

# FOOD EDUCATION FAST FACTS

These Food Ed Fast Facts highlight the latest science on food education (food ed) so your organization can reduce the time you spend reviewing the latest literature for grant applications and other materials.

## Why Food Ed?

Food ed supports healthy diets, empowering children to adopt lifelong healthy habits. With food ed, children's weight status, eating behaviors, and test scores improve.

Food ed includes a comprehensive range of strategies to improve nutrition knowledge and skills. Food ed promotes systems and environments that support healthy food choices and behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

With food ed, children cook, grow, taste, and learn about food. They gain the motivation, knowledge, and skills that empower them to choose, prepare, and eat healthy food. Food ed also helps transform food environments, making healthy choices the easier choices.<sup>2</sup>

### What Does Food Ed Look Like?

- Growing garlic, tomatoes, and squash in a school garden.
- Making, tasting, and eating culturally-relevant recipes with classmates.
- Analyzing a junk food advertisement.
- Measuring out teaspoons of sugar in a soda bottle.

## Students Are Not Getting Enough Food Ed

Students need between 35-50 hours a year of behaviorally-focused food ed. But, New York City students do not have equitable access to food ed. The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University found that in the 2016-2017 school year, only 55% of schools partnered with external food ed orgs, and these food ed orgs were not evenly distributed among students.<sup>3</sup> For example,

- Only 43% of schools in Staten Island had programming from one or more food ed orgs;
- Only one-third of high schools had programming from one or more food ed orgs; and
- Only 29% of schools with a majority Latinx population worked with a food ed org that has materials in Spanish.

## Food Ed Grows Healthy Bodies & Minds

Food ed programming is a cost-effective way to encourage healthy behaviors and body weight.<sup>4-11</sup> After participating in a food ed program, children are:

- More willing to try fruits, vegetables, and whole grains;<sup>12-16</sup>
- More likely to eat these foods during school lunch;<sup>17-22</sup> and
- More likely to ask for and eat healthy foods at home.<sup>13,14,17,22-31</sup>

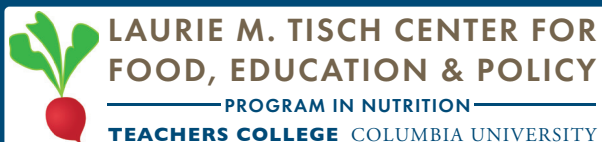


Wellness in the Schools (WITS) Chef conducting a WITS Bits lesson.

When children adopt healthier food behaviors, it helps improve their bodies and minds. Ultimately, food ed:

- Improves students' weight status;<sup>8, 32-34</sup>
- Increases students' test scores in math, science, and language arts;<sup>33, 35-38</sup> and
- Develops important life skills, such as cooking and gardening.<sup>30, 39, 40</sup>

Additionally, emerging research suggests that healthier diets are linked to better mental health in kids and teens, including fewer emotional issues, peer problems, and depressive symptoms.<sup>41, 42</sup>



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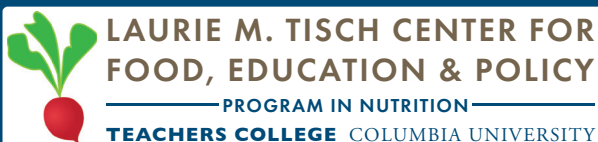
Rita Gold Center in the Teachers College Garden

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## Food Ed Org Spotlight

- One Harlem-based organization has been working to transform neighborhood abandoned lots into soil-based farms, hydroponic greenhouses, and school gardens. Across 11 urban agriculture sites, the organization hosts free educational farm tours, enrichment programs, and summer camps.
- Their hands-on farming and cooking programs benefit elementary school children. A 2018 study of the summer camp's impact found that 38% of students felt they could better control their emotions, 25% exercised more, and 18% ate more fruit.<sup>43</sup>



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