

Norwich school tries to get healthy

Young students try out nutritious fare



Second-grader Jerameii Ramos, 7, holds up a picture of blueberries as UConn Dietetics Student Kristen Chasse talks about the color of fruit. The class later tried fruit pizza as part of the Healthy Kids program at Uncas Elementary School in Norwich. Aaron Flaum/ NorwichBulletin.com

By Anna Maria Lemoine

[For The Bulletin](#)

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Norwich, Conn. —

Without a moment of hesitation, most of the students in Barri Crowley’s second-grade class took their first taste of fruit pizza Monday afternoon.

And gave it their solid endorsement.

Gobbling up the snack — a whole grain bagel with cream cheese, strawberries, bananas and kiwi — is part of a series of taste-tests students at Uncas Elementary School will undertake through March.

“I liked it,” Jonah LaFlesh, 7, said. “It was just as good as real pizza.”

Taste-test

Norwich Public Schools' officials are introducing fruits and vegetables to students at a handful of schools across the district one test at a time, thanks to a grant from Action for Healthy Kids, a national organization that works with schools to help kids learn to be healthier

In February, a third-grade class at Uncas will taste-test assorted tropical fruits. Earlier this month, students at John M. Moriarty tried acorn squash, and students at Thames River Academy had spinach.



“The goal is to introduce foods that might possibly go into the school lunch menu in the future,” said Roberta Jacobs, the director of food services for Norwich Public Schools. “The kids love it. We want to keep introducing new things because they love them, go home and say, ‘Mom, go get this.’”

“It then becomes a part of their life, not just their school lunch.”

Regulations

Norwich is working ahead of federal regulations that will force districts to make any meal they serve — including breakfasts, snacks and lunches — healthier.

Those regulations, which should be passed this week, Jacobs said, include increasing servings of whole grains, fruits and vegetables and dropping the amount of sodium.

The district already changed all breads to whole grains. If regulations are passed, next year students can expect a full cup of fruits and vegetables instead of the half-cup they receive now.

“It’s great to expose them to fresh fruits and vegetables,” Uncas Principal Janis Sawicki said. “Most of the things we’re introducing are simple, quick and easy so they can make them at home.”

Crowley said the key is educating students on what they’re eating.

“It’s important to teach them about what they’re putting in their stomachs,” Crowley said. “Then they take those lessons and educate their families.”

Kristen Chasse, a graduate student at the University of Connecticut and registered dietitian, agreed.

“They’re learning the benefits of eating fruit and how they can stay healthy,” said Chasse, who gave a lesson on fruit prior to Monday’s taste test. “Most of the students are really open to trying new things. If they had access to some of these fruits, they would make them a part of their diets.”

While Alex Santiago loved the fruit pizza, the second-grader said he would’ve given the snack a different name.

“It really wasn’t pizza-like,” Alex said. “It was fruit on a bagel. I would call it a bagel fruit.”

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why bother with fruit pizza? the republicans in congress managed to make pizza a vegetable!

also.... cream cheese really shouldn't be used in anything to be labeled as 'healthy', and many breads labeled as 'whole grain' or 'whole wheat' still contain boatloads of artificial and unhealthy ingredients like HFCS. healthy eating requires considering both the nutrition facts and the ingredients, and many dietitians only consider the former.

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By the numbers

1 in 3 Number of American children who are overweight or obese

2 Percent of school-age children in America who consistently eat well

35 Percent of school-age children who watch an average of five or more hours of television on a school day

\$119 billion Amount the nation spends annually on obesity-related health care costs.

Source: Action for Healthy Kids

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