

SuperFood HEROES provides vegetable exposure and nutrition knowledge to students during their major taste bud development. In alignment with the efforts of Food Day, the vegetables are served fresh and cooked in various ways in hopes of broadening acceptability and instilling healthier eating behaviors.

SuperFood HEROES is a taste-testing and nutritional education intervention designed to increase vegetable consumption among elementary school students. There are twenty SuperFood HEROES characters designed to appeal to students and promote the super power for which they are named (Ex: Samson Spinach, Sabrina Sweet Potato, Rhett Red Pepper). This research-based intervention educates students on the “superhero-like” nutrients that vegetables provide in our diet. It was created in response to the recent changes in the USDA school food standards to encourage students to consume more of the healthy options offered in the school cafeteria. The intervention lasts for a minimum of twenty weeks and provides forty opportunities for students to sample at least five different vegetables offered in the school cafeteria. Research shows that the more times children taste a food, the more likely they are to begin liking the food. Sometimes, however, it can take eight or more times of trying the same food to start enjoying it. Because of this, students are encouraged to taste the same vegetable multiple times. Students receive incentives according to how many times they sample the product.

Participating schools have partnered with Indiana University to collect taste preference data before and after the intervention. Data will be collected from a sample of fourth graders, although the intervention may be provided to other grade levels as well.

Expected outcomes of the SuperFood HEROES program include an increase in vegetable recognition and consumption among students, an increase in students’ preferences for targeted vegetables, and an increase in knowledge about the benefits of consuming the targeted vegetables.

Additional benefits of the program include increasing the number of specific vegetables offered in the school meal, providing valuable feedback to the school food service department regarding vegetables most enjoyed by students, and overall enhancing the HEROES Initiative efforts funded by the Welborn Baptist Foundation.