

October 28, 2024

Getting Started: School Nutrition Advocacy

Leveraging your expertise, interests, skills, and networks to influence change



About Balanced

Balanced is a nutrition security and public health advocacy organization.

With a focus on **nutrient-based interventions**, such as increasing dietary fiber, we work to enhance the healthfulness of institutional food service menus. Through advocacy, technical support, partnerships, and policy initiatives, we support advocates and drive change, particularly in K-12 school food services.

Institutional Support

Training, support, connections, and technical assistance to food service professionals on menu-reform initiatives.

Advocacy

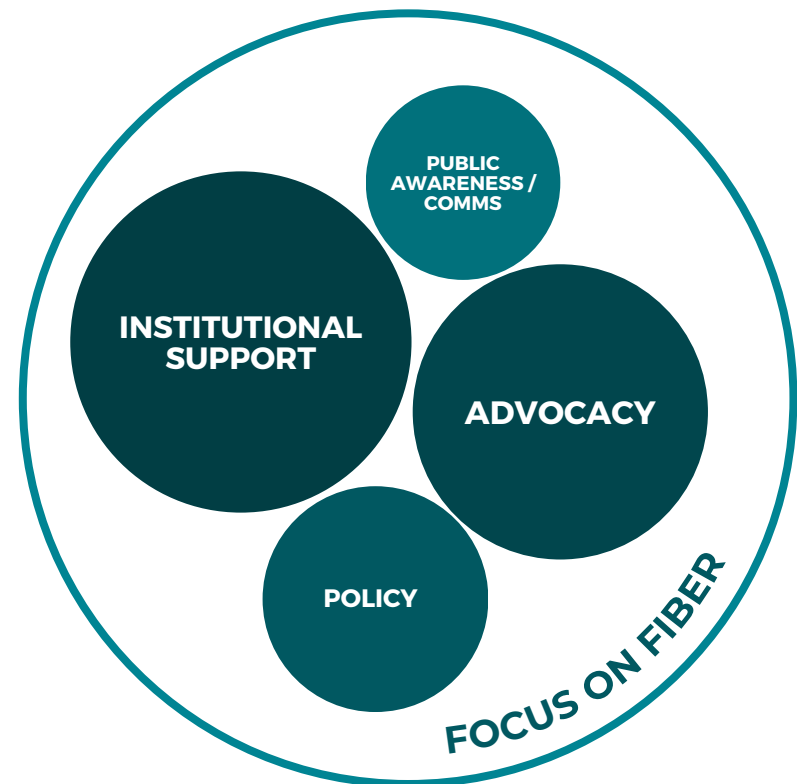
Training, resources, and campaign support for healthy-menu advocates and institutional stakeholders. High-impact menu reform and nutrition policy campaigns.

Nutrition Policy

Partner with policymakers and community leaders to encourage health-promoting school nutrition policy reforms.

Public Awareness / Comms

Strategic communications projects to generate attention for and engagement in high-impact campaign/projects.



Together, today...

Build on conversation started at virtual MIG meeting in April.

Expand on and clarify the scope and scale of advocacy actions.

Identify opportunities for pediatricians and health care professionals to engage in school nutrition advocacy.



Unique Role of Health Care Professionals

Expertise

Health care professionals' expertise plays a crucial role in the advocacy process by providing evidence-based insights and authoritative recommendations that shape policies and advocacy initiatives.

Trust & Credibility

Trust in, and credibility of, health care professionals means your advocacy efforts and viewpoints are highly valued by decision-makers and the public alike -- making your involvement in policy and advocacy efforts even more impactful.

Influence, Networks, & Community

Health care professionals can leverage their influence and networks to facilitate dialogue and action in the advocacy process, bridging gaps between medical evidence, community needs, and decision-makers. Your networks within healthcare and your community are of extreme value to advocacy efforts.

Additionally, by caring for young people, you have...

- Access to - and relationships with - stakeholders directly affected by school nutrition
 - Patients
 - Families
 - Colleagues
- Deep understanding of your community's demographics, wants/needs, and receptiveness to change
- Quantitative and qualitative information about impact of nutrition on your community
- Ongoing engagement with nutrition science and public health research



Advocacy

(broadly defined)

Supporting, promoting, or arguing in favor of a cause, policy, or idea. Typically aimed at bringing about social or legislative change.

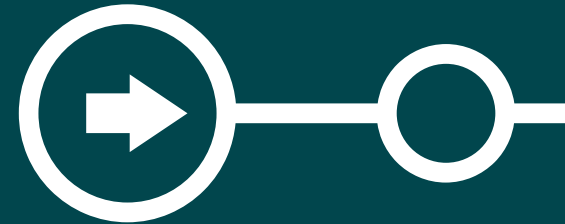
Advocacy

(broadly applied)

Actions you take to create change.

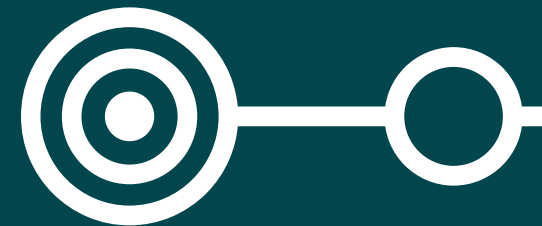
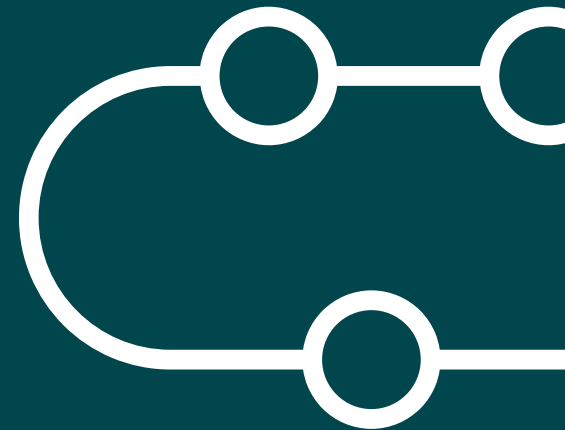
Advocacy may look like...

- Highly organized public awareness or legislative campaigns



but it also may be...

- Community-specific organizing and education efforts
- Helping your patients/community access pre-existing resources
- Connecting community members with decision makers



Elements of Effective Advocacy

Clear outcome, goal, or policy

Organized & active supporters

Engaged decision makers

As you explore different ways for you to get involved in school nutrition advocacy efforts, it's helpful to identify opportunities that

1. align with a cause you believe in and
2. are a good fit for your interests, capacity, resources, and/or skillset.

For example: You may want to lend your time to a local campaign calling for the removal of processed meat on menus, but you don't have time to join a monthly school wellness committee. You may, however, know a school board member and can introduce the campaign to that decision maker.

Getting Started

Existing Efforts

Lend your voice to existing/ongoing campaigns or initiatives.

Pros: Often less intense, established supporter network, abundance of opportunities to take action

Cons: Less influence over campaign/initiative

New Efforts

Lead new campaign/initiative or support launch of new efforts

Pros: More influence over key decisions/direction of initiative

Cons: More resource intensive, may limit capacity to engage with other ongoing efforts





**The scope and scale of
advocacy efforts exist
on a continuum(s)**

Intensity



Intensity

The amount of resources (time, effort, social capital, etc...) required to create change

Impact

The degree to which the action(s) affect change

Impact

Element + Examples

Clear goal or policy proposal

- Make nondairy fluid milk available to any student who requests it without a doctor's note
- Provide a fully plant-based meal to students who submit a prior request
- Meatless Monday (or equivalent)
- Fully plant-based menu [X #] of days per week
- 50% of menu options plant-based every day
- Remove processed meats from menus by [X date]
- Include a plant-based unit in nutrition education

Clear goal or policy proposal (examples, continued)

Add

Add plant-based milk options

Add PB options (veg chicken nuggets to standard menu)

Add PB protein to current offerings (tofu to salad bar)

Remove

Remove processed meats

Doctor's note requirement

Replace

Replace beef in chili with beans

Replace 50% of burgers with veg option

Overhaul

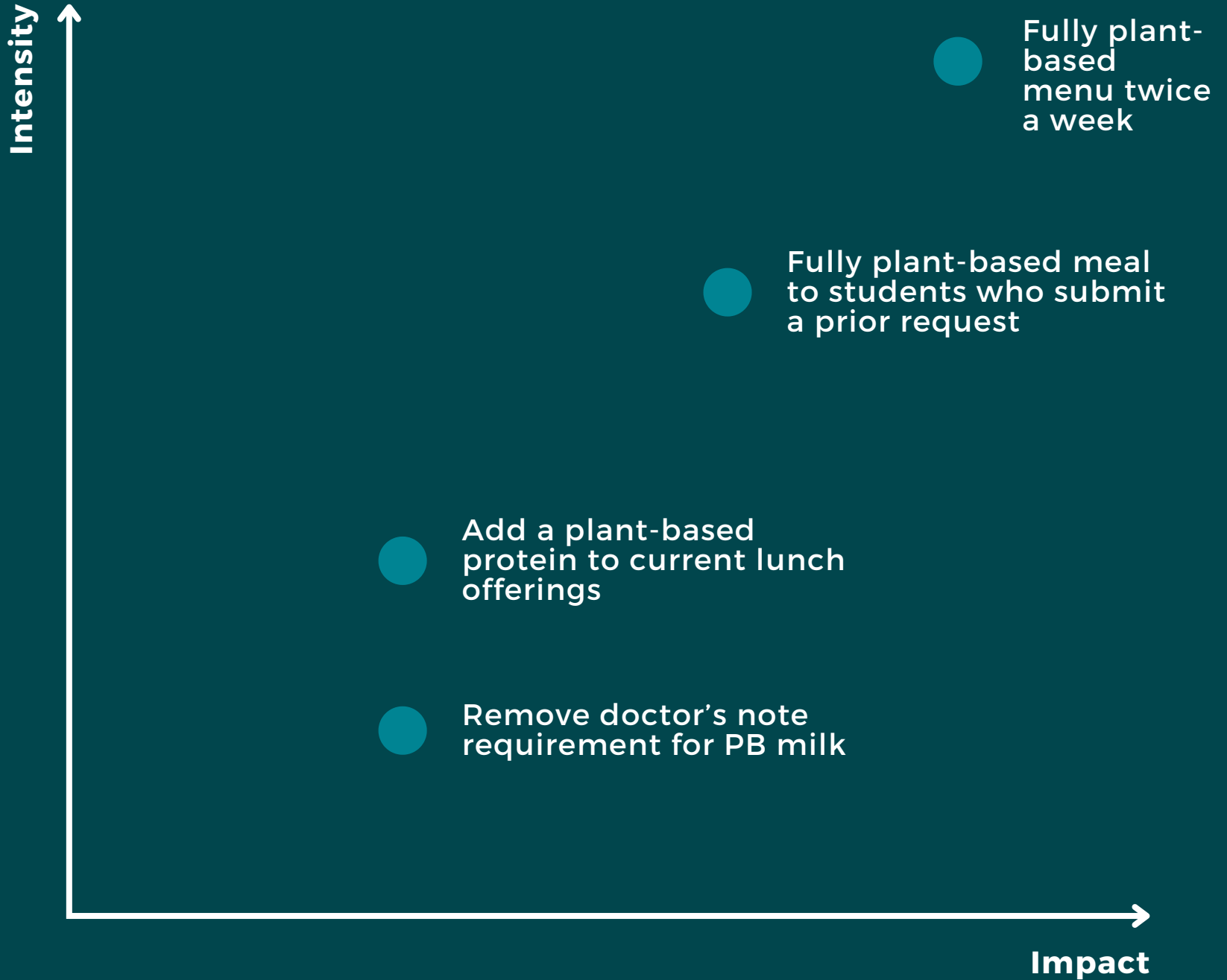
Fully PB day once a week

50% PB menu every day of the week

Example “asks/goals”

Based on unique community context, these examples may or may not land in the same place

Goal or Policy



Element + Examples

Organized & active supporters (example advocacy actions)

- Sign a petition / endorse a campaign
- Reshare educational or advocacy content on social media
- Distribute handouts or other materials to friends / family
- Send an email of support to decision makers
- Conduct / compile supporting research
- Develop and distribute educational materials: pamphlets, webinars, or other educational materials for schools, parents, and community members
- Create advocacy content (op-eds, blogs, social media posts, emails, policy briefs, recommendations)
- Attend campaign / initiative events
- Provide testimony (legislative hearing, school board meeting, etc...)

Element + Examples

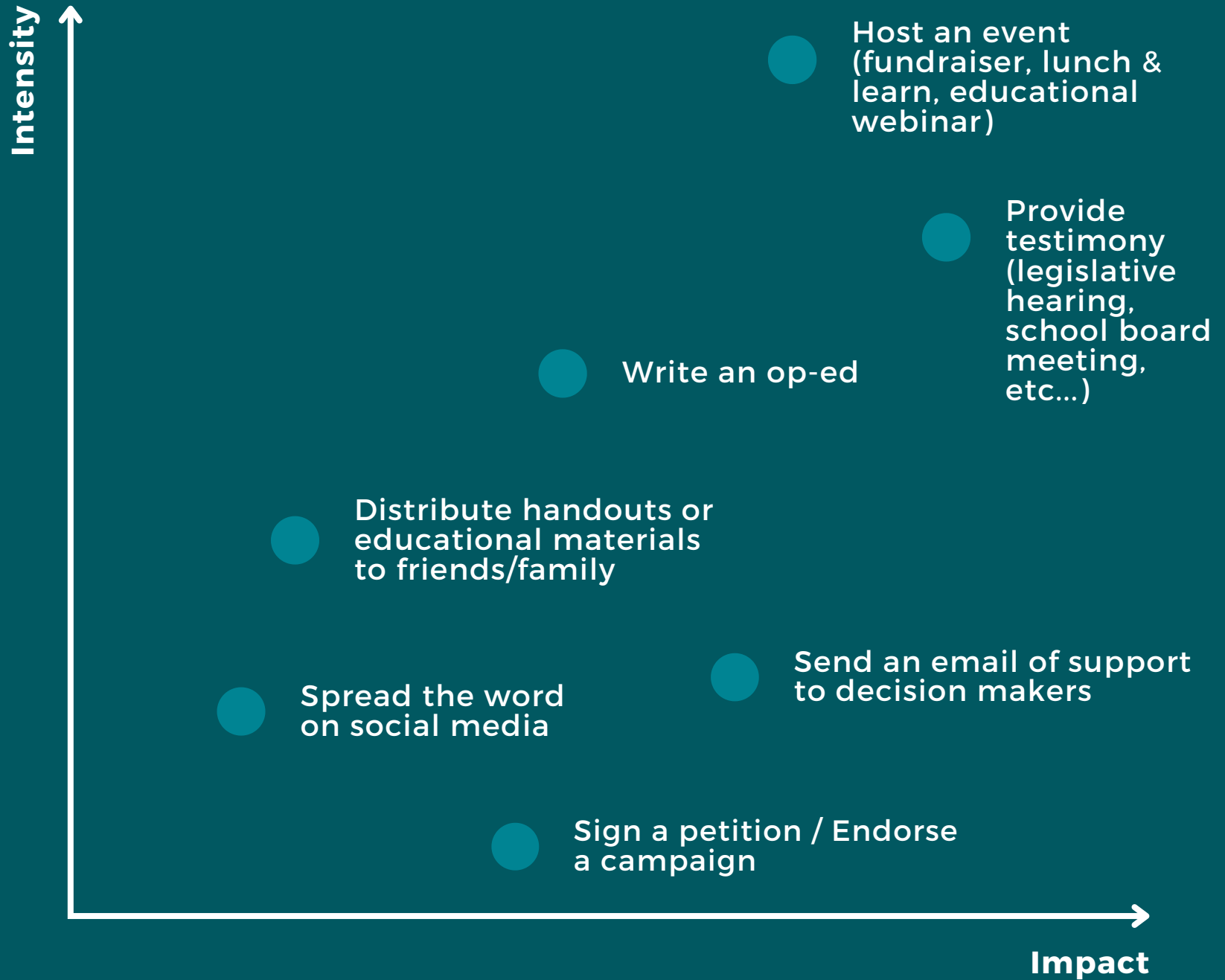
Organized & active supporters (example advocacy actions)

- Organize campaign actions or events
- Mobilize others to take action or attend those events
- Provide a service like website design, graphic design, etc...
- Donate to fundraising efforts
- Facilitate connection with decision makers
- Volunteer on an advisory or steering committee
- Host an event (fundraiser, lunch and learn, educational webinar)
- Launch & lead a national campaign
- Launch & lead a state campaign
- Launch & lead a local or community campaign

Example advocacy actions

Based on your own interests, capacity, and resources, these advocacy actions may or may not land in the same place.

Existing Efforts



New Efforts

Intensity



Promote initiative within networks (digital, social, etc...)



Compile research/create supporting materials for initiative/ campaign-ask



Launch a community campaign



Launch a state-level campaign



Launch a national campaign

Impact



Element + Examples

Engaged Decision Makers (actions & considerations)

Actions

- Research
 - People and positions (nutrition team)
 - People and positions (admin)
 - Program operations
 - Food service model
 - Operators (self-op or contracted)
 - Current Menus
 - Current nutrition initiatives
 - Previous nutrition initiatives
 - Wellness or sustainability goals
 - Motivations / barriers
 - Current nutrition or procurement policies
- Contact & Engage
 - Email / call
 - 1:1 or group meetings
 - Compile and share petition signatures
 - Encourage supporters to contact
- Connect
 - Make introductions
 - Share contact info
 - Bring in experts or partner organizations

Element + Examples

Engaged Decision Makers (actions & considerations)

Considerations

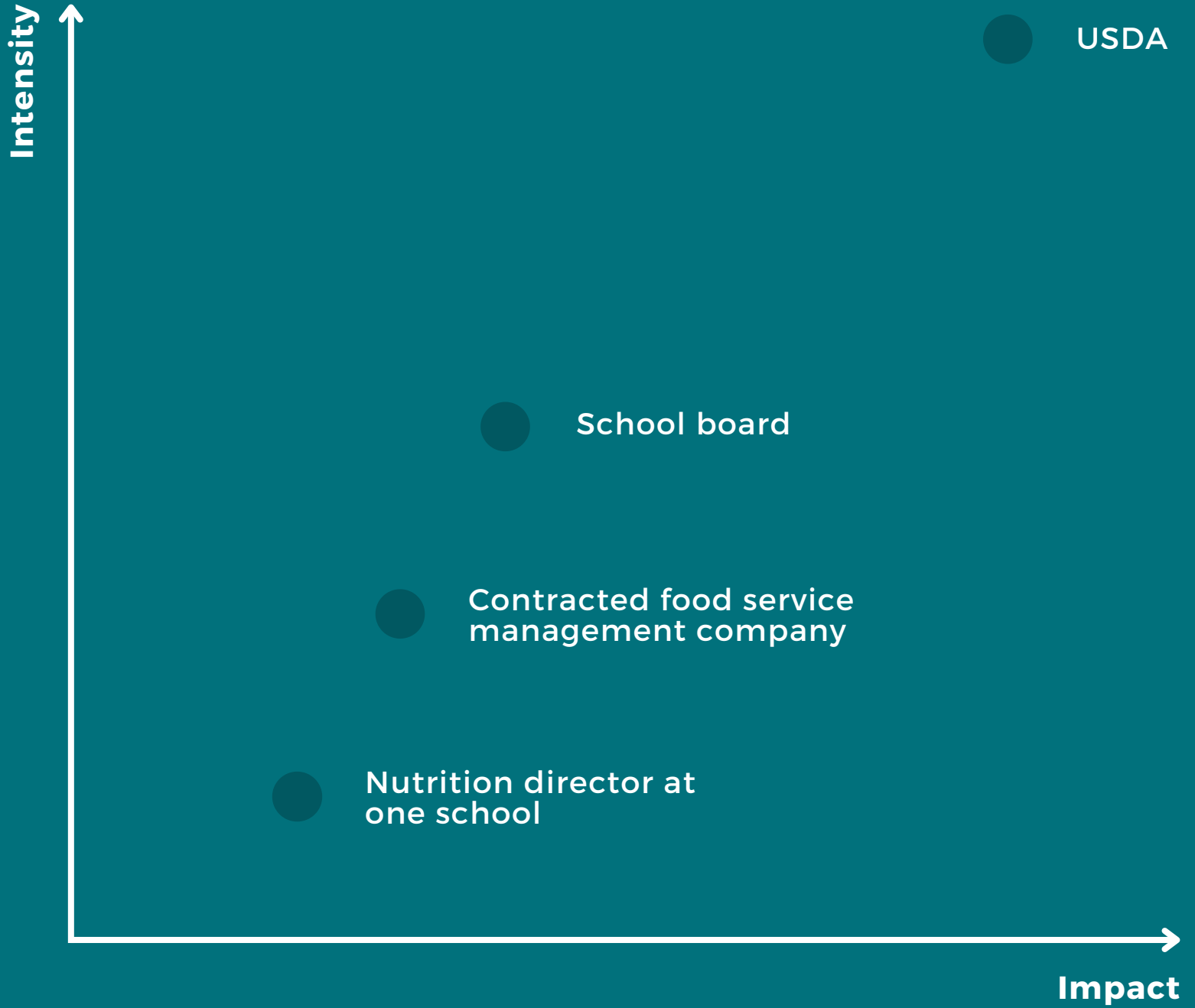
- Where in the system are the decisions made, approved, or vetoed?
 - Individual person
 - Program (nutrition team or admins)
 - Internal decision like a school nutrition team or third party like a food service management company
 - School, district, state, or federal decision
- Opposition
 - Who else is trying to influence decision makers?
 - What are the opposition arguments?
- Influential/compelling advocacy figurehead
 - Should parents, students, or organization be the “lead”



Example decision makers

Based on your goals, research, and program considerations, the relevant decision makers may be different

Key Decision Makers



Easy Ways to Take Action

- Lend Support to Ongoing Campaigns

- Encourage Participation in Relevant Initiatives ←

Lend Support to Ongoing Campaigns

Support: Balanced's Focus on Fiber (balanced.org/fiber)

Objective: Promote fiber-rich standards in school meal pattern as well as educate the public on the benefits of fiber.

Ways to take action: Endorse campaign, share materials, spread the word. Encourage local fiber-focused meal initiatives and educate parents on fiber's health benefits.

Support: Healthy Future Students and Earth Act (ForKidsAndThePlanet.org)

Objective: Encourage schools to serve more plant-based and climate-friendly meals, reducing the environmental impact of school food.

Ways to take action: Advocate for plant-based, sustainable meal options in schools by signing petition, contacting lawmakers, and educating families on climate-friendly eating.

Oppose: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act (pcrm.org/HealthyStudents)

Ways to take action: Write or sign letters to legislators explaining the evidence-based reasons for opposing the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act. Use patient data (in an anonymized form) or research findings to showcase the impact of whole milk on children's health.

Encourage Participation in Aligned Initiatives



More Plants on Plates Illinois (moreplantsonplatesil.com)

Objective: More Plants on Plates Illinois is an initiative raising awareness about an Illinois law that directs school districts to provide plant-based lunch with prior request.

Pediatrician Role: Endorse campaign, share materials, spread the word. Encourage local fiber-focused meal initiatives and educate parents on fiber's health benefits.

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