plate website](#)
- [10 steps to building a healthy meal](#) and examples of [complete meals and recipes](#)
- [Video on how to build a well-rounded meal](#)
- [Sample plate video from Michigan Team Nutrition](#)
- [Explanation of a USDA reimbursable meal](#)

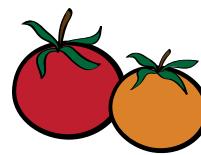
Say: **“The Smarter Lunchrooms project consists of completing four simple steps. Those steps are Spot, Plan, Do, and Prove. Let’s start with the ‘Spot’ step and evaluate your lunchroom to see if there are more ways to promote complete meal selection.”**

Review ‘Spot’ Findings - the [Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard](#) and the [photo checklist](#).

The Scorecard and photos may have already been completed by a school food service staff member, or a parent or community member. If not, a teacher and several students should complete this task together, asking the Food Service Director for information as needed.

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Using the completed Scorecard and photos, share with students the photos and the unchecked areas of the Scorecard that indicate a need for more complete meal selection in the lunchroom. The goal is to increase the appeal and desire for nutritionally balanced meals.

- Have students evaluate these sections of the Scorecard: Boost Reimbursable Meals, Lunchroom Atmosphere, Student Involvement, and School Community Involvement.
- Have students individually list specific strategies from the Scorecard that could be addressed through the use of complete meal selection strategies. Hint: the unchecked strategies on the Scorecard.
- Using this list, have students identify which strategies are already being addressed in the lunchroom and which strategies offer opportunity for change.

## Step 2: Plan

Say: "Now that we have reviewed how our lunchroom did on Step 1, 'Spot,' let's start the 2nd step – 'Plan.'"

### Information for educator:

Creating complete meals can be done using the following techniques and strategies. The goal is to increase selection and consumption of fruits, vegetables, milk, lean proteins, and whole grains. Many of these strategies fall under multiple categories on the Scorecard.

- Label trays based on the five food groups so that they are reminded of how to make their tray more nutritionally diverse.
- Create signs with examples of colorful and diverse meals. How can a variety of fruits and vegetables be promoted?
- Display sample plates/meals at the beginning of the service line for students to see how to build a complete meal.
- Use creative, fun names on the menus to entice students to choose the healthful entrée, salad, vegetable, or complete meal.
- Encourage lunchroom staff use positive phrasing to encourage selection of a complete meal.
- Provide multiple options in each food group so that people with different preferences or allergies can still build a complete meal.
- Design an a la carte menu to offer a combination meal (combo meal deal) at a lower price to encourage students to select a complete meal. Would a "grab and go" meal be a feasible option for the food service staff to offer? Discuss with the Food Service Director, if possible.

### Class discussion:

As a class, discuss different ways of promoting complete meal selection in the cafeteria.

### Use the following questions as a guide to stimulate creativity and help students come up with ideas:

- What are some strategies you can think of for promoting a complete meal selection?
- How can signage (education) using posters or trays lead students to choose a complete meal? What types of poster designs can be created? Can pictures of complete meals be promoted on the school television/computers located in common areas?
- How can we design the lunch line to encourage students to select at least three food groups, including at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of a fruit or vegetable?
- What can staff members do to help?
- How many options for each food group do you think should be available?

## Step 3: Do

Say: "Now let's move towards the 3rd step in the Smarter Lunchrooms Plan – which is to 'Do' the work necessary to improve the school lunchroom."

Say: "Using the school lunch menu, how easy do you think it will be to create a complete meal?" If your school offers a salad bar, include those foods too.

Have students get into groups of three and look at the sample cafeteria menu from their school. Ask students to create complete meals using the options available and write them down. Afterwards, discuss these questions as a class:

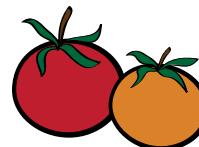
Say: "Now we are going to create changes in the lunchroom environment in order to promote choice and consumption of complete meals."

Have students get into the same groups of three and design posters to hang in the cafeteria using the meals that they formulated earlier. Have each group come up with one way to promote a complete meal.

- How can pictures of complete meals be promoted to students?
- Students can create a flow chart or highlight steps to forming a complete meal on their poster.

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- How can a 'grab and go' combo meal that includes three out of five food groups, including at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of a fruit or vegetable, be promoted to students?
- Are there some theme bars or special menu days that can be offered to promote a complete meal selection? (i.e. Italian, soup/sandwich, Mexican)
- How can signage, social media, or other communication tools be used to promote selection of a complete meal?
- Which areas of your cafeteria are present in which you can build a complete meal: traditional service line, a la carte line, salad bar, or 'grab and go' option?

Say: **"It is important to vary the way that food is presented and promoted in the cafeteria to keep customers choosing complete meals."**

Talk to students about the importance of getting cafeteria staff members involved in this process. In order to rearrange foods, provide more selection, assess tray designs, create combo deals, etc., the support and cooperation of cafeteria staff members is needed.

- Have students work cooperatively with school food service staff to propose their ideas on how to further modify the cafeteria environment to increase complete meal selection.
- Students can share their list of recommendations/ideas by setting up a meeting with the Food Service Director to discuss ideas and plan to move forward.
- Schedule follow-up meetings as necessary.

## Step 4: Prove

Say: **"Great job coming up with ideas for promoting the selection of complete meals in the cafeteria. The 4th and final step of the 4-Step Path to Building a Smarter Lunchroom is to 'Prove.' To wrap up our lesson we will talk about how we might do that, and what our final steps would be if we actually want to start to create changes in our lunchroom (if applicable)."**

### Information for educator:

The success of this marketing intervention can be measured in several ways:

- Have students fill out a survey about why they do not take a complete meal.
- Count how many students are selecting a complete meal at lunchtime.

- Compare production records or sales data from a la carte or 'grab and go' meal lines versus number of meals sold for a week. Does the use of the salad bar vary depending on what's served on the menu in a week?
- See if more students select a complete meal after implementing Build a Healthy Tray or Create a Complete Meal signage, creating combos, or adding more options. Make sure to compare results before and after the intervention.
- See how many students respond to the cafeteria staff member who is nudging them to select a complete meal.
- Record how many students are looking at the sample plates provided and attempting to copy them or getting ideas from them.

Say: **"Once we make a change, it is important to find out if it is actually increasing the number of students making healthy choices, so using the ideas we came up with, we are going to try and 'Prove It.'"**

Review with the students that in order to prove something, information or data must be collected before and after the change(s).

### Questions for students to respond to as a class:

- What ways can we monitor the effect of our intervention in the cafeteria so that we can see if it is effective or not in increasing complete meal choices?
- Could a student survey help to identify the barriers to selecting a complete meal or other areas of improvement? What types of questions would you ask?
- Is there another location to post signs or complete meal ideas throughout the school? Maybe outside the cafeteria doors to get students thinking about their meal?
- How can we determine which interventions are the most effective in changing student choices?

[> Assessment Tools](#)