

School Nutrition

Program Guide



W E L C O M E

Thank you for being a Let's Go! partner and for your commitment to help improve the health and well-being of your community. This is your guide to getting started.

Let's Go! is a community engagement initiative working to create environments that support healthy eating and physical activity. We use evidence-based strategies to improve the policies, practices, and environments that influence behavior change.

If you have questions about the information in this guide, please email info@letsgo.org.

SCHOOLS &
SCHOOL
DISTRICTS



SCHOOL
NUTRITION



EARLY CARE &
EDUCATION



OUT-OF-SCHOOL



HEALTHCARE

MaineHealth
LET'S GO!

Working with community and healthcare partners, we help to promote healthy messaging and encourage healthy choices where people live, learn, work, and play.

Let's Go! helps to create healthy environments by using a multi-setting model to reach community members.

We partner with:

- Schools and School Districts
- School Nutrition Programs
- Early Care and Education Programs
- Out-of-School Programs
- Healthcare Practices

Our partners use Let's Go! Strategies to:

- Increase physical activity
- Promote drinking water
- Increase access to healthy foods
- Limit recreational screen time
- Encourage healthy sleep habits and more

Your partnership with Let's Go! is critical for creating and sustaining meaningful change not just in your physical location, but also as part of the larger community initiative.

The Role of School Nutrition Programs

Obesity is a complex, chronic disease. Overweight and obesity continue to have a major impact on the health of the entire population, from infancy to adulthood.

School Nutrition Programs can play a critical role in preventing childhood obesity.

Students consume a substantial proportion of their daily calories during the school day. School meals are important to fostering the development of students' healthy eating habits. It is critical that schools, the district and the school nutrition programs collaborate and engage students in the work to have the greatest impact.

Let's Go! helps:

- School Districts to adopt and implement strong wellness policies that support healthy eating and physical activity practices.
- School Nutrition Programs improve the nutritional quality of food served, make the healthy choice the easy choice and improve the perception of school meals.
- Individual Schools to bring the district wellness policy into practice and engage students in the process.

School Nutrition Programs play an essential role in serving healthy meals to support students' health and increase their readiness to learn.



Let's Go! is designed to help you and your staff to:



ASSESS & PLAN
using the *Let's Go! Self-Assessment* to measure strengths and identify opportunities for growth.



PROMOTE
Let's Go! program messages.



TAKE ACTION
using program tools, resources, and community connections.



SUSTAIN
environments by adopting policies that meet state and federal mandates and support healthy eating and physical activity.



COLLABORATE
with students, schools and departments for greater impact across the district.



HIGHLIGHT SUCCESS
with stories, photos, and videos.



Before You Get Started

Before you begin implementing the evidence-based strategies of the Let’s Go! program, here are some things to consider:

1. Team Camaraderie is Essential

Engage all kitchen staff at each school and send the message that everyone has a role to play in preparing, cooking, and serving healthy foods.

2. Attitudes and Beliefs Matter

When it comes to food and healthy eating habits, people’s personal experiences, cultural beliefs, and biases can vary. To be successful in building a strong school nutrition program:

- Recognize that staff and students come with their own relationship to food and definition of health.
- Reflect on staff skill sets and experience in the culinary field.
- Look for possible areas of resistance and where to bolster food creativity by involving students.
- Remember that how staff talk about and present food to students can make a difference.

3. Youth and Adult Partnerships are Powerful

Students have effective and creative ideas to create environmental change in their schools and want to discuss these ideas with adults. Students feel empowered when they have voice and choice and can help build peer buy-in.

4. The Cafeteria Environment is Important

Consider what your program currently does to ensure the cafeteria is a safe, accepting and inviting environment for students and staff to eat nutritious meals.

Advocate for proper seating and accommodations for students and staff.

Staff can foster healthy behaviors in their cafeterias by:

- Setting up the cafeteria to ensure the healthy choice is the easy choice.
- Creating a welcoming and inviting environment for students to easily navigate.
- Creating a café feel using colorful signage.

5. Be Inclusive

Consider what your program does to diversify meals to accommodate dietary and cultural differences. Advocate on behalf of students, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, needing seating alternatives.

The program is designed to make sure every student can benefit regardless of ability, race or socio-economic status.

The Program Messages

5-2-1-0 for Children

The Let's Go! 5-2-1-0 program helps children and youth to establish healthy behaviors.

The 5-2-1-0 messages are:

Small Steps for Adults

The Let's Go! Small Steps program encourages adults to make one small change at a time. These small changes can add up to big improvements in health.

The Small Steps messages are:



5 or more fruits and vegetables



2 hours or less of recreational screen time



1 hour or more of physical activity



0 sugary drinks, more water



Move More
It's a great way to improve your health



Eat Real
Foods that come from nature give you energy



Drink Water
It's the best choice



Rest Up
Good sleep restores your body and mind

Your Partnership with Let's Go!

Let's Go! provides materials and training to you and your staff to enable you to promote healthy eating with students and families. Your partnership with Let's Go! includes:

- 1. Program Assistance**
from Let's Go! to get you started and keep you motivated.
- 2. Tools and Resources**
to promote the nutrition program and improve the perception and quality of meals served.
- 3. Training and Development**
opportunities for you and staff members.
- 4. Regular Communication**
to keep program information, tools, and resources at your fingertips.
- 5. Celebration**
for every achievement whether big or small.
- 6. Connection**
to local and national organizations and other sites working to improve the health of students and families.

Let's Go! is here to help you get started with the program.

Program Messages & Strategies

The Let's Go! 5-2-1-0 program messages are the behaviors to encourage. To support this we have developed evidence-based strategies which align with national recommendations to increase healthy eating and physical activity.

The scientific evidence for why the messages matter

To help you influence environmental and behavior change

The scientific evidence for why these categories matter

MESSAGES

MESSAGE RATIONALES



5 or more fruits and vegetables

Emerging science suggests fruit and vegetable consumption may help prevent weight gain, and when total calories are controlled, may be an important aid to achieving and sustaining a healthy weight.



2 hours or less of recreational screen time

Watching too much television and use of other screen media is associated with an increased prevalence of overweight and obesity, lower reading scores, and attention problems.



1 hour or more of physical activity

Regular physical activity can help children and adolescents improve cardiorespiratory fitness, build strong bones and muscles, control weight, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and reduce the risk of developing other health conditions.



0 sugary drinks, more water

High intake of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption among children is associated with overweight and obesity, displacement of milk consumption, and dental cavities.

STRATEGIC CATEGORIES

STRATEGY RATIONALES

Developing the school meals menu

Creative menu names and student involvement in menu development can positively influence selection and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Promoting the school meals program

Sharing and promoting menus to the entire school community can increase participation and improve student perception of school meals.

Increase school meals participation

Promotion of a daily featured meal on a poster with a descriptive name and picture before the point of selection can significantly increase selection of the featured meal.

Serving healthy school breakfast

Including a variety of fruits and vegetables improves the quality of school breakfast. Alternative breakfast options such as grab-and-go or serving in the classroom can increase participation.

Serving healthy school lunch

Offering a variety of produce in the lunch line in convenient and visually appealing ways can increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

Collectively, the Let's Go! School Nutrition Strategies nudge students to select healthier options, increase the perception of school meals, and help support the nutritional quality of food served.

The Let's Go! Champion and Team

Every registered Let's Go! School Nutrition Program identifies a Champion to lead the work of environmental and policy change and is encouraged to establish and/or participate in a regional workgroup.



The Site Champion

The Site Champion is someone who has a good sense of District level operations and can help advocate for the adoption of the program strategies. Frequently this is the School Nutrition Director.

The Regional School Nutrition Workgroup

Don't go it alone! When possible, gather with other school nutrition professionals in neighboring districts who share an interest in improving the nutritional quality, perception, and participation in school meals. Ask Let's Go! staff about an existing workgroup to join.

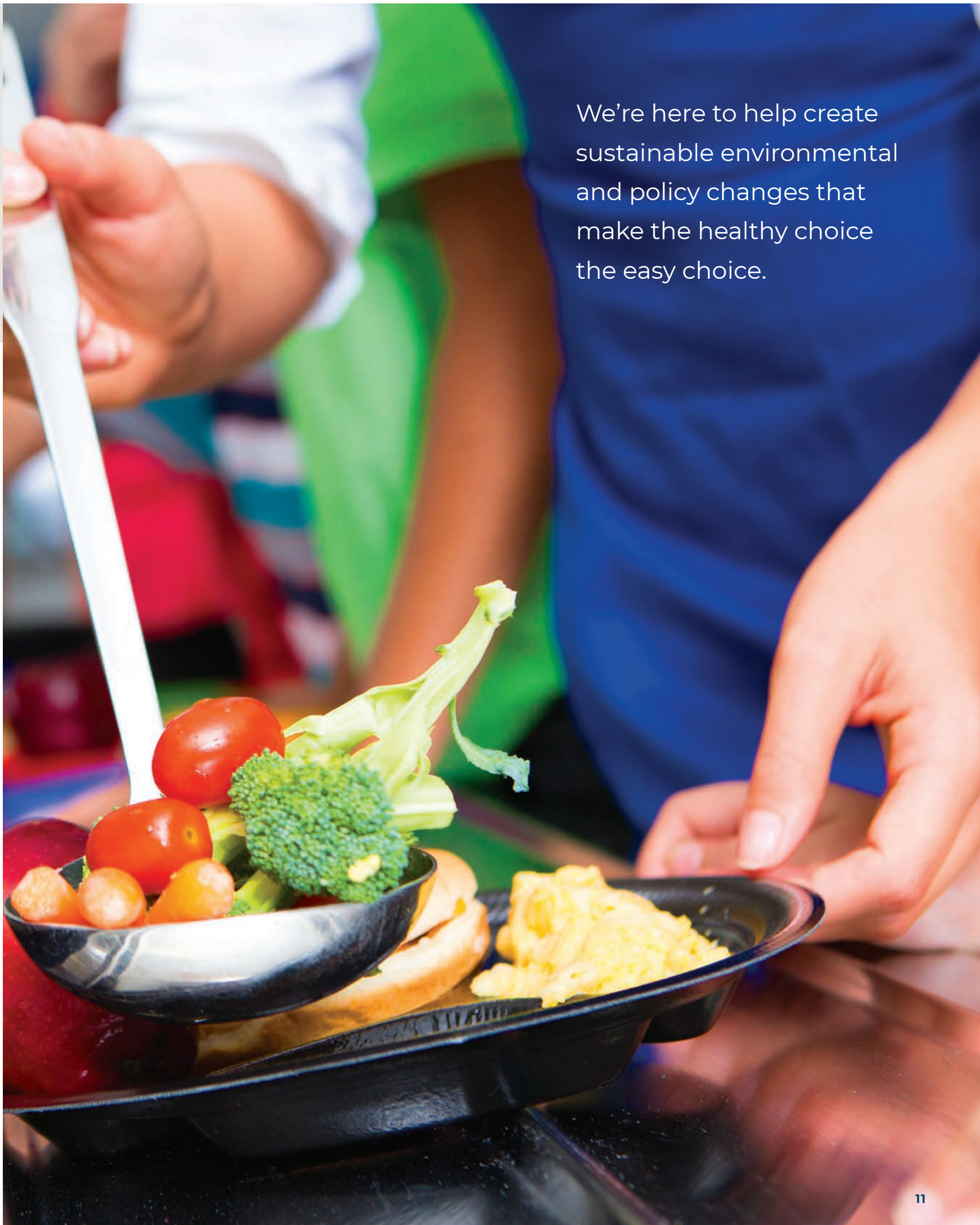
Role of the Site Champion

The Site Champion is an advocate for change. They lead their school nutrition program through the process of assessing needs, setting goals and sharing the Let's Go! messages with staff, students, and families. Additionally they work to bring meaningful collaboration between their school nutrition program, district wellness efforts, individual schools and help create space for students ideas and involvement.

Role of the Regional School Nutrition Workgroup

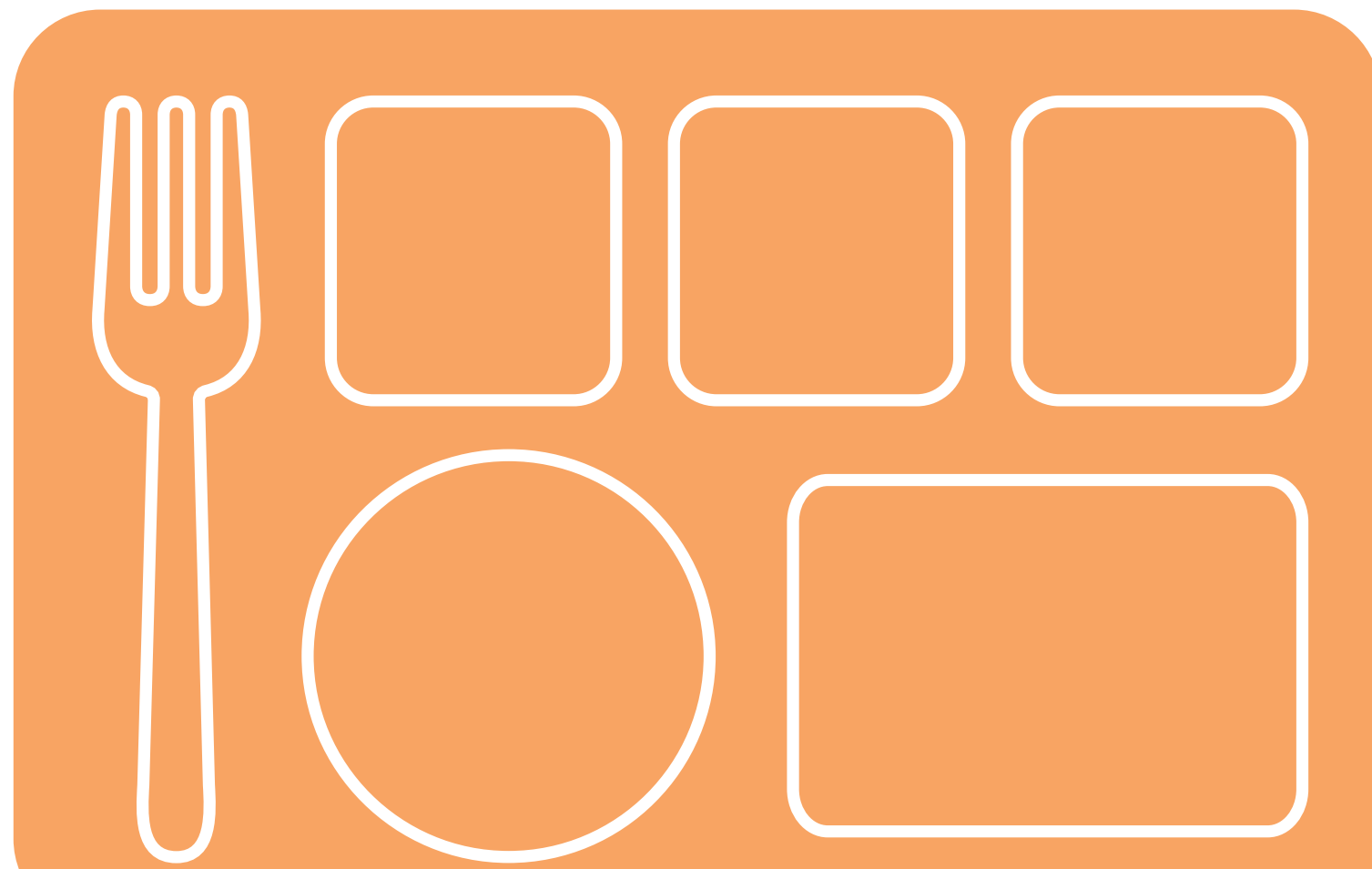
Let's Go! convenes regional workgroups to create networking opportunities for school nutrition staff to share successes, challenges, gain support, exchange ideas, plan professional development and collectively problem solve.

We're here to help create sustainable environmental and policy changes that make the healthy choice the easy choice.



Implementing the Let's Go! Program

Let's Go! is an annual program that supports sites interested in working towards environmental and policy change. The program can be woven into your existing structure and support you to build and sustain a healthy environment.



START HERE

to join the program and follow these steps each year.





Resources and Program Tools

Let's Go! has resources and tools to help increase healthy eating and physical activity at your site.

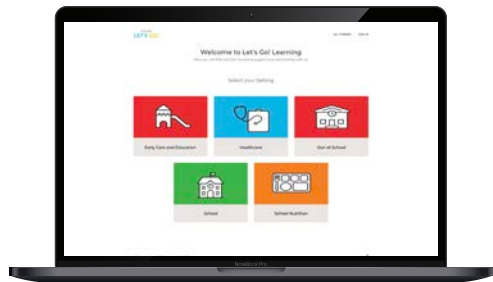
Let's Go! Website

Utilize educational materials and communication templates to share with staff and families at [LetsGo.org](https://lets-go.org).



Let's Go! Learning

Explore available on demand trainings, including the *Let's Go! Self-Assessment* at [LetsGoLearning.Thinkific.com](https://lets-go-learning.thinkific.com).



Promotional Tools

Share 5-2-1-0 messages and your partnership throughout your site.



Need help finding something? Contact us at info@lets-go.org. Stay Connected! Find, like and follow us on Facebook.



Site Champion Checklist

Use this checklist to help ensure you stay on track with your Let's Go! work.

GETTING STARTED

☐ Identify a Champion

- Determine who at the site will be your lead for this work, typically this is the School Nutrition Director.

☐ Build a Team/Join a School Nutrition Workgroup

- Gather support to take action in this partnership.

ONGOING EACH YEAR

☐ Assess your Environment and Create a Plan

- Use the *Let's Go! Self-Assessment*.
- Connect with your Team/Workgroup to reflect on previous year and set a plan for the year.
- Communicate with District Wellness team to look for opportunities to collaborate and ensure district wellness policy is up-to-date.

☐ Promote Messages and Partnership

- Ensure 5-2-1-0 posters and Let's Go! Cafeteria signage are displayed and in good condition.
- Communicate your partnership with staff and families.

☐ Use Let's Go! Resources and Program Tools

- Use educational tools and communication templates to encourage healthy eating.
- Participate in professional development opportunities.
- Invite Let's Go! to your team meetings to provide ongoing support.

☐ Celebrate Success

- Share stories, photos, and videos with staff and families.
- Acknowledge individual and team contributions in creating healthy environments.

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