

URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE & PILOT LIGHT

**PARTNERS IN
FOOD EDUCATION**



URBAN SCHOOL
 **FOOD**
ALLIANCE

 **PILOT
LIGHT**

ABOUT PILOT LIGHT

Pilot Light began when four Chicago chefs—Jason Hammel, Paul Kahan, Matthias Merges, and Justin Large—wanted to give back to their Chicago community by teaching students about food through food. They collaborated with educators and other experts to develop a unique Common Core-aligned Food Education curriculum that teaches students where food comes from, how it grows and how the choices they make affect their bodies and the environment. The first lessons were delivered in a single Chicago public school, where the model was tested and honed.

Today, Pilot Light provides a Food Education Fellowship, The Food Education Center, and a new suite of ready-to-use resources, Pilot Light Anywhere, all working together to teach youth through their groundbreaking Food Education Standards. While the model has adapted, the mission remains: Support and center students as they learn and advocate for informed choices by bridging the lessons they learn in their classrooms to the foods on their lunch trays, at home, and in their communities. Since its founding in 2010, the organization has partnered with 233 teachers across 40 schools to reach over 15,000 PreK-12th grade students.

ABOUT URBAN SCHOOL FOOD ALLIANCE

The Urban School Food Alliance was created by school food professionals to address the unique needs of the nation's largest school districts. The members of the Alliance strive to provide fresh, healthy, and delicious meals to students, collaborate to share best practices, develop procurement standards, and advocate for the health and wellness of students.

Collectively, 15 Alliance member districts offer meal services to nearly 3.8 million students daily. Annually, they serve over 655 million meals and spend more than \$825 million on food and food supplies across the country. School meals provide the most consistent source of daily nutrition for the majority of students served by Alliance member districts and Alliance members work each day to ensure these students have access to the healthy meals they need to thrive. When students eat well, they also do well in school.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP

Health and equity challenges unfolding throughout 2020 brought a heightened awareness to the reality that millions of families struggling to access healthy food are the same families at highest risk of diet-related disease and reduced quality of life. In October 2020, Pilot Light and Urban School Food Alliance joined forces to provide solutions.

The partnership began an expansion of Pilot Light's food education program nationwide through recruitment and implementation in the school district network of the Alliance. With the financial and operational support of the Urban School Food Alliance, Pilot Light stands ready to bring food education to life in classrooms and cafeterias across the county. Dr. Alex DeSorbo-Quinn, Pilot Light Executive Director explains, "Our partnership with the Urban School Food Alliance is helping us grow and develop as an organization. With the Alliance district Fellows, we are attempting to connect food education in the classroom to the real-life lessons students receive through the food they eat in their cafeterias."

Food connects people and has a deep impact on health, culture, relationships, history and the environment; this concept is deeply ingrained in the missions of both organizations. By extending the reach of food education to students throughout the country, Pilot Light and the Alliance are working together to give students the tools they need to solve today's challenges and create a new, more equitable food future for all.

THE PANDEMIC PIVOT

Partnership conversations between Pilot Light and the Alliance began in early 2020; however, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. Pilot Light quickly adapted and worked to bring all its Food Education Center content online, available free of charge. The Food Education Fellowship transitioned to virtual professional development opportunities and Pilot Light created a lesson library called Pilot Light Anywhere, which offers ready-to-use lessons, video content and food education experiences to support teachers' needs for virtual or in-person instruction. The Alliance, working side-by-side,

helped to recruit fellows throughout their member districts and ultimately assisted in onboarding Pilot Light Fellows from Chicago Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, Orange County Schools and New York City Public Schools.

"We have learned over the past year that training can be done effectively virtually and the resources that were created for eLearning are very valuable in the in-person classroom setting as well. We have also proved that you don't need to have physical food in the classroom to teach food education," explains Katie Colvin, Vice President of Programs for Pilot Light. Through the partnership with Urban School Food Alliance, Pilot Light found new strategies to educate young people about food choices and food environments. Dr. DeSorbo-Quinn adds, "If there was a silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be our partnership with the Urban School Food Alliance. Because of the Alliance, we were able to expand nationally and open our programming to more teachers and students. We have learned so much this year and every change has made our program stronger. Nationwide expansion was always the vision for our organization. The virtual learning environment and our expansion through the Alliance helped make it possible."

THE IMPACT OF PILOT LIGHT

This unique school year brought about many challenges for Pilot Light Fellows and all education stakeholders, but food education established its value. Pilot Light Fellows consistently used food education to engage students and make classroom connections from afar. Food education offered teachers new and different ways to teach in an ever-changing environment and allowed students to act and engage in food justice at a critical moment in our nation's history. Founding member and chef Paul Kahan explains, "Food relates to everything - it relates to math, it relates to science, it relates to social studies. Food is a language that students understand more than anything else." This year in particular, teachers in virtual environments needed strategies to keep kids engaged in learning. Pilot Light filled that need.

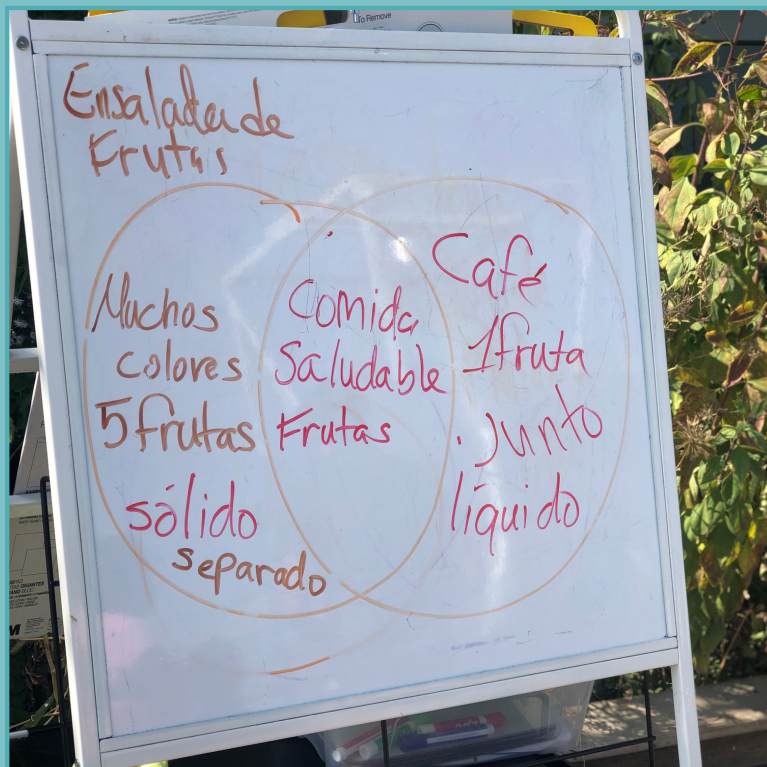
Food Education Fellow and elementary school teacher in New York City Public Schools, Grace Chang found classroom connections through the exploration of food cultures. “We are creating windows to help kids connect and share traditions and cultures that are not familiar.” Pilot Light lessons also helped her class understand the connection between food and health. “We learned together that healthy eating looks different for everyone. It looks different for every family and different for every person and for every body type,” she adds. Her class intends to turn those ideas into action, reporting an increase from 50% to 90% for students that felt like they could eat a fruit and vegetable at lunch.

With lack of food access, issues of justice and equality, and inequities in health and health care in full view, this year also provided real opportunities for students to act as food advocates. Students in Alliance districts learned more about family food cultures and worked to reshape family diets, as was the case with the student who developed a Powerpoint for her family to encourage them to reduce meat consumption. Students explored lack of food access in their communities, including one student educating her class on how gentrification was pricing small restaurants and local markets out of her neighborhood. Students created social media campaigns on climate change and wrote letters to teachers explaining the benefits of whole grains. Students even learned how to change their own lives by exposure and exploration of careers in culinary arts.



Pilot Light Fellows reported that food gave them a useful lever to pique students' interest in topics and students responded with high retention of food education lessons. Chicago Public Schools Fellow and high school social science teacher Edward Gadiant reflects on the challenging school year and why he plans to explore food education with future classes, "Pilot Light consistently engaged students and the output they were creating was evidence of deeper thinking and understanding of what we were studying."

The Pilot Light Anywhere model also proved instrumental to help teachers make connections with students virtually. "Each year I am looking for ways to build community - we are a family now. Pilot Light was a way to deepen our relationship," explains Tamara Leachman, elementary math teacher and Chicago Public Schools Food Education Fellow. "Pilot Light instilled in me that there is always a way. During this time where virtual learning is necessary, using Pilot Light allowed me to engage my students and make an impact even without hands-on teaching," she adds. Ms. Leachman also reported Pilot Light lessons were the highlight of the week with consistent attendance at 97%, up from 91% at the beginning of the school year. Mr. Gadiant had a similar experience, "When it was difficult to find connections or establish community, the similarities that food brings to everyone's lives were very useful. Students made connections between food, each other, and topics we were talking about in class."



CAFETERIA CONNECTIONS

As Pilot Light and the Alliance move forward together, they are excited to deepen connections between the lessons students learn in their classrooms to the foods they receive on their lunch trays. Dr. Katie Wilson, Executive Director of the Urban School Food Alliance sees the critical need. “Every kid has the right to understand the food system, where their food comes from and how to access the best food for their bodies. Pilot Light gives them the tools they need.”

School meal programs are an effective safety net to ensure children have what they need to be healthy and successful in the classroom and in their communities. Tarrah DeClemente, Director of Health Policy and Partnerships for Chicago Public Schools, knows these programs are the best vehicle for food education knowledge. “We see the meals program as the cornerstone of a healthy school environment. They are the guiding light for all health initiatives in our district,” she says.

“For so long, we have been saying [nutrition education] could fit anywhere,” says DeClemente. Pilot Light brings that reality to life. Pilot Light builds capacity to provide food education by equipping teachers with the resources and professional development to make them the food and nutrition educators. Using the food education standards and the skills to integrate food and nutrition into all core subjects and into the lunch period, nutrition education is no longer just one more thing in a growing list of demands, it is built into the school day.



CREATING ADVENTURE

Ms. DeClemente also appreciates that the Food Education Standards provide a practical, tangible space to teach children about new foods, how to cook them, how to incorporate more healthy foods into their daily meals and how not to waste them. This translates into more adventurous eaters in the cafeteria who understand a holistic approach to eating that encourages them to eat their full school meal - fruit, vegetable, milk, and all.

“Anytime we can strengthen the connection between the school meal menus, school cafeterias and the classroom there is a benefit. The more a student learns about eating a variety of foods, new spices, textures and cultures of a community, the better relationship they will have with food as an adult,” explains Stephen O’Brien, Director of Strategic Partnership and Policy for the New York City Department of Education Office of School Food. The benefits extend home as well, with parents of Pilot Light students reporting a 20% increase in confidence that their child will try new foods.



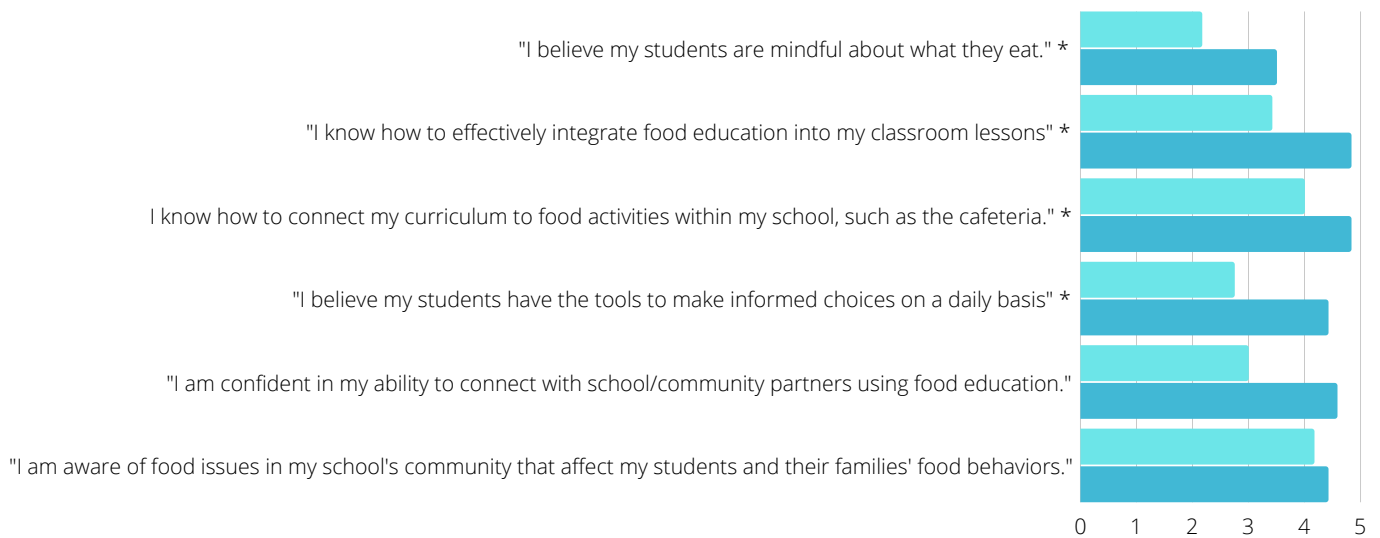
LASTING CHANGE

In each school year, Pilot Light conducts pre and post surveys to assess knowledge, growth and fulfillment among Pilot Light participants. During the 2020-2021 Fellowship, Teacher Fellows (n=12) and students (n=331) completed pre and post surveys. Teacher Fellow surveys were scored based on a 5-point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) and students received multiple choice questions. Survey results showed that Pilot Light created lasting change in both students and teachers.

Students showed a significant increase in knowledge of local foods, while teachers reported significant gains in students ability to eat mindfully and to make informed food choices on a daily basis. Students and teachers also gained awareness and knowledge of how food issues in their school's community affect family food behaviors.

Pilot Light Fellows consistently agreed that Pilot Light should be a part of every teacher's professional development and training and believe students deserve food education in their classrooms. Fellows also strongly agreed that teaching food education had a positive impact on their teaching.

PILOT LIGHT 2020-2021 FOOD EDUCATION FELLOW SURVEY RESULTS



Teacher Fellows (n=12) completed pre and post surveys during the 2020-2021 Fellowship. Each item on the survey was scored based on a 5-point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Pre and post test results are based on average scores. *= statistically significant result



BUILDING BRIDGES

As Pilot Light and the Urban School Food Alliance plan for the future, they look forward to recruiting additional Food Education Fellows, establishing school district-wide partnerships, and finding new connections between food education and school food. Executive Director Dr. DeSorbo-Quinn appreciates the collaborative approach. "We are coming together with food education as the bridge that meets all our collective goals. Food education touches on social, emotional learning, on health and nutrition education, on food advocacy, equity, and justice. All of the topics that are top of mind at this moment in time are addressed in these standards." Together, they will continue to build the field of food education for classrooms, cafeterias, and communities throughout the country.