



— Mission + Background —

Pilot Light is a nonprofit organization bringing Food Education to every student through an educator-led, student-centric approach. They give educators the standards-based tools they need to take customizable Food Education lessons and experiences into their classrooms, giving kids the chance to explore and engage with how food fits into their lives and communities, and how they fit into the food system.

The organization was founded in 2010 by Jason Hammel, Paul Kahan, Matthias Merges, and Justin Large, four award-winning Chicago chefs who were inspired by Michelle Obama's Let's Move! Campaign. What started in one classroom now reaches over 2,500 educators across 26 states and online.

— Leading the Way —

Pilot Light is a trailblazer in this space, creating comprehensive, multifaceted Food Education Standards that provide educators with an adaptable framework to build lessons that complement their unique classrooms and align with their state's education standards. The first-of-their-kind standards, first published in 2018 and updated in 2025, were developed for educators by a multidisciplinary team of experts, including teachers, school administrators, chefs, farmers, medical experts, and psychologists. You can access the standards here: [FOOD EDUCATION STANDARDS](#)

— What's New? —

Pilot Light is relaunching its [Food Education Center™](#) (FEC), featuring over 200 free-to-access lesson plans, videos, toolkits, and recipes designed for all grade levels. The digital hub offers teachers, parents, students, and school administrators 24/7 access to the organization's resources, all grounded in Pilot Light's Food Education Standards, making it as easy as possible to let kids learn, both in the classroom and at home, about how food connects them to the world around them.

This fall, Pilot Light will also launch its inaugural New York City chapter, the first formalized chapter outside its Chicago headquarters. The chapter comes as NYC Public Schools begins to roll out its new Food Education standards, modeled after Pilot Light's Food Education Standards and in collaboration with the organization.



— Key Stats —

Since starting in one Chicago classroom, Pilot Light has been shaping the Food Education space to reach people in practical ways, and it's just getting started.

Today, Pilot Light

- Operates in **26 states** and **online**
- In **302 schools** across **76 school districts**
- Working with over **2,500 educators**
- Reaching over **143,000 students across PreK through 12th grade**
- Administering **7000+ hours of educator professional development** since 2019

The Food Education Center™

- Offers over **200 free lesson plans**
- Reaches over **2,500 users**

— What's Next? —

At its core, Pilot Light believes that all students deserve access to Food Education that celebrates the central role food plays in their lives and prepares them to become knowledgeable and engaged changemakers for a better food system. To accomplish this, Pilot Light is working to remove the barriers educators often face when trying to implement new material into the classroom by creating easy-to-access, easy-to-use resources that can be adjusted as needed to fit classes, topics, and existing education standards.

The relaunch of the Food Education Center™ and Pilot Light's inaugural chapter in NYC marks an exciting step in the organization's broadening impact and shows real progress toward making Food Education part of every child's learning.

— Leadership Bios —

Alexandra DeSorbo-Quinn is the **Executive Director** of Pilot Light. She has been working at the organization since 2014, where she has proudly worked in partnership with many educators, chefs, and community members to grow the reach of our Food Education programs from one school to 79, impacting over 20,000 students nationwide. Alex began her career at Harlem Hospital in New



York City, managing its Stroke Center. Alex went on to join the research faculty of the Neurological Institute at Columbia University, where she managed two federally funded community-based studies looking at the impacts of arts-based public health education in New York City Public Schools and faith-based institutions.

Mallory Ulaszek is Pilot Light's **Chief Operations Officer (COO)**, where she oversees the implementation of the strategic plan and develops the foundation to help Pilot Light grow. Mallory has spent 10+ years working alongside Pilot Light, first serving as Co-President, founding the Young Professionals Board as well as producing fundraising events. Most recently, she served as Co-Founder and CEO of Week of the Website, during which she was recognized by Inc. Magazine as one of the top 500 Female Founders of 2025.

Taylor Meredith is the **Education Policy Advisor**, overseeing policy work on the local, state and federal levels. After graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in Policy Studies, she joined New York City Teaching Fellows and learned with the best while teaching special education at a public school in East Harlem. She also earned a Master's Degree in Special and General Education Curriculum from Hunter College. Five years later, she moved back to the Chicago area and continued teaching 5th grade. For the past seven years, Taylor worked as an instructional coach, supporting teachers and district administration through a variety of initiatives.

— Pilot Light Voices —

“Pilot Light really shaped how I think about food and how to approach teaching about it. This has really impacted how we talk about food in my class and with my kids!”

— Pilot Light Fellow Kate N.

“My understanding of how food affects my life has improved. I learned about how to grow different plants and eat them safely. I also learned about more sustainable options, like Kernza instead of wheat.”

— 7th Grade Pilot Light student



“My favorite part of the school year has been cooking and trying different foods. It has been so fun and is something we did together as a class like a big family.”

– 3rd Grade Pilot Light student

“Pilot Light taught me the relevance of Food Education across all subject areas. My students' engagement increased as they related and understood the food education standards. We loved exploring, tasting, and cooking new food!”

– Pilot Light Fellow Andrea R.

“What Pilot Light is doing is so compelling because it enables children—all children—to engage in the kind of experiential learning about food that excites and stays with them as lifelong learning. It's an approach that is scalable and has the legs to be of great educational and social value across the nation.”

– John Allegrante, Professor of Health Education, Teachers College Columbia University

“Having seen it firsthand, I'm so inspired by how Pilot Light brings the power of food into classrooms across the country, opening hearts and minds to the magic food can create in our lives. Their work to impact communities nationwide through food is remarkable, and it is guided by their Food Education Standards, an incredible tool for building connections and community through food in schools.”

“The standards give kids a way to talk about and explore food's many roles in the world, helping them see how food connects us, shapes our lives, and reflects our cultures. Each Standard is like a stepping stone, bringing us closer to understanding and appreciating one another through a shared love of food. Every teacher, school, and community nationwide should embrace the Food Education Standards to make food a part of everyday learning for their kids.”

– Chef Carla Hall



Learn more at www.pilotlightchefs.org, and follow [@pilotlightchefs](https://www.instagram.com/pilotlightchefs) on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. You can browse our free lesson plan library in our [Food Education Center](#)!