

Cultivating Social and Emotional Skills Through Nutrition Education

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Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

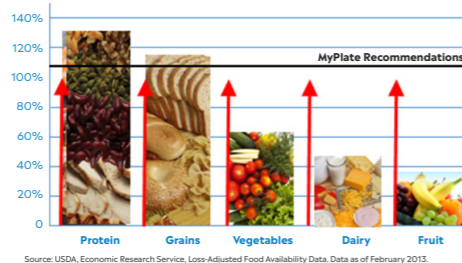
is the process by which individuals learn to interact with others, set and achieve goals and regulate their emotions.¹ Nutrition education and SEL can integrate to effectively build skills that support the **whole child** through instruction and activities that can shape behaviors to support lifelong health and well-being.



SEL Starts With Nutrition

California Surgeon General Dr. Nadine Burke Harris emphasizes, "As we're thinking about how to help students be successful, we must recognize that what we put in our kids' lunches or provide in a school environment makes a difference in a child's ability to regulate stress response."² School meals, which are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, increase consumption of key food groups such as fruits, vegetables, dairy and whole grains, closing nutrient gaps that exist for many children in the United States.³ Improving access to daily nutritious meals provides a foundation to support cognitive function and the way children feel throughout the day, playing a role in stabilizing mood, self-esteem and focus,⁴ ensuring children are receptive to all learning, including SEL.

U.S. Consumption in Relation to MyPlate Food Group Recommendations, 2016



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, Loss-Adjusted Food Availability Data. Data as of February 2013.



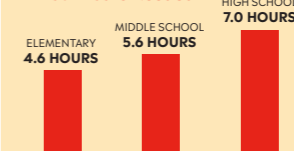
Nutrition Education Is SEL

Nutrition education, which teaches children to make connections with food, health, environment and community, is a practical and engaging way to develop SEL competencies, including self-awareness, social awareness, relationship, self-management and responsible decision-making skills.

- Nutrition education is a vehicle for cultural exploration, building **self-awareness** through identity and **social awareness** by learning and respecting a variety of food traditions.
- Farm to school programs and school gardens offer experiential learning that teaches children about where food comes from, increases **social awareness** and builds appreciation of the journey of food from farm to plate.
- Food tasting, shared meals and celebrations build and strengthen **relationships** among peers and with educators.
- Nutrition education teaches a food group framework that empowers children to make healthy food choices, motivating them to be **decision-makers** who **self-manage** their health and well-being.

Research shows that nutrition education can teach students to recognize how a healthy diet influences emotional well-being and how emotions may influence eating habits,⁵ helping students effectively manage health-related behaviors.

Annual Hours Needed



Data from CDC's School Health Policies and Practices Study 2014

40-50 HOURS
NEEDED FOR
BEHAVIOR
CHANGE

Call to Action

U.S. students receive less than eight hours of nutrition education each school year.⁶ To achieve the 40 hours required for behavior change, alignment across programs like SEL and nutrition education is an efficient and cost-effective strategy to systematically combine these types of health education to improve the social-emotional climate in schools.⁶



SEL in Action

Surveys show that students who use the Let's Eat Healthy for Teens curriculum gain motivation, knowledge and skills to improve dietary patterns, demonstrating **self-awareness** and **self-management**.



"Nutrition education is applicable to all students and their everyday lives, providing a strong platform for project-based learning. Food is needed for survival. It brings people together and is something all students and their families can relate to."

Jaime Brown, Teacher on Special Assignment in Madera Unified School District

For access to free nutrition education resources, visit HealthyEating.org.

"I think it's great that the Let's Eat Healthy program is inspiring young people like myself to eat & treat themselves well."

High School Student From Let's Eat Healthy Teen Program Survey

1. <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>
 2. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/california-s-first-surgeon-general-screen-every-student-childhood-trauma-n1044286>
 3. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-per-capita-data-system/loss-adjusted-food-availability-documentation/>
 4. <https://www.tu.columbia.edu/media/centers/itach/briefs/pdfs/Food-and-Mood-Research-Briefv4.pdf>
 5. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/school_nutrition_education.htm
 6. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/pdf/321123_A_FS_SchoolNutrition.pdf