

Student Nutrition program has *measurable* impact on kids' choices

Fruit and vegetable consumption up significantly following "Healthy Plate, Healthy Me" program

Beavercreek Schools' Student Nutrition Department believes that teaching elementary-age students healthy eating habits is important if they are to make good food choices later in life.

Each year, the Department strives to teach students about the importance of a balanced diet through kitchen tours, classroom talks and other educational efforts. This year, one such program at **Shaw Elementary** led to a marked increase in students' fruit and vegetable consumption.

Teaching kids what healthy eating is about

"A lot of kids don't understand what makes a healthy meal," said Jeannette Niezgodski, Shaw Elementary's Satellite Café manager, who created a program called "Healthy Plate, Healthy Me" to teach students about the importance of a balanced diet. "Kids can have up to a half cup of fruit and three quarters of a cup of vegetables as part of the set school lunch price, but walk by these nutrition-rich foods every day because they don't understand their benefits."

As part of her program, Niezgodski takes first through fifth grade students on kitchen tours and discusses how different types of foods help the body. She explains healthy serving sizes, and helps students put together balanced meals using pretend food. Each student is also asked to design a tray that showcases what a balanced meal should look like. These trays hang from the ceiling of Shaw's kitchen, providing a colorful backdrop for her presentations.

Measuring the impact of education efforts

Niezgodski also addresses the finer points of nutrition, explaining that a whole apple offers more nutritional benefits than apple juice. "We used to sell more juice, but since 'Healthy Plate, Healthy Me,' **fruit consumption is up 42.5 percent and juice consumption is down by 20.4 percent.**"

Even greater gains were made in vegetable consumption following the program. **The percentage of students taking a quarter cup of veggies with their meals went up by a whopping 130.8 percent, and 24.4 percent more students chose half-cup servings of vegetables.**



Jeannette Niezgodski, Shaw Elementary's Satellite Café manager, discusses the components of a balanced meal with students (above and below)



"These sorts of programs play an important part in encouraging students to make healthy food choices," said Connie Little, Beavercreek Schools' Student Nutrition supervisor. "We work hard every day, in every one of our buildings, to educate students about the benefits of good nutrition."

Programs like Niezgodski's have won Beavercreek Schools **10 consecutive awards for Excellence in Student Nutrition** from the Ohio Department of Education, and numerous individual awards from the School Nutrition Association of Ohio.



SEE

a slide show of photos on our website