Throughout Minnesota, innovative partnerships among faculty, students, parents, and foodservice staff are transforming schools into healthier places to learn. From elementary schools to college campuses, providing nutritious food increases school performance and supports students’ academic success. Schools serving a variety of fruits and vegetables, healthy beverages, and nutritionally balanced meals and snacks are establishing a vital connection between learning and health. Purchasing and serving healthy food grown on nearby farms and establishing school gardens also promotes healthier schools, while developing important connections between what we eat and our food supply.

**SPOTLIGHT: CAMPUS CUPBOARD**

Eating well is associated with better school performance, including higher test scores and greater classroom engagement among younger students. Older students also need adequate nutrition, but can experience challenges in balancing the demands of a healthy diet, coursework, jobs, family responsibilities, and budget constraints.

At Normandale Community College in Bloomington, a growing trend of hunger inspired action by students and faculty. A 2011 survey of Normandale students revealed that nearly 25 percent of respondents did not have enough money to buy food on campus. Many students would feed their children breakfast before school, while they themselves relied on caffeine for energy. As a result, faculty would often keep extra snacks in their offices or purchase food for students struggling to afford regular meals.

The result: The Campus Cupboard. This on-campus food shelf provides students with single-serve, nutritious items such as nuts, dried fruit and canned vegetables. Any Normandale student can visit the Cupboard and receive up to 21 food items per month.

To launch this new food shelf, students and faculty approached Good in the ‘Hood to be an active partner. A local non-profit that empowers and supports urban communities through anti-hunger initiatives and youth development, it provides free food to Normandale’s food shelf. Campus Cupboard has been so successful that several other two-year and four-year campuses across Minnesota have contacted Good in the ‘Hood about replicating the model.

By helping meet students’ basic food needs, the Campus Cupboard sets students up for success both in the classroom and beyond.

www.goodinthehood.org/campus-cupboard.html
The following steps, based on strategies found in the Minnesota Food Charter, provide ideas and resources for taking action in places where students learn.

**ACTION STEP**
Support a school- or district-wide wellness committee—which includes teachers, administrators, students, parents and foodservice staff—to define, implement, and enforce comprehensive healthy eating efforts.

**RESOURCE:** Review William Mitchell Public Health Law Center “Creating and Sustaining a School Health Council.”

**ACTION STEP**
Recruit and support school-based champions, such as teachers and foodservice staff, who can identify concrete steps to increase healthy food accessibility.

**RESOURCE:** Read about a Burnsville foodservice manager leading the charge for greater school breakfast participation.
[www.twincities.com/education/ci_25159701/grab-breakfast-then-grab-seat](http://www.twincities.com/education/ci_25159701/grab-breakfast-then-grab-seat)

**ACTION STEP**
Incorporate food-related, hands-on learning into existing curricula—such as Farm to School or gardening programs, particularly in math, science, and social studies.

**RESOURCE:** Agriculture in the Classroom, through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, provides resources to connect food and agriculture in the classroom.
[www.mda.state.mn.us/kids.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/kids.aspx)

**RESOURCE:** University of Minnesota Extension offers a list of nutrition, food and gardening curricula.
[www.extension.umn.edu/food/farm%2Dto%2Dschool/educators/curriculum/](http://www.extension.umn.edu/food/farm%2Dto%2Dschool/educators/curriculum/)

**RESOURCE:** Dakota County Public Health’s Smart Choices Toolkit shares information and resources on implementing garden-based learning programs.
[www.co.dakota.mn.us/HealthFamily/HealthyLiving/DietNutrition/Documents/SmartChoices/SmartChoicesSchoolGardens.pdf](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/HealthFamily/HealthyLiving/DietNutrition/Documents/SmartChoices/SmartChoicesSchoolGardens.pdf)
ACTION STEP
Create opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to give input on foods served and sold at school.

RESOURCE: At University of Minnesota-Morris, the Healthy Eating team makes healthy foods more available and accessible, on campus and across the county. This student-led effort connects many partners as part of its work. www.morris.umn.edu/healthyeating/partners/

ACTION STEP
Provide regular training and development opportunities for food service staff to strengthen healthy food planning, procurement, and preparation skills.

RESOURCE: Use the Great Trays toolkit, designed specifically for Minnesota food service professionals. www.extension.umn.edu/family/health-and-nutrition/toolkits-and-resources/great-trays/

ACTION STEP
Purchase and prepare foods grown on nearby farms and increase capacity of farm-to-school programs.

RESOURCE: Refer to the “Find Local Foods” section of the University of Minnesota Extension’s farm to school toolkit. www.extension.umn.edu/food/farm-to-school/parents-community-members/find-local-foods/

WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA FOOD CHARTER?

The Food Charter is a guide to planning, decision-making, and collaboration for agencies, organizations, policy-makers, and public and private entities across the state.

Developed through a broad based public process, the Minnesota Food Charter offers a shared blueprint for how all Minnesotans can have reliable access to nutritious, affordable, safe food in the places they work, learn, live, and play. In turn, this access will reduce the risk and cost of obesity and diet-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, conserve state resources, and boost economic prosperity.

In recent decades, diet-related health issues—such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease—have surged, presenting costly, long-term challenges to Minnesota’s economy. Changes in the way Minnesotans eat—particularly high calorie, unhealthy foods and beverages—contribute to growing healthcare costs and lower worker productivity.

This is not sustainable.

As a state, we must work together to improve our health and support a vibrant economy. To find out more about the recommendations outlined in the Minnesota Food Charter, visit www.mnfoodcharter.com

“Student health needs to be at the forefront.”

Minnesota Food Charter Focus Group Participant