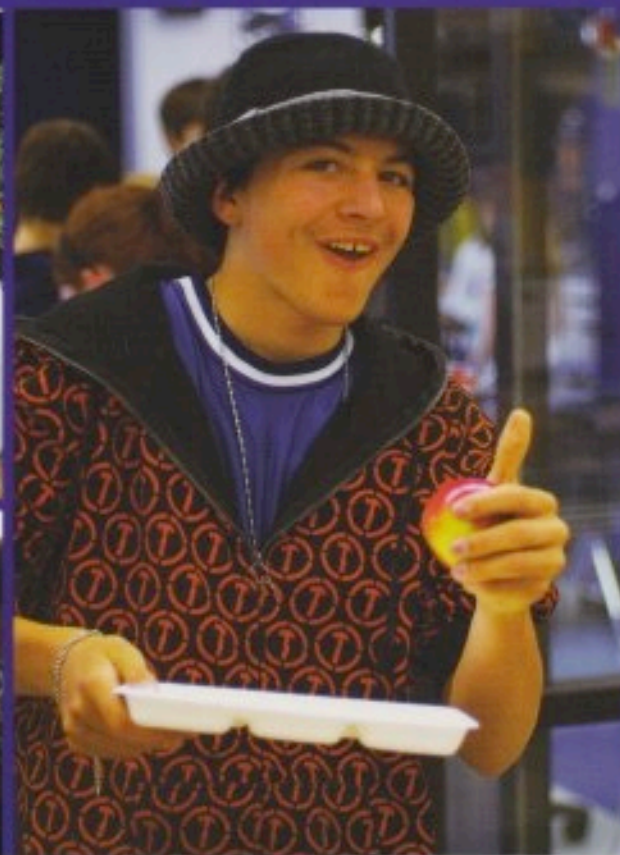




Nourishing Choices

*Implementing Food Education in Classrooms,
Cafeterias, and Schoolyards*



Drawing on a wealth of collective experience, *Nourishing Choices* offers a roadmap for developing a food education program and exciting children about healthful eating. It features details on ensuring sustainability and profiles of winning school- and district-based initiatives. Here's what educators and health professionals have to say about *Nourishing Choices*:

"Teachers, health educators, parents, and nutritionists want to improve the quality of school food, but are often short on time, energy, and resources. We need a comprehensive 'how-to' guide, with proven success stories that can be replicated nationwide — Nourishing Choices is it!"

— Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S., R.D., L.D.
Food Sleuth® Columnist, Nutrition Communications Consultant

"In this book, the inspiring and illuminating stories of thriving programs reveal that combining complex concepts — food systems, sustainability and conservation, and community and cultural awareness — can engage children and help them see that health extends beyond their own bodies. Exposure to farms, hands-on gardening, and cooking all serve as introductions to systems thinking, giving children a real and holistic involvement with learning environments that integrate the sciences and humanities."

— Joel E. Kimmons and Terry O'Toole
Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity; Division of Adolescent and School Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

"Nourishing Choices is an inspiring and practical guide for anyone interested in making positive changes in school food offerings, from cafeteria to vending machines. It is a wonderful and greatly needed resource! A must-read for administrators, teachers, school nurses, food service staff, and parents working to promote school wellness."

— Karrie Kalich, Ph.D., R.D.
Early Sprouts: Gardening and Nutrition Experiences for the Young Child Program




The National Gardening Association (NGA) promotes home, school, and community gardening as a means to renew and sustain the essential connection between people, plants, and the environment. For more information about NGA's plant-based programs, curricula, and resources, contact: National Gardening Association, 1100 Dorset Street, South Burlington, Vermont 05403 • (802) 863-5251.

Or visit: www.garden.org • www.kidgardening.org • Printed in Canada.

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Curriculum Serves Up Sensory Lessons

Food as Passport

Urban students learn about geography and cultures and open up to sampling new flavors with an award-winning exploratory food curriculum.

Hampstead Hill Academy
Baltimore, MD

Richard Daley Academy
Chicago, IL

When teachers at Hampstead Hill Academy in Baltimore, Maryland, retrieve their students from Ariel Demas' Food for Life class, they're met with an enthusiastic crowd eager to dish out nutritional and cultural facts, along with samples of the whole-food dishes they have just made. And that's no small thing. "One of my goals is to help dispel the perception that healthy food is scary and tastes weird," says Ariel. And she's not talking just about the students' responses.

Ariel's program, which was funded initially by the Food Studies Institute and local foundations, is based on a year-long, award-winning curriculum called *Food Is Elementary*.

It features teaching tools, lessons, and recipes to help educators implement cooperative, multicultural cooking sessions. The curriculum engages all of a student's senses in learning about foods and nutrition. The kitchen equipment required is basic and can be used in any classroom — even those without sinks. (To learn more and order the *Food Is Elementary* curriculum, contact the Food Studies Institute: www.foodstudies.org/Curriculum/.)

Kevin Read, a volunteer at Richard Daley Academy in Chicago, Illinois, used the same curriculum with a bilingual third-grade class. He admits that he was a bit of a skeptic at first. "I really had doubts," he says. "As good as the curriculum sounded, I assumed that kids, deep down, simply don't like vegetables." He soon

changed his tune. Perhaps it was watching students devour raw Brussels sprouts! "When we explored edible plant part categories, we looked at those cool leaves wrapped up in tight balls," explains Kevin. That inspired students to want to taste them. "Most of the students are Mexican and had never seen them before, so they had no preconceptions," he adds. "Their first real hint was my comment that they might love them."

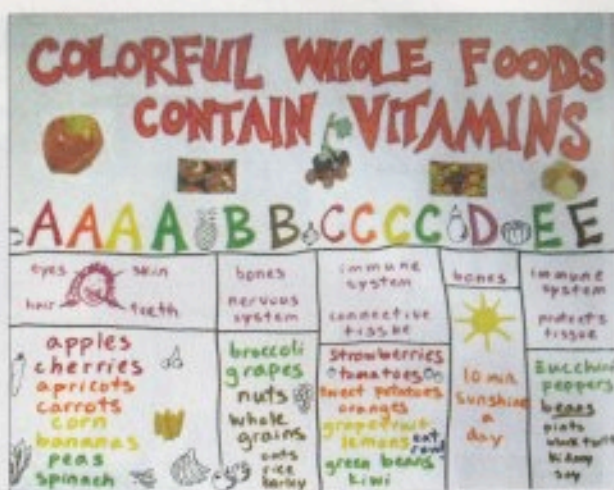


PHOTOS: ARIEL DEMAS/HAMPSTEAD HILL ACADEMY/FOOD STUDIES INSTITUTE

Laying the Groundwork: Digging into Edibles

The first half of the yearlong curriculum finds students handling and tasting fresh foods that represent different plant parts and food groups (e.g., grains, fruits), exploring the aesthetics of food, looking closely at product labels, and learning about what makes foods — and people — tick.

And sensory it is. A lesson on fat begins with students plunging their hands into butter. They learn that fat feels sticky, connect that to how it acts in our arteries, and then act like scientists as they “feel” milk samples and try to detect butterfat levels.



“Memorizing which vitamins do what doesn’t make it,” says Kevin. But keying into color codes does. He explains that one lesson helps students link different-colored foods to certain vitamins and general personal outcomes, such as good eyes or skin. Next, students list and draw foods representing each color; they add others throughout the year. Students in Ariel’s classes even color-code their notes. The main message: Eat a rainbow of hues.

Another lesson invites students to examine, describe, taste, and write about different fruits, legumes, or whole-grain breads. But the youngsters’ favorite might be the project for which they get to use food as an art medium! First they explore the colors and textures of different food items. As they cut and arrange them on white paper plates, whimsical creations emerge. Then the science slips in. Each artist must identify the vitamins in each item and its place on the food pyramid. Before eating their works, children draw or photograph them, admire one another’s pieces, and explain what they were thinking as they designed their own.

Cooking Across Cultures

Armed with a basic understanding and growing appreciation of food and nutrition, students spend the second semester cooking cuisines of other cultures. As they prepare each dish, they listen to music from the continent and learn something about the culture that created the recipe.

“The Indian dahl wasn’t a huge favorite, but tabouli was,” says Ariel. Red beans and rice also ranked high. Who would imagine that a tofu vegetable stir-fry would draw applause from kids? Using chopsticks was a real motivator for that meal, she explains.



Coaxing Converts

"No 'yuck' allowed" is one of the cardinal rules in Ariel's class. "I never pressure kids to try anything; but when the others do, they tend to get curious and step up." She also avoids pushing a heavy nutrition message, opting instead to engage students' hands and taste buds. "It's more important to get children thinking about what they're tasting and eating, where it comes from, and what they do and don't like," says Ariel.

It's not only the students who need enticing. Early on, Ariel invited the cafeteria staff to attend some Food for Life classes and try new dishes along with the kids. As they sampled the fare and encouraged students to keep open minds, the cooks and servers began to buy into the concept. Parents receive a newsletter filled with students' work, recipes, and comments about what they've been

cooking. Some attend community dinners prepared by the school's culinary arts club. This year, parents and students can sign up to work together to prepare a weekly snack. (The recipe goes home with classmates.)

"Our principal is a great supporter," says Ariel. "He wants to see kids — and the staff — healthy and ready to learn." With that in mind, he first invited Ariel to cater all staff meetings so teachers could become more familiar with whole foods and model healthful eating for their students. Then after three successful years, he folded the program into the school budget. Next he helped Ariel pave the way for new dishes to someday land on the lunch counter. In 2007 she used new grant funds to conduct scientific food trials in the cafeteria. The goal: To offer tastes of popular dishes and determine which might pass muster with the student body. Using tickets to vote thumbs up or down, a majority of students opted for burritos, red beans and rice, North African stew, and others from the Food is Elementary curriculum.

How They Grow

"Beyond getting an introduction to new foods and cooking techniques, students gain a new way of looking at food: how it connects to cultures, its beauty, and the fun we can have preparing it," says Kevin. He adds that as food themes are integrated into other subjects, the students see how their learning relates to real life.

Perhaps less tangible are the benefits that accrue when students are treated as responsible, able learners. For example, they use adult-size knives to cut vegetables — but not without some instruction. Even before students hold a knife, Kevin asks them to draw and



PHOTOS: ARIEL DEMAS/HAMPSTEAD HILL ACADEMY/FOOD STUDIES INSTITUTE



