



A typical lunch tray at the Cypress School District: chicken Tikka Masala over brown rice, carrots and celery with hummus, fresh fruit, and low-fat milk

FAST FACTS

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT: | Cypress School District |
| LOCATION: | Cypress, CA |
| GRADES SERVED: | K-6 |
| NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED: | 3,400 |
| PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE- OR REDUCED-PRICE MEALS (PRE-PANDEMIC): | 30% |

At Cypress School District, Director of Child Nutrition Parisa Shukla, MDA, RD, SNS and her excellent staff have been providing a wide variety of 100 percent whole-grain rich meals to students for over four years. With a 40 percent increase in lunch participation since the start of the pandemic, even more students can enjoy nutrient dense, delicious meals at school every day.



A tasty lunch comprised of lentil penne, marinara sauce, fresh fruit, salad, whole grain-rich bread, and fat-free chocolate milk.



One of the students' favorite dishes: edamame whole grain-rich yakisoba noodles

THE IMPORTANCE OF 100 PERCENT WHOLE GRAIN-RICH GRAINS

As a dietitian, Shukla is acutely aware of the numerous health benefits of fiber, a key nutrient found in whole grains. She feels that offering all whole grain-rich grains is a “no brainer.” While reducing sodium and added sugar can be challenging, in Shukla’s view, there are fewer barriers to offering 100 percent whole grain-rich grains. Shukla also emphasizes the importance of introducing whole-grains to kids and teaching them to enjoy these foods from an early age. Some of the whole grain-rich student favorites include whole grain pizza, hamburger buns, and Yakisoba noodles. Shukla notes that students don’t even recognize the difference between these products and their white-flour counterparts! Additionally, though many students come from cultural backgrounds where white rice consumption is common, students are very accepting of brown rice at school and enjoy the variety of dishes that incorporate it.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

In addition to the development of creative recipes, Shukla noted that sufficient kitchen equipment can make all the difference. The school district recently received grant funding that allowed them to purchase a new oven and steam table. This equipment is helpful to her staff preparing tasty whole grain-rich grains. Shukla noted that first impressions are critical—if an item isn't prepared perfectly the first time a student tries it, they won't give it another try next time it is on the menu. For this reason, Shukla feels mastery of proper cooking technique of a menu item is so important.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Throughout the pandemic, labor shortages and supply chain disruptions forced the Cypress School District Child Nutrition Services Department to adapt and adjust. There were instances where the Department ordered whole grain-rich grains, but white flour items were delivered due to product shortages. But Shukla has remained nimble, producing innovative solutions to ensure students receive healthy items. When chicken and beef prices surged, she substituted edamame in the yakisoba noodle dish and created more plant-based, whole grain-rich recipes like lentil penne, plant-based brownie batter, and unicorn overnight oats. On Shukla's Wishlist for ways to better support her staff in preparing healthy, tasty meals: access to contract school foodservice experts that could provide tailored training to her staff periodically (e.g., 3-4 trainings per year).

“IT SEEMS LIKE A NO-BRAINER TO OFFER ALL WHOLE GRAIN-RICH FOODS”



The Lunch Box Buddies cart in action

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.

School website: www.cypsd.org

For more information, please contact policy@cspinet.org

June 2022