

Food Literacy for all Massachusetts Children

Knowing where food comes from, how it affects our bodies, and the role it plays in our culture, our communities, and our environment is essential. All K-12 students should have access to food system education in school.

Food system education connects with a range of critical issues:

- **Physical health:** Understanding how nutrition and cooking impacts physical growth and health can have a long-term impact on students' wellness and on the health of their families.
- **Mental health:** Activities like growing plants, raising animals, and cooking allow students, through active participation to acquire interpersonal and social skills, such as teamwork, dependability, and empathy.
- **Employment:** By learning about food-related careers and developing applicable skills, more students will be prepared to enter professions like farming, fishing, nutrition, food safety, processing, and transportation.
- **Environment:** The food system is an important lens through which to understand the impacts of climate change as well as how individual decisions can together have a collective impact.
- **Community:** Food system lessons incorporate discussions about inequitable access to food, providing students with the opportunity to think critically and become civically involved in their community.

Food literacy is not included in most state frameworks or tested on the MCAS, making it challenging to include food system concepts throughout the school day. Many teachers feel unprepared to teach about the food system and struggle to find high-quality, culturally appropriate, curriculum-aligned lessons. Massachusetts should require food literacy to be taught throughout the K-12 curriculum and provide resources to support educators in integrating these subjects into their curricula.

Building on successful models of classroom food literacy work can have a transformative impact not just on the students themselves, but on their families, their communities, and the Commonwealth as a whole.

To ensure that all students have access to food system education, state investments are needed to support implementation of food system education.



**For more information, reach out to Emily Fidanza, Network Manager at the
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Invest in Food System Education for Massachusetts Children

A level \$1 million investment in food system education will have a lasting impact on hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts children's health, the environment, and local economic development.

Continue support for coaching and grant programs through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

To ensure that teachers are supported in offering food system education, the state should allocate funding to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to continue the expansion of the Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program, and fund professional development opportunities and experiential learning through the Farming Reinforces Education & Student Health (FRESH) grant.

Continuing the expansion of the **Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program** will ensure that more school districts go beyond the requirements of wellness policies to integrate best practices around nutrition education and make plans to implement those goals.

A third round of FRESH grants will provide opportunities for professional development about food system education, spaces for teachers to learn how to integrate food literacy lessons into their curriculum and make connections with community partners, earn continuing education credits, receive ongoing support, and identify funding sources to purchase materials to implement new lessons.

These grants also support expanding educational programming around food literacy, and support expanding staff time to meet food literacy objectives. The first two rounds of the grant were popular, and only a certain percentage of districts have been awarded funded through this competitive program.

Proposed Funding, line item 7010-1192:

Massachusetts School Wellness Coaching Program expansion: \$250,000

MA FRESH grant: \$750,000

Total: \$1,000,000

Support Providing Quality Food Education for all K-12 Massachusetts Children

H.4424 / S.2588 would begin to provide resources and guidance to districts, schools, and educators related to food literacy.

This legislation adds food literacy to the list of topics that the board of elementary and secondary education may set educational standards for.

To help teachers add food literacy to curricula, this law directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to identify appropriate materials and curriculum, and provide professional development opportunities for educators, helping to improve teachers' preparedness to teach about the food system.

H.4424/S.2588 would also enable DESE to fund a Food Literacy Trust Fund that could be used by schools to support this programming, and convene a working group of educators and others with expertise in the food system to review and report on the implementation of food literacy efforts in the Commonwealth.