



## Guidelines and Resources for Implementing Healthy CPS in Pre-K Classrooms



# INTRODUCTION

## Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Early childhood is the most crucial time for a child's development. Children make enormous gains in cognitive, language, and motor skills during this time. Developing healthy habits during this time is just as important! [Research](#) shows that attitudes about nutrition and physical activity develop from a very early age. In a sense, Pre-K students have a "clean slate" when it comes to these habits, and we have a great opportunity to mold them into healthy learners. Roughly 5% of CPS preschoolers have a documented chronic condition asthma, diabetes, or a food allergy- but the number of undocumented cases is likely much higher. Only around 50% have health insurance, which likely results in less access to quality, consistent health care. Research also demonstrates a connection between obesity and poor academic outcomes, especially among low-income children. Given the high rates of both overweight/obesity (in Chicago, [22% of children ages 3-7 are obese](#)-- twice the national average) and poverty among CPS students, it is especially important to address these issues as early as possible. Early Childhood Education is often children's first exposure outside the home. This is an ideal opportunity to start building healthy behaviors (in students as well as their families) right from the beginning that will set children up for success as they enter primary school and throughout their education. Not only are we starting kids on their educational journey, putting them on the right path to college and career- we are also starting kids on their health journey, one that will last their entire lives.

In 2013 the Office of Student Health and Wellness created LearnWELL, an initiative to help schools implement District-wide wellness policies around school food, physical activity, nutrition education, healthy celebrations and rewards, and family engagement. In 2015, to address additional health and wellness inequities throughout the District, OSHW created Healthy CPS, an initiative aligned with Healthy Chicago that encompasses policy, direct service, partnerships, health and physical education (PE), and health promotion. Both initiatives came together in the Healthy CPS Indicator, the first ever comprehensive health-focused measure that is included on the CPS school progress report. The Indicator allows stakeholders to identify if their school is meeting key policies and initiatives that focus on four areas: chronic disease, instruction, wellness (LearnWELL), and health services, which in turn helps the District realize the Whole Child core value.



**StartWELL: Healthy CPS for Pre-K** defines early childhood program criteria for Healthy CPS by encompassing a variety of components that support healthy learning environments for preschoolers. By following these recommendations and best practices, StartWELL can help ensure that every preschooler in the District has equitable access to physical activity, nutrition education, healthy food and activities, and direct health services. In other words, this toolkit contains everything you need to make sure your school is a StartWELL school!

## CPS Policy Guidelines for Early Childhood Education

Early childhood programs within CPS will strive to meet the guidelines set forth in the CPS Local School Wellness Policy, Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy, and the Chicago Early Learning (CEL) Standards:

### Chronic Disease

- Provide a safe and supportive environment for students with chronic conditions including asthma, food allergies, and diabetes by completing the required annual training and ensuring all related policies and procedures are followed.
- Ensure all paperwork has been returned by parents/guardians and submitted to appropriate school staff.
- Make sure the medication always follows the child.

### Health Services

- Ensure students are meeting requirements for Vision and Hearing screenings and general medical compliance.
- Work with school staff to ensure Student Medical Information forms are returned and submitted.
- Refer all students who do not have health insurance to 773-553-KIDS (5437).

### Physical Activity

- Include at least 30 minutes/day for half day and 60 minutes/day for full day programs as well as frequent movement activities integrated into academic learning.
- Include at least 10 minutes of structured physical activity within that time.

### Family Style

- Implement full family style dining and incorporate casual, nutrition-based conversation into meal time.

### Healthy Celebrations and Rewards

- Celebrations should focus on fun rather than food.
- Classroom celebrations with food are not permitted; food prepared in the home is not permitted in classrooms.
- Food should never be used as a reward.

### Family Engagement

- Offer at least one family engagement event incorporating health and wellness content each school year.

### Nutrition Education

- Integrate nutrition education into learning activities.

## How to Use StartWELL

StartWELL is intended to help you implement the various health and wellness policies and requirements set forth in the Chicago Early Learning Standards and Healthy CPS. In general, StartWELL explains the What, the Why, and the How of Healthy CPS for Pre-K classrooms. Some sections include tips and best practices, while others may also contain specific resources or lessons you can use in your classroom. Throughout you will also notice call-out boxes; these are intended to draw attention to additional resources, references, or additional information you may not have known.

# CHRONIC DISEASE

**StartWELL Guideline: Provide a safe and supportive environment for students with chronic conditions including asthma, food allergies, and diabetes by completing the required annual training and ensuring all related policies and procedures are followed.**

This is accomplished through:

- Student identification
- Proper accommodations
- Staff training as it relates to chronic condition management and emergency response.

CPS has implemented several policies and procedures to ensure that students who have food allergies, diabetes, asthma, or other chronic conditions are able to safely participate in school activities while teachers and school staff are properly trained to recognize potential emergencies and respond accordingly. If a student in your class has a documented food allergy, asthma, or diabetes:

- **Ensure the parent/guardian has the proper paperwork** to be completed by a physician and returned to the school ASAP (click on the links to find the appropriate Physicians Reports for [Allergies](#), [Asthma](#), and [Diabetes](#).
- **If a student requires a food substitution for medical reasons**, ensure that the family has the [Healthcare Provider Statement for Food Substitution](#).
- **Work with the family and the school nurse, Principal Designated staff person, school case manager, and/or Comprehensive Services Coordinator** to ensure all required paperwork is received and appropriate 504 is established, if necessary.
- **If your school has a student with diabetes**, the school is required to have a Delegated Care Aide (DCA) who must complete an annual DCA training. While training requirements remain the same, schools are allowed to have more than one DCA. If there is a Pre-K student with diabetes at your school, it is best practice to have an Early Childhood representative trained as a DCA.



In SY1718, 5% of preschool students had a documented chronic condition. However, the true number is likely much higher when the number of undiagnosed or undocumented cases are accounted for.

## Administration of Medication

Students with 504 plans related to asthma, allergies, and/or diabetes may require administration of medication in the classroom. All classrooms should have a **red toolbox** (pictured) in which to store unrefrigerated student medications. This should be kept unlocked and out of reach of the students during the school day; however **it is crucial that the medications always follow the child**- on field trips, the playground, PE, etc.- so they are always in close range should there be an emergency. In other words, bring the toolbox wherever your students go. In all cases where a student requires medication at school, the parent/guardian needs to submit the following forms, whichever is appropriate for that child's needs:

- [Physician Request for Administration of Medication](#)
- [Parent Request for Administration of Medication](#)



## Staff Training

Per CPS and state policy, all school staff are required to complete the Office of Student Health and Wellness Chronic Conditions training annually. (Staff can search on Learning Hub for "Chronic Conditions" and find the current school year's training.) This 48-minute webinar covers life saving measures and information about three of the most prevalent chronic conditions: asthma, allergies, and diabetes. This webinar will help you recognize the signs of an emergency and properly respond to ensure the child's health and safety. While this training is required for CPS staff across grade levels, it is especially important in Pre-K, when students are often unable to verbalize or express when something is wrong. For example, a student may have undiagnosed or undocumented allergies and may accidentally eat something that could trigger an allergic reaction.

*\*\*Schools with one or more students with diabetes must also have a designated Delegated Care Aide; the DCA is required to attend additional trainings. If you have any students with diabetes in your class, consider volunteering for this important role.*

## Allergen-Free Classrooms

Schools CANNOT label themselves as allergen-free (peanut-free, nut-free, etc.). Schools labeled as allergen-free provide a false sense of security as the label cannot be enforced. An allergen-free label also opens the school up to increased liability should an allergic emergency occur. Instead, schools should consider creating allergen-free zones, tables, and classrooms. You can use this [Sample Allergen Free Classroom Letter](#) to communicate this with families and ensure that they do not send their children to school with any foods that may pose a risk to other students.

You may be required to post a list of students with allergies in your classroom. In the interest of maintaining student privacy and avoiding anything that may stigmatize or otherwise "call out" students with allergies, this list should always have a cover sheet that keeps the names from being in plain view. Of course it should be easily accessible, but a cover sheet will help keep the students' names from being on public display at all times.

Schools are able to elect into becoming SunButter™ schools, and have all peanut butter products served at the school replaced with sunflower seed butter. School administration should coordinate with the school dining manager to request they become a SunButter™ School.

If you have additional questions or concerns please contact the Office of Student Health and Wellness at OSHW@cps.edu.

# HEALTH SERVICES

**StartWELL Guideline: Ensure students are meeting requirements for Vision and Hearing screenings, Dental exams, and general medical compliance.**

All Pre-K students are required to have a vision and hearing screening. Most students will receive a screening at their school by an OSHW Hearing and Vision Screening Technician assigned to the school building. The technicians will provide screenings and referrals for all preschool children before the end of the school year (these visits are typically scheduled by the school clerk or nurse; you can find the Hearing and Vision Tech, as well as the other medical providers assigned to your school [here](#)). You can help prepare your students for these screenings by playing [conditioning games](#) in the days before the visits.

While not a requirement for Pre-K, dental exams are recommended as a best practice. The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and CPS partner to provide preventative dental services (i.e., exams, cleaning, fluoride treatment, sealants as needed, and referrals) to all consented students grades Pre-K through 12 at no cost to families. If there are students in your class who do not have a dentist, you can help by providing the family with the [CPS dental consent form](#), and talk to your principal about scheduling a visit from the [dental provider assigned to your school](#).

Additionally, it is both a priority of the Office of Student Health and Wellness and a requirement of the Chicago Early Learning Standards that every child has a medical home. A medical home is not just a building, but is a source of continuous, comprehensive, coordinated primary health care for children and families. This could be a doctor's office, community clinic, or school-based health center; as long as [certain characteristics and services are provided](#), medical homes can take different forms for different families. [There are many benefits](#) of children having a medical home, especially in early childhood, but essentially it's the best way to ensure that children have access to comprehensive, individualized healthcare throughout their childhood and cuts down on expensive, unnecessary trips to the ER.

Likewise, ensuring that all students have health insurance is a priority for both OSHW and OECE. Many CPS Pre-K students are eligible for Medicaid or other low-cost insurance plans but are not enrolled. Not only does insurance coverage help families access the care their children need, but Medicaid reimbursements also enable CPS to provide many of the health services mentioned above. If you know that a student does not have a medical home or health insurance, they should be referred to the Children and Family Benefits Unit in the Office of Student Health and Wellness, who can help families apply for health insurance as well as SNAP (food stamps). Families can call the Healthy CPS Hotline, (773)553-KIDS, for assistance.



## **To help ensure your students receive the health services they need and to help your school achieve medical compliance for Healthy CPS:**

- Collect signed dental consent forms and give them to your school's designated point person for dental consents.
- Work with school staff to ensure Hearing/Vision screening, Dental, and/or Mobile Van visits are scheduled.
- Make sure families return the Student Medical Information (SMI) form at the beginning of the year.
- Get your students ready for their hearing and vision screenings by playing these conditioning games before your class's scheduled visit.
- Remember the Healthy CPS Hotline number (773.553.KIDS) and be ready to refer families as needed!

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**StartWELL Guideline: Include at least 30 minutes/day for half day programs and 60 minutes/day for full day programs as well as frequent movement activities integrated into academic learning. Include at least 10 minutes of structured physical activity within that time.**

Regular physical activity can help prevent obesity, reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes, and improve gross and fine motor skills. Physical activity can also contribute to increased academic achievement and positive cognitive and behavioral development. In addition to ensuring Pre-K students are up and moving on a regular basis, it is also important to offer a variety of activities to support different types of growth. For instance, moderate to vigorous physical activities (MVPA) like running support heart health and large muscle groups, while jumping and tumbling help strengthen bones. Structured PA is teacher-led, developmentally appropriate and engaging, and supports age-appropriate motor development. Ideally, your classroom will offer a combination of MVPA, free play, and structured physical activities.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

StartWELL recommends [OPEN](#) (Online Physical Education Network) as a resource for structured physical activity. The online curriculum is free, many of the activities utilize the equipment you received in your [StartWELL kit](#) and can be adapted to the classroom, gym, playground, or whatever space you have available. These 10-minute activities focus on movement exploration, knowledge, and skill development in the following categories: Movement Concepts, Balance, Locomotor, Manipulative, Health & Nutrition, and Social-Emotional Development.



Source: Lakeshore Learning

In addition to leading your class in structured activities, you should also incorporate several "Brain Breaks" (1-5 minute exercises that can be scheduled between activities; [Go Noodle](#), [Moving Minutes](#) or Mighty Minutes Cards are excellent resources for short, fun Brain Breaks) and other physical activities throughout the day. Some of these can be unstructured free play (e.g. playground time) but you should also incorporate physical activity into academic learning. Including these breaks and activities in your daily schedule is a great way to ensure they happen- or use [this daily activity tracker](#) to help plan.

**There are numerous ways to incorporate PA into learning activities while aligning to the [IS GOLD](#) objectives:**

- Create an obstacle course in the block area.
- Show a numeral and prompt students to respond with a movement (e.g., hold up a 4 and students perform four jumping jacks).
- Act out movements during story time.
- Take yoga breaks between whole group activities or incorporate yoga during quiet time.
- Roll out your hopscotch carpet (from the StartWELL kit), or use floor tape to create lines for walking, jumping, and balancing.
- Use the Physical Intentional Teaching Cards and [Mighty Minutes](#) from Creative Curriculum to meet both StartWELL and CEL Instruction goals.



## A Note on Instructional Classrooms:

OPEN PE curriculum activities can and should be adapted to meet the individual needs of students. For more information please contact the Office of Diverse Learner Supports and Services at [ODLSS@cps.edu](mailto:ODLSS@cps.edu).



# FAMILY STYLE

## StartWELL Guideline: Implement full family style dining and incorporate casual, nutrition-based conversation into meal time.

*\*Please Note: Family Style dining is not required, but recommended as a best practice. If you would like to implement Family Style in your class, talk to your principal or email [OECE@cps.edu](mailto:OECE@cps.edu).*

### Meal time is an important part of the day for any preschool program.

In addition to providing physical nourishment, meals offer an opportunity for engagement and development of cognitive and social skills. Regardless of how meals are served in your class, you should spend this time participating in casual, nutrition-based conversation, using open-ended questions to engage your students and see where the discussion can go (see next page for suggestions).

### What is Family Style?

Family Style is a type of meal service in which food is placed on the tables in serving bowls and plates (rather than handed to children pre-plated or on trays) and passed from one person to another. Research has shown that the benefits of Family Style meal service are significant, touching on various aspects of development including cognitive, physical, and social-emotional.



Source: KinderCare

Family Style meals can help children develop:

- language skills by encouraging mealtime conversation.
- math skills through opportunities to explore spatial relationships, count and sort flatware and dishes, etc.
- social-emotional skills by sharing, cooperating, taking turns, following the rules and being independent and self-directed.
- hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills by passing platters, pouring from pitchers, and using the correct serving and dining utensils.

### Additionally, Family Style can help students learn how to gauge when they are hungry or full.

Rather than being told to eat everything on their plates, children should be encouraged to take as much as they want and are allowed to ask for seconds if they are still hungry. If a student isn't taking any food, ask them to at least try something (they can take a "polite bite" or join the "Two-Bite Club"), but understand that they may not be hungry and shouldn't be forced to eat. This can present a great opportunity to teach them about portion size and food waste, and can help them learn to understand and manage their own hunger.



**Did you know?** All CPS menus are reviewed by a registered dietitian to ensure they meet or exceed the nutritional standards established by the United States Department of Agriculture. Pre-K menus are subject to further guidelines, eliminating potential choking hazards and other items that are not appropriate for this age group. Questions? Contact [food@cps.edu](mailto:food@cps.edu).



## Family Style and CLASS

While not the time for a formal lesson, Family Style meals provide the perfect opportunity for casual, nutrition education that also integrates elements of CLASS. **Even classes that are not implementing full Family Style should engage in the following practices during meals:**

- Ask questions about the different components of the meal- do the children know what it is, have they tried it before, do they know how it grows or where it comes from?
- Encourage students to try new foods through "polite bites" and give them language to express why they do or do not like something.
- Practice and reinforce colors or letters when discussing menu items (i.e. what color is the apple? What letter does apple start with?).
- Practice numbers by counting how many of each item a student takes and linking back to healthy foods and how that helps you grow to be big, strong, and smart.
- Use mealtimes to discuss food groups or "What's on my plate?" to reinforce science ideas.

## Implementing Family Style may seem daunting at first. Here are some tips for making the transition:

- Create routines for transitioning in and out of mealtime, such as a designated meal announcer (which could change daily), specific music or a song that means it is meal time, visiting the bathroom and/or washing hands before sitting down, or a thank you song when everyone is seated.
- Teach children how to serve themselves/pass food outside of mealtimes to build those skills.
- Don't stress about spills- they will happen! Things are bound to get a little messy as children develop their motor skills and learn to navigate meal time. Instead of immediately jumping up for a towel, think of it as an opportunity to teach children how to clean up after themselves.
- Be sure you have all the necessary equipment. Using appropriately child-sized utensils and platters.
- Mistakes will happen! As children learn about sanitation and manners, someone is bound to "double-dip" or eat from the serving utensil from time to time. If possible, try to have extra utensils, serving dishes, and food ready to swap out in case anything gets contaminated.



### Additional Information and Research on Family Style Can Be Found Here:

<http://www.myredrabbit.com/blog/family-style-dining-in-school>

<https://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/links/tips-for-family-style-dining>

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news>

## Understanding the Meal Service

Preschool meals are determined by a combination of federal and local guidelines and meet or exceed USDA nutrition standards. All menus are created and approved by dietitians and adapted to meet the needs of preschool-aged children (e.g. eliminating choking hazards). Any documented student allergies will also be accounted for before the food is delivered to your classroom or otherwise presented to students. All CPS menus are pork-free and vegetarian options are available daily. Please reach out to your school's dining manager to arrange accommodations for vegetarian meals.

The USDA requires that each meal and snack contain specific amounts of fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and meat or meat alternatives. If you are implementing a full Family Style, the food that is delivered to your classroom or otherwise presented to your students will include an appropriate amount of each food item to ensure that every child is able to receive the required portion sizes of each component.

### **The Family Style process is the same whether it happens in the classroom or the dining center:**

- Food will be prepared by the dining staff according to the Pre-K menu and sent, along with the appropriate serving utensils, to the classroom (or dining center).
- Included with the food and utensils will be a Food Production Worksheet (FPW), which will explain the portion size of each food items that should be allotted for each student.
- You will also receive spoodles, which you should use to portion out the food from the lunchroom containers into your serving bowls and platters. For example, if the dining center provides you with black beans and you have 5 students at each table, you should use the spoodle to scoop 5 servings of beans into your serving bowl and place that bowl along with your serving spoon on the table. This process is the same for each item served at the meal.

Milk is always served in individual cartons. State guidelines require us to provide two different fat contents of milk (e.g. skim and 1%). There needs to be a choice of milk placed at every table. For example, if you have 5 students at each table, you may place 3 skim and 2 1% milks, or 4 1% and 1 skim, etc. You can work with your School Dining Manager (SDM) to find the appropriate mix for your class, keeping in mind that there always needs to be a choice available. In addition to milk, water must always be made available during meal times; work with your SDM to find the best solution for serving water in your classroom.

*\*\*\* Proper dishwashing of all utensils, serving bowls, and dishes is the responsibility of the dining room and is not allowed in the classroom.*

# HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS AND REWARDS

**StartWELL Guideline: Celebrations should focus on fun rather than food. Classroom celebrations with food are not permitted; food prepared in the home is not permitted in classrooms (unless for individual student consumption during meal times). Food and physical activity may not be withheld as a punishment and food should never be used as a reward.**

Celebration is an important part of the classroom culture in early childhood, and can be a great opportunity to start building healthy, lifelong habits. Celebrations and rewards should focus on fun rather than food. Classroom celebrations with food (e.g. for birthdays or holidays) are not permitted. No celebrations with food are permitted to replace meal times, however CPS is proud to offer a [special event catering menu](#) so your school can celebrate with a special breakfast or pizza party and still ensure your students are receiving nutritious food with all medical accommodations accounted for. (These celebrations are required to be school-wide, so make sure your principal knows about the menu!)

Bringing outside food into the classroom can put students at risk of having an allergic reaction, especially for young children who may be undiagnosed; therefore this should be avoided. Parents may have a hard time getting used to the idea that they cannot bring cupcakes or other treats to school for their child's birthday. As with any new policy or idea, communication is key. StartWELL recommends sending home a letter (you can use [this sample letter](#)- just copy and paste it on your school's letterhead and fill in the blanks!) on the first day of school that explains the policy and suggests alternative ways for parents to celebrate in the classroom. Additionally, you can post [this flier](#) in your classroom where parents can easily see that your classroom celebrates with FUN rather than FOOD!

Fortunately there are lots of ways to be festive in the classroom without food! (See even more suggestions below!)

- Students celebrating a birthday could wear a favorite costume to school.
- Parents could bring in kazoos, games, or party hats to share with classmates, or bring in their child's favorite book to read aloud to the class.
- Create a crown, sash, or button for students to wear on their birthday, or decorate a special "birthday chair" for students to sit in on their big day.
- For holidays, students could celebrate by wearing pajamas or dressing like their favorite athletes or animals.



## CPS Policy Requirements for Celebrations

The *CPS Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy* establishes guidance for CPS schools regarding school celebrations:

- Schools should focus on FUN rather than food for celebrations.
- Schools may not serve food in competition with service of the National School Breakfast or National School Lunch Programs.
- Schools will be expected to ensure all foods served during celebrations adhere to the Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy nutrition guidelines with the exception of two celebrations per year.
- A maximum of two **school-wide** celebrations per year may include foods of minimal nutritional value.
- The USDA [defines the school day](#) as 12:00 am until 30 minutes after the last bell.

### Bright Ideas for CPS Schools: Healthy Celebrations

School celebrations are an ideal time to demonstrate the nutrition education that is being taught in the classroom. Class parties and other school festivities do not have to detract from a healthy school environment. Fun activities and creative snacks and drinks can ensure that school is celebrating in healthy and exciting ways.

#### Celebrations for Pre-K Students

Birthday	Birthday crown	Recognize the birthday student by allowing them to wear a birthday sash, crown, button, or sign for the day.
General	Scavenger Hunt	Have a scavenger hunt around the classroom.
End of the year	Farmer's market visit	Look up your local farmer's market and take a tour.
Fall	Apple picking	Take students on a field trip to a local apple orchard.
General	Dances	Host a dance party for a fun and active celebration.
Seasonal	Nature walk	Contact a local park to arrange for a seasonal nature walk.
Halloween	Halloween mask or pumpkin party	Decorate masks or pumpkins with paint, glitter, or markers.
Thanksgiving	Craft project	Have students make handprint or paper plate turkeys and label with things they are thankful for.
Winter Holidays	Snowflake decorating party	Create classroom decorations from snowflakes cut out from white paper.
Valentine's Day	Singing grams	Get a student group together to learn Valentine's Day songs. Students can request that these songs be sung to families at pickup.
St. Patrick's Day	Pot of gold scavenger hunt	Have a scavenger hunt around the classroom, searching for a "pot of gold" with school supplies.

# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

**StartWELL Guideline: Offer at least one family engagement event incorporating health and wellness content each school year.**

Healthy habits and attitudes start at home. Parents have the greatest influence on young children, both as role models and children's first educators. For parents, early childhood education is likely their first encounter with the school system since attending school as children. For these reasons, parents tend to be more engaged at the early childhood level than any other stage of a child's education. Teachers should take this opportunity to educate parents about their children's physical activity and nutritional needs, as well as provide resources to help their students develop healthy behaviors.

There are many ways to incorporate health and wellness into family engagement activities:

- Share information about CPS policies such as the Local School Wellness Policy (specifically Healthy Celebrations) and the Healthy Snack and Beverage Policy at orientation or a Back to School Night.
- Designate an area within parent newsletters devoted to health and wellness resources or education.
- Create a health and wellness bulletin board featuring tips for promoting healthy behaviors for parents.
- Find partners who offer parent workshops with topics like cooking for preschool students, reading food labels, movement activities for children, and developing healthy eating habits.

# NUTRITION EDUCATION

## **StartWELL Guideline: Integrate nutrition education into learning activities.**

Young children are notorious for being picky eaters. [Research](#) shows that new foods may need to be introduced up to ten times before children will try them, which can cause difficulties in providing a varied diet. In the United States, almost one third of infants and toddlers receive no discrete fruit or vegetable daily, and French fries are the most common vegetable consumed.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to encouraging them to try new food items, nutrition education can teach preschoolers how certain foods can affect their growth and why it is important to eat a well-balanced diet. Learning and understanding these ideas at an early age can help children develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

## **There are numerous ways to incorporate nutrition education into your daily routine:**

- Implement Family Style dining and incorporate casual, nutrition-based conversation.
- If your school has a garden, get your students involved! There are lots of age-appropriate garden activities for preschoolers, and children may be more inclined to try new veggies if they are involved in growing and harvesting. (If your school doesn't have a garden and you would like to lead a garden team, contact oshw@cps.edu to find out how!)
- Include a variety of pretend food items in the dramatic play area and create a fun farmers market or restaurant. Your [StartWELL Kit](#) includes 4 food baskets containing realistic fruits, veggies, bread products, meat, dairy, and other protein items.
- Does your school participate in the [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program](#)? If so, be sure to use the information sheets that come with each delivery to lead a conversation about that day's item.
- Take a field trip to a local grocery store or farmers market.



**Did you know?** Nutrition education is the perfect subject for integrating elements of CLASS. CLASS focuses on Instructional Support- how teachers promote children's cognitive and language development. Try engaging children in conversation about foods they've tried, where different foods come from, and how they impact growth. There are many opportunities to integrate these kinds of questions- during mealtime, a food experience, a nutrition-themed story time, etc.

**It can also be easy to integrate nutrition education into math, science, literacy, and other activities while incorporating elements of CLASS:**

- Make predictions about new foods in a shared writing activity and record descriptions after tasting to see if the predictions were correct. Integrate elements of CLASS by asking open-ended questions like "Have you ever tried this food before?" "What does it taste like?" "What do you like or not like about it?"
- Sort foods by color, size, and food group.
- Make a chart of the number of fruits, vegetables, and grains your school's program serves each week and discuss why each food group is important.
- Fill your bookshelves with stories about food, gardening, and farms. Books centered on cooking or spending time as a family around a special meal. This can also be a great way to teach students about different cultures.



**A Note About Food Prep In the Classroom**

"Food Experiences" are an important part of many Pre-K programs, however CPS policies (including Chicago Food Safety Code and USDA meal program requirements) prohibit any food prep in the classroom that is not done by certified dining staff or an approved partner organization. This is important for several reasons, including protecting students with food allergies and from potential food borne illness.



**Additional Information and Resources Can Be Found at the Following Sources:**

[USDA- Nutrition Education for Preschoolers](#)

[Illinois Farm to School Network- Nutrition Education Resources](#)



# GENDER INCLUSION IN PRE-K

**StartWELL Guideline: Follow best practices and take steps to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all students.**

Research shows that it is developmentally appropriate for children to explore gender through activities, dress, and interests. Children learn about gender from adults and culture. Beliefs about activities, interests, and behaviors associated with gender vary based on time, place, and culture. Children are more likely to become resilient and successful when they are valued and feel that they belong. Included below are definitions and best practices to help educators navigate gender in the early childhood classroom.

**Gender roles:** The set of functions, activities, and behaviors commonly expected of women and men in society.

**Assigned Sex at Birth:** The designation made by medical professional of a person's sex based on a visual examination of a child's genitals at birth.

**Gender Identity:** A person's innermost core concept of self; How individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves.

**Gender Expression:** How we present our gender to the world through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, mannerisms, and other forms of presentation.

**Gender non-conforming/Gender expansive:** Gender that doesn't comply with societal, cultural, communal, and/or familial expectations of gender.



## Did you know?

The Office of Student Wellness offers training focused on informing teachers about these very issues and providing them with the language and tools to help make all of their students feel safe and welcome in the classroom. *Creating Safe and Supportive Environments for LGBTQ and All Youth*, which is now a required training for at least one staff member per school as part of Healthy CPS, is offered several times a year, with at least one annual training specifically for Early Childhood.

## Best Practices for Pre-K Teachers

- Use gender neutral language when addressing children.
- Don't separate children into groups based on gender.
- Don't police gender during playtime; anyone can play with dolls, dress up as a firefighter, etc.
- Encourage expansive ways of thinking about gender - combat stereotypical gender roles.
- Show support for each child's gender expression by encouraging all children to make their own choices about how to express themselves.
- Offer a wide range of toys, books, and games that expose children to diverse gender roles.
- Avoid assumptions that children are not interested in activities typically associated with one gender or another.
- Display images around the room that show people in a wide variety of roles to inspire children to be who they want to be.

## References

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- CPS Office of Early Childhood Education



## HEALTHY CPS

— OFFICE OF STUDENT HEALTH & WELLNESS —

## Endnotes

- 1 Rasberry, Catherine N., et al. "The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance: a systematic review of the literature." *Preventive medicine* 52 (2011): S10-S20.
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