

**Title:** Meeting Healthier US School Challenge Guidelines: The Impact of the Nutrition Education Institute, A Strategy for Improving Fruit, Vegetable, and Whole Grain Offerings.

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**Abstract:**

The school environment is considered a high priority setting for targeting childhood obesity, since students spend 30% of their day in school and nutritious school meals promote weight maintenance and improve cognitive development. In order to participate in the Healthier US School Challenge (HUSC), schools must meet specific guidelines that are designed to improve the quality and quantity of fruit, vegetable, and whole grain offerings in school meals. As part of HUSC, nine Vermont school Nutrition Teams (NT) were invited to join the Nutrition Education Institute (NEI), an intervention implemented by the Green Mountain Healthy Kids Challenge, to help schools meet HUSC criteria. The goal of that year-long intervention was to encourage collaboration between food service personnel, school administrators, teachers, and parents by having them participate in a three day training that targeted nutrition and health. These schools were also provided an on-site mentor during the 2012-2013 academic year for technical assistance. In order to evaluate compliance with HUSC criteria researchers compared 2013 actual HUSC scores against 2012 actual HUSC scores following completion of a one-week menu analysis of their fruit, vegetable, and whole grain offerings. This study suggests that the NEI was effective for educating school staff about food and nutrition as demonstrated by an increase in their HUSC scores.