



An "Eat The Rainbow" display at one of the elementary schools in the district.

FAST FACTS

NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT:	Humboldt Unified School District
LOCATION:	Prescott Valley, AZ
GRADES SERVED:	Pre-K -12th Grade
NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED:	5,321
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE- OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS (PRE-PANDEMIC):	50%

At Humboldt Unified School District (HUSD), Director of Nutrition Jody Buckle, District Nutritionist Pamela Liuzzo and their hardworking staff have been implementing nutritious, whole-grain-rich meals at the schools in their district for years. Despite product shortages and supply chain disruptions, they remain driven in their mission to provide healthy, delicious meals to students every day.



Fresh broccoli, tomatoes, and a whole grain-rich pasta salad available in the school cafeteria.

THE HISTORY OF WHOLE GRAIN-RICH AT HUSD

HUSD has been offering 100 percent whole grain-rich foods prior to Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act required them to do so. Student favorites include the breakfast-for-lunch whole grain-rich French toast and whole grain-rich breaded chicken dishes like Orange Chicken and General Tso's chicken. Liuzzo notes that a little over 10 years ago, students were not as accepting of whole grain-rich items. Early formulations were a hearty, dark brown shade. The dishes made with these whole grain-rich products were not as visually appealing to students, and students would shy away from trying them. Around 2015, according to Buckle, manufacturers started reformulating their whole grain-rich items to make them more visually appealing. Since then, the whole grain-rich dishes have been very popular across the schools, many students don't even realize they're eating a whole grain-rich product!



A balanced lunch tray featuring a whole grain-rich wrap with chicken and vegetables, fresh fruit, celery, and plain 1% milk.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Buckle and Liuzzo acknowledged that there is a learning curve for preparing whole grains. They emphasized the importance of training staff on the differences in cooking whole grain-rich items versus white flour products. To help address this, all their recipes have instructions specific to the preparation and cook-time of whole grain-rich items, and they encourage staff to try the food before serving it to students as a “quality assurance” check. Buckle emphasized that investing in training for his staff has made a big impact on their school meal program’s success. They also credit some of their success with whole grain-rich items to the equipment available, such as their steamer which helps them prepare brown rice.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, food shortages and supply chain disruptions meant vendors didn’t always have the whole grain-rich products they were used to receiving. When a product was in short supply or no longer available, the team quickly adapted, adjusted their menu, and found substitutions to ensure students continued to receive nutritious meals. Buckle and Liuzzo are passionate about this cause. While USDA meal pattern waivers are available, they are determined to “do right by the students” and remain innovative to continue serving whole grain-rich meals.



Two lunch trays featuring some student favorite items including whole grain-rich breaded chicken over brown rice, a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain-rich pasta, and low-fat milk.



This story was developed and based on an interview and email correspondence with the district. Compliance with nutrition standards is self-reported and has not been verified by CSPI.

<https://www.humboldtunified.com>

@HUSDchildnutrition

For more information, please contact policy@cspinet.org

June 2022