



Presents...

## Rainbow Days

A Food Services Student  
Activity to Engage Kids  
with Salad Bars



## Acknowledgements

“Oh hey! I know you! You’re the Rainbow lady!” I cannot count the number of times a child in Boulder, Colorado has run up to me shouting this exact statement. And while being recognized around town while off the clock is a very new and odd occurrence to me, it shows me just how much impact a Rainbow Day event can have. After calling me out, the kids often go on to describe the salad they had that day “... remember mine? I had apples and peas and even blueberries!” They then tell me how proud they were to earn their sticker after finishing.

“Rainbow Days” started as an idea in 2010 in the Boulder Valley School District in Boulder, CO. A salad bar had been placed in every school, most menu items were being made from scratch, and the school food was *healthy*. Participation needed to rise to keep the program intact and a number of different efforts were carried out by helpful parents, interns, volunteers, and lunchroom staff to encourage students to experience the new menu. There were many sample days, fun nutrition exercises, and presence at many school functions such as PTA meetings and parent teacher conferences. With all these efforts underway, *nothing* came close to the impact we experienced once Rainbow Days came into the picture. The first pilot Rainbow Day took place at Heatherwood Elementary school, and while normally the firsts of anything can be a little rocky – it went off without a hitch. Parents flooded the lunchroom to help, volunteers from across the community came to pass out stickers, and even the school principal joined his students and earned a sticker!

The next big hurdle in the Rainbow Day streak at Boulder Valley (31 schools in total in just one semester!) was Aspen Creek K-8. The Aspen Creek community had not taken to the new food changes like most of the other Boulder Valley schools. They were upset with the new offerings and participation was dropping. Their Rainbow Day changed all that. Even without support from parents and faculty, a Rainbow Day was scheduled and the students really stepped up to the challenge. The most beautiful salad bar creations came from this day and the food services staff at Aspen K-8 have consistently had to increase their fruit and vegetables orders ever since.

Due to the success of the Rainbow Day extravaganza in the Boulder Valley School District, we at the Food Family Farming Foundation knew it was an activity we needed to spread across the nation. The creation of this guide will bring Rainbow Days to more schools which ultimately means more kids eating more fruits and vegetables on a more consistent basis. This activity puts the power into the students’ hands and gives them an active role in their own healthy future.

Rainbow Days in the Boulder Valley School District would not have been possible without the assistance of a few dedicated individuals that not only helped prepare for the events against their heavy schedules, but also often were right there next to the kids in the lunch lines, handing out stickers and talking about how much they love carrots and broccoli! To the five district managers of BVSD: Sarah Acker, Sal Manzo, Eric Ditzler, Brandy Dreibelbis, and Deb Trevor – thanks for all your time and patience and for helping to make each Rainbow Day a success!

Have fun at your Rainbow Day and enjoy eating all those delicious colors of the Rainbow.

Sunny Young - Marketing Coordinator BVSD



# Rainbow Days:

## A Food Services Student Activity to Engage Kids with Salad Bars

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Figure 2: Proud Display of a Rainbow Day Creation at Boulder, Colo.'s High Peaks Elementary



## Introduction

### *What is a Rainbow Day?*

Hosting a Rainbow Day at your school is a great way to acclimate your students to their salad bar and introduce them to the concept of eating their colors. On Rainbow Day, students are challenged with the task of creating a “rainbow” on their tray out of the fruits and vegetables offered at the salad bar. When they have finished eating their rainbow, they receive a sticker or other small reward to encourage healthy eating habits. Students can only receive the sticker after eating *everything* they chose – therefore preventing unnecessary waste. After Rainbow Days students feel more confident making choices at the salad bar, learn seasonal eating as they see the offerings change on a regular basis, and generally tend to eat more of the fresh fruits and vegetables offered to them. To maximize the impact of Rainbow Days, identifying financial sponsorship to offer free side salads to every student is recommended. Rainbow Day is a foundation exercise which will reward any school with long term impact.



Figure 3: Rainbow Salad maker at Boulder, Colo.'s High Peaks Elementary

### *Rainbow Day Outcomes*

**Nutrition:** Introduces the concept of “eating the rainbow”. The simple practice of selecting different colors of fruits and vegetables on their plates enriches the students’ nutrition in a fun and accessible way. The event increases student confidence in seeking out and trying new foods.

**Etiquette:** Teaches students how to use a salad bar including use of utensils, managing a tray, bowl and/or disposable container to hold their selections, and makes them watchful for spills and cross contamination.

**Participation:** This activity, when marketed in advance, will increase meal participation.

**School and Parent Engagement:** This activity is designed to bring Food Services (FS), School Administrators, Teachers, and Parents together in the dining room to participate in an activity that has a direct impact on children’s health as well as showcasing Food Services.



**Teacher Engagement:** A Rainbow Day can be used to intersect other areas of learning and participation. Examples observed include: creating music to accompany the event, language arts projects including rainbow poetry, and artwork connecting fruits and vegetables to the rainbow theme.

**Administrative and Parent Volunteer Engagement:** Food Services staff are often the unsung heroes in school environments. Creating a Rainbow Day establishes the opportunity for administrators and parent volunteers to work together with Food Services staff in a learning activity in the cafeteria, a location rarely identified as a classroom.

**Community Sponsorship:** This activity creates the opportunity for community sponsorship by offering salad bar engagement to the entire student population, whether participating in the reimbursable meal or bringing lunch from home. Sponsors can provide the additional funds to cover the costs of providing a free side salad to every child. This inclusion increases the potential long term impact of Rainbow Days through encouraging future participation from children who routinely pack a lunch from home.



Figure 4: Teachers participate in Rainbow Day festivities at Boulder, Colo.'s BCSIS Elementary

## PRE EVENT - What is Involved?

### *Communication*

**Making sure everyone knows Rainbow Day is coming is key!**

**Food Services:** Food Services staff that are planning the event will coordinate scheduling the date, communicating ahead of time with the food orders, (either direct vendor or production kitchen orders as



appropriate) and to the site level Food Services teams.<sup>1</sup> If side salads for all students will be sponsored, the impact to the meal period on the school schedule can be greater. It is therefore *imperative* that FS leadership communicates directly with the principal of the school sites.

**School Administration, Teachers, and Parents:** Everyone at the school site needs to know that a Rainbow Day is being planned, both to avoid any potential schedule conflicts and to allow adequate time for marketing the event. Parents are key in student participation so having the Rainbow Day included in school communications is very important. See our sample letter to send home to parents in the appendix<sup>2</sup>.

The event can be a theme for teachers to use in coordination with lesson plans in a number of areas: science, language arts, music, and/or visual arts. Creating anticipation for the event offers greater rewards – from higher participation to students repeating the experience by making a rainbow on their tray every day.



Figure 5: Having Fun at Boulder, Colo.'s BCSIS Elementary

## Media and Marketing

**Local Media:** Alerting local media always helps your school's image of being a healthy place!

School websites, weekly newsletters, press releases about the event to local media outlets, tweets, and facebook posts can all be used successfully to help FS coordinate with individual schools about the upcoming Rainbow Day.<sup>3</sup>

**Contests:** Designing a contest for the best Rainbow Salad is even more encouragement for students to try the activity. This contest could be anything from: best picture of a salad wins a smoothie party for your class or best salad maker is school "Salad King/Queen" for the day – get creative! If you can find a sponsor, creating a

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<sup>1</sup> Rainbow Day Planning for Food Services Teams – Resources i

<sup>2</sup> Sample Parent Letter – Resources ii

<sup>3</sup> Sample Press Release – Resources iii



fundraising activity for PTA becomes possible. An example: giving out cash prizes to PTAs based on pictures submitted from their school's Rainbow Day.

**Volunteers on Rainbow Day:** Inviting a few volunteers to help the FS staff out in the dining room is recommended. Make sure the volunteers know what their role is (see appendix for Volunteer Checklist)<sup>4</sup>.

## EVENT DAY CHECKLIST

### *The Task*

The challenge is simple: each student makes a colorful Rainbow salad from the salad bar.

**3-Color Rule:** Each student must **select and eat** a minimum of three different colors of the rainbow - *specifically the rainbow of fruits and vegetables*<sup>5</sup>. It is recommended to avoid "white" vegetables like potatoes on the salad bar during Rainbow Day to avoid the confusion of what constitutes a rainbow "color". Meats, cheese, and grains are encouraged but not the focus of Rainbow Day and are not counted toward the 3-color rule.

**Sticker Rewards:** If the students eat each color they chose from the salad bar they receive an "I Made a Rainbow" sticker<sup>6</sup> creating accountability by only offering rewards to those who actually consume their choices. This helps limit waste and increases fruit and vegetable consumption.

**Adult Team Stations:** Adults need to be stationed around the lunchroom to assist students in the creation of their rainbow salad. (Keep in mind that one adult can do several of the tasks listed below.)

Here is a glossary for each role:

- **Salad Bar:** An adult on both sides of the salad bar ensures students actually take the required amount of colors.
- **Etiquette Adults:** All volunteers should be trained on the etiquette of the salad bar use. This is often the first time students have encountered a child-size salad bar and learning how to properly use things can be tricky. This may be the first time some students have really tried to choose more than one or two items from the bar. Watching students to be sure they place the right utensils in the right places, don't create a huge mess, and most importantly don't allow for the spreading of germs by using their hands, coughing or sneezing on the salad bar – are all important! Use of tongs and spoons, not bending under the sneeze guard, reaching across, and cross-contamination should all be reviewed with adults assisting on Rainbow Day. Adults can also remind students that they have to eat everything they take

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<sup>4</sup> Volunteer Checklist – Resources iv

<sup>5</sup> The Three Color Rule Guide – Resources v

<sup>6</sup> Rainbow Sticker – Resources vi



to receive the sticker/prize. This act will help students become more conscious of food waste in the future and help the salad bar be as sustainable as possible.<sup>7</sup>

- **Roaming Adults:** Adults walking around the room can offer free salads to students who brought lunch from home and who would like to join the activity but are uncertain they are “invited”.
- **Sticker Adults:** Adults stationed near the dish return and trash area can be sure students have *eaten* everything they chose and hand out the sticker rewards.
- **Discussion and Engagement Adults:** Adults sit with students and discuss the importance of creating a colorful plate at every meal.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 6: A Rainbow from the Salad Bar at Boulder, Colo.'s Arapahoe Ridge School

### *Making Every Day Rainbow Day - Post Event Checklist*

**Parent Email:** Follow up is important! Sending an email out to parents after the event is a good way to reinforce the message at home, spread the word about the salad bar, and get comments from the day.<sup>9</sup>

**Thank You Notes:** Thank key volunteers, principals and teachers for their participation either via email or snail mail.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Rainbow Days are a great way to introduce your students to a new or existing salad bar, to encourage healthy diets by familiarizing them with the concept of looking for different colors of fruits and vegetables, and in

<sup>7</sup> Etiquette Guide– Resources vii

<sup>8</sup> Chart of Rainbow Fruits and Vegetables plus Vitamins and Nutrients of all

<sup>9</sup> Sample Post Event Parent Letter – Resources - viii

<sup>10</sup> Sample Volunteer Thank You Letter – Resources - viiii



general allow children to become more comfortable making healthy decisions for themselves. Hosting a Rainbow Day at your school means: students eating more fruits and vegetables by taking full advantage of their salad bar, an increase in school lunch participation, bringing together multiple school groups (faculty, parents, students) to rally around the good work Food Services is doing, and most importantly happy, healthy kids!

### *Testimonials from the Lunch Room*

“In my experience, having thrown 30 Rainbow Days at elementary schools in the Boulder Valley School District, students get surprisingly into eating fresh fruits and vegetables on Rainbow Day. I often receive emails from moms and dads who claim their child *never* would touch lettuce until Rainbow Day!” (Sunny Young, School Food Project Marketing Director at the Boulder Valley School District)

“What a great idea! Remi came home today so excited about making a rainbow. She tried some different foods that she found she liked and had so much fun doing it. She mentioned that her friends would like to do this often. Thanks for making such a great effort in promoting healthy eating at school.” (Traci Hoops, Douglass Elementary School Mom)

“Just wanted to let you know that I LOVE this. Jasper came home talking about his 'rainbow', requested and ate plain lettuce with his dinner, and when he was still hungry after dessert, went and made himself another 'rainbow' with lettuce, grapes and strawberries. His 4-year old sister copied him and both kids polished off their entire bowlful of healthy stuff. I am SO impressed with this program!” (Rachel Berry, Douglass Elementary School Mom)

“I happened to be in the lunch room when you were doing your rainbow contest. It was wonderful! I've been using the rainbow concept at home since then and it's a lot of fun. Thank you for doing it! My kids are not great veggie eaters but we are taking steps to increase their consumption.” (Christine Cowles, Mesa Elementary School Mom)



Figure 7: Students Give Rainbow Day the Thumbs Up at University Hill Elementary in Boulder, Colo.



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## Rainbow Day Planning for Food Services Teams

**Know your numbers:** Rainbow Days require careful attention to typical salad bar production volume compared to the potential of a Rainbow Day when every child may take and consume a cup or more of combined prepared salad bar ingredients.

To determine adequate volume in ordering and preparation, evaluate past salad bar production records and the number of students served. Then increase your order and preparation assuming that almost every child may be eating from the bar.

**Colors, cut size, types of foods offered:** The season may drive the color selections, but the idea is to represent all the colors of the rainbow. If possible, offer more than one selection in a color category particularly if there are popular foods in a particular color. For example, purple can be both fruits and vegetables. Talk to your produce vendor about what you are doing, they may offer to discount some selections and join in the fun.

Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple
Apples	Cantelope	Summer Squash	Lettuces – Spinach,	Blueberries	Beets
Peppers	Winter Squash	Corn	Broccoli	Blue Potatoes	Plums
Strawberries	Carrots	White Peaches	Peas		Cabbage
Plums	Peaches	Tomatoes	Avocado		Lettuce
Cherries	Nectarines	*Cauliflower	Peppers		Grapes
Kidney Beans	Tomatoes	*Jicama	Zucchini		Tomatoes
Tomatoes		Garbanzo Beans	Tomatoes		

\*Though these vegetables are more “white” than yellow, they are nutritious and help you offer lots of variety in this learning activity.

## Rainbow Day Planning for Food Services Teams continued

**How much to stock of what?** This exercise emphasizes vegetables and fruits. To receive a sticker the students must choose and consume at least three colors from vegetable and fruit offerings. Green is the easiest color to stock (lettuce) and to start with. We recommend suggesting green as the base color for the exercise. As long as you have enough volume of various colors, don't worry about running out of one choice. If you plan your forecast estimating a cup of combined ingredients per child you should have plenty of product. If your school is not offering the exercise to all the students, regardless of whether they are purchasing a lunch or brown bagging, then plan the consumption around your typical average daily participation, assuming that more of the hot lunch kids will try the salad bar that day as a result of the exercise.

**Cut Size:** Cutting fruits and vegetables to small bite size pieces will help the kids try more foods without creating waste. The activity does require they eat what they select which emphasizes the "eat what you choose" rule, recommended when teaching kids about salad bars dos and don'ts.

### **What if my salad bar has proteins and grains like chicken, cheese, eggs, and croutons?**

This activity is strictly about teaching vegetable and fruit consumption and if the facilitators are following the exercise they won't count yellow cheese, brown croutons, diced chicken, etc. toward the sticker reward.

## Make a Rainbow on Your Tray Day!



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

On *Sample Date* we will be hosting a “Rainbow Day” at *Sample Elementary School*! Please read through the following information and let us know if you would like to help out on the day of the event!

Kindest Regards,

*Sample School* Food Services Team

*Sample Elementary School – Sample Date*

**Who:** **Elementary school students (at all schools in the district)** will be charged with the task of creating colorful creations from their salad bar. **Interns, volunteers, and parents** stationed at the school will encourage the students, take pictures of great looking salads, and hand out “I Made a Rainbow at the Salad Bar Today” stickers after students have proved that they not only put colorful foods on their tray, but ate them all as well!

**What:** The “Make a Rainbow on Your Tray” campaign will encourage all of our students to create colorful dishes from the salad bar and help guide them in the creation of a healthy salad. Our hope is that through this series of events, students will be more comfortable and excited with the salad bar and its contents.

**How much will it cost? It’s FREE** We are so excited about the “Make a Rainbow on Your Tray” campaign that we are giving EVERY student and school staff member the chance to make a rainbow. If a student or staff member has not purchased lunch from school on the day of the event, they will be given a FREE side salad option (side salads are normally \$1). Students who are already purchasing meals from school that day will automatically participate if they so choose.

**Photo Contest:** Pictures of great-looking salads will be taken by volunteers and three photos will be submitted from the school’s PTA to our district-wide Salad Bar Photo Contest. A panel of judges will vote to choose the top three winning photos.

Theme of photos: "Salad Bar Creations." Pictures can be of a salad or any other assortment of fruit, veggies, grains, and proteins from the salad bar.

- Timeframe: We will open the contest to students on *Sample Opening Date*. Photos will be chosen after all schools have participated.
- Prizes: Cash prizes will be awarded to the PTA for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners of the contest.
- *Sample Prizes*- to be used at the PTA's discretion

## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY!

Contact: *Sample School Communications (333) 333.3333*



- Elementary school children at *Sample School* are playing with their food this spring in hopes of winning up to \$500 for their school's PTA.
- Called the "Make a Rainbow on Your Tray" campaign, this initiative challenges the students to create colorful creations from the salad bar. Interns, volunteers, and parents stationed at the school encourage the students, take pictures of great looking salads and hand out "I Made a Rainbow at the Salad Bar Today" stickers after students have proved that they not only put colorful foods on their tray, but ATE them as well!
- Media are invited to a Rainbow Day at *Sample Elementary School* this week:
  - *Sample Elementary School*
    - *Sample Time*
    - *Sample Date*
    - *Sample Address*
- Each elementary school in the district will have a "Rainbow Day" sometime before the end of *Sample Ending Date*, at which point a panel of judges will choose the top three winning photos.
- Cash prizes will be awarded to the PTA for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners of the contest: *Sample Prizes*

# # #



## Volunteer Checklist

On the day of the event taking the following steps to orient volunteers with the lunch room and the event will help your Rainbow Day to run smoothly.

Ask volunteers to arrive at least 20 minutes ahead of time. In this time they should:

- Get the lay of the land (figure out which grades come in at what time, when will they be able to offer students who brought their lunch to school the chance to visit the salad bar?)
- Assign stations to volunteers (i.e.: Who will make the announcement to the students? Who will stand by the salad bar and be sure students are getting at least three different colors and watch for salad bar etiquette? Who will walk around the lunchroom handing out stickers to those with empty trays and talk about the importance of eating a variety of colors with students?)
- Figure out where extra stickers will be held and what will be used for students who will get a free salad (bowls, plates? Where will the dirty dishes go?)
- Be sure the volunteers know the rules of the lunchroom. Who should they ask for help in getting students attention? Who lets students out to get back to class or out to recess? How long do students have to eat? These are all important questions to be answered beforehand.
- If volunteers are allowed to help restock the salad bar, show them where everything is kept (i.e. where the fruits and veggies are stored) as well as proper kitchen etiquette (when to wash hands, wear gloves/hats, and hair restraints, etc.).
- Prepare volunteers to maintain a tidy salad bar by instructing them on the school's standard operating procedure for salad bar operation.

To prepare for volunteers to arrive, be sure to have the following things:

- An apron or something to wear to: a) distinguish them from the other adults in the room, b) protect their clothing
- A nametag: Always helps for volunteers to be identified with a nametag during these events
- Stickers portioned out for each volunteer
- Little dishes or "boats" for students trying the salad bar on Rainbow Day
- A camera for taking pictures of great looking salads and the event in general



## **The Three Color Rule**

Students must have at least three different colors (of the rainbow) on their tray. This means fruits and vegetables of the color spectrum. Meats, grains, and especially white or golden food do not count. Potatoes do not count (most children will eat potatoes with little to no encouragement, by not including potatoes in the three color rule, students are challenged to try new vegetables and fruits).

### **Foods of different colors:**

**Red:** Apples, tomatoes, red peppers, beets, cherries, cranberries, raspberries

**Orange:** Oranges, orange peppers, carrots, apricots, peaches, nectarines

**Yellow:** Bananas, yellow peppers, corn, lemon, garbanzo beans, pineapple

**Green:** Lettuce, peas, broccoli, green peppers, celery, zucchini, leafy greens

**Blue:** Blueberries, blackberries

**Purple:** Purple lettuce, plums, grapes, eggplant, raisins, kidney beans, beets



**I MADE A  
RAINBOW<sup>™</sup>**

**at the Salad Bar today**

[www.thelunchbox.org](http://www.thelunchbox.org)



## Etiquette Guide

Assigning volunteers to monitor the salad bar not only allows them to be sure students are choosing the correct number and colors of fruits and vegetables, but also means an extra set of eyes are able to watch for spillage, incorrect utensil usage, and more. Look to correct the following etiquette issues that are bound to come up at the salad bar:

- Proper use of utensils. First, students need to use utensils and not their hands. Correcting this mistake can help prevent spread of germs! Volunteers should also look out for cross-contamination and be sure students use the correct utensil for the correct product.
- Watching for cross-contamination. Students should be aware that if they accidentally spill one salad bar item into another container they need to clean up or tell someone about it.
- Staying behind the sneeze guard. This means no reaching across the salad bar under the sneeze guard and keeping one's face away from the food.
- Take what you want, eat what you take. Be sure to remind students that everything they choose must be eaten in order to receive the special prize.



### Red

Lycopene and anthocyanins!  
The delicious variety of red fruits and veggies can prevent cancer and help keep you from getting sick.

### Orange

Lots of antioxidants! Vitamin C and beta carotene (Vitamin A) galore. Fight off those colds and help out your eyes.

### Yellow

Eat yellow for antioxidants and an abundance of Vitamin C. Eating yellow also helps to maintain healthy skin strengthens bones and teeth.



### Green

So many veggies are green! Lots to choose from and lots of nutrients to gain. Eat *dark* leafy greens for your heart and eat broccoli and zucchini for reducing your chance of getting cancer.

### Blue

Blueberries. The magical fruit that helps improve your memory and aid in brain function.

### Purple

Purple colored fruits and veggies can help reduce your risk of getting a number of life-threatening diseases!





Dear *Sample Elementary School* Parents, Teachers and Staff,

Food Services hosted a very special event at *Sample School* today, called “Make a Rainbow on Your Tray Day”. The salad bar included foods of every color of the rainbow (except blue – blueberries aren’t in season yet!), and kids who both took and ate foods of different colors received a special sticker. Unlimited salad bar is always included in hot lunch, but today kids who brought lunch were offered a free trip through the salad bar. Most of the students participated.

This event was a HUGE hit, so ask your kids about it, especially if they came home with a sticker. Some kids even ate more than one salad. "Making a Rainbow" is a great visual way to teach kids how to eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, and a message that we'll be promoting in the cafeteria from now on. Did you know that even if your child brings lunch from home, s/he can buy a side salad for \$1.00? What a fantastic, low-cost way to get your kids eating more fruits and vegetables! If you'd also like to reinforce this message at home, think about having your child make a chart with the colors and let him/her track which color foods they eat each day.

Finally, we took pictures of the event. We will get to choose the three we like best and turn them into Food Services. They will choose the top three from all the schools and if one of our pictures is chosen our PTO could win *sample prize!*

All in all, a terrific event. Please let us know if you have any additional questions.

Kindest Regards,

*Sample Name*

*Sample School* Principal

\*Children may only purchase a side salad if they have brought a cold lunch. The salad is meant to be supplemental to either a hot or cold lunch and is not permitted as a stand-alone.



Dear Volunteers,

Thank you so much for all your help at yesterday's Rainbow Day! We could not have pulled off this great event without you. We added up the total and *Sample Number* of our students made a Rainbow Salad!

Here is a great picture of one of the best creations:



Thanks again, and we will be in touch about further events to help promote our great lunch program.

Kindest Regards,

Food Services