

BUILDING HEALTHIER TRAYS

Cheshire schools talking up fruits and vegetables

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CHESHIRE — Getting kids to eat their fruits and veggies may just be a matter of talking them up.

The Cheshire school district has introduced a new lunch program at its four elementary schools that touts good nutrition.

The new Build a Tray Cafe encourages kids to put some thought into their food through a game that's as simple as counting to five.

The goal is to get students to fill their trays with five essential elements of nutrition. The district has purchased new food trays for the elementary schools with five compartments, each with a different raised shape on it: a clover shape for veggies, a circle for fruit, a square for milk, a triangle for grains and a star for protein.

Students are encouraged to take one of each.

The cafeterias have a new look with a fresh coat of paint



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Kristina Offerdahl of Norton Elementary School in Cheshire buys food at the cafeteria on Monday. The school's new Build-a-Tray program encourages students to eat healthier meals. Madeleine Diker, food service director for Cheshire schools, holds signs about the food pyramid in the background.

and education displays that tout healthy eating.

The program was launched late last month, and already the district is using more fruits and vegetables in the four elementary school cafeterias, said Food Service Director Madeleine Diker.

At Norton Elementary School on North Brooksvale Road, six lunch rounds of chil-

dren, one per each grade, moved quickly through two lines on Monday. The children picked pizza made with low-fat cheese, chicken nuggets breaded with whole-grain bread crumbs and mashed potatoes. Each picked a milk.

When it came to fruits and veggies, the students were a

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PROGRAM: 1 vegetable and 1 fruit on every tray

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bit more picky, with most choosing mashed potatoes or corn for a vegetable. The fruit offerings included apples, pears, cut-up oranges, blueberries, apple sauce, and canned Mandarin oranges.

Diker has been the program's biggest cheerleader, visiting cafeterias to talk to students, giving them high fives or fist bumps when she sees trays filled right.

Even food workers have started to talk in code: like don't forget your "three," or he almost took two "fives."

On Monday, Diker was a walking billboard for healthy eating. She decorated herself with her son's hockey medals and her daughter's honors cords from their days at Cheshire High School. With the trinkets she got the attention of students for mere seconds, just long enough to get in a few words about the importance of good nutrition.

Diker said the new program encourages talk about fruits and vegetables as cool stuff to eat. "Like a commercial," she



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Karen Amato serves lunch for students at Norton Elementary School in Cheshire on Monday. The district has introduced a lunch program aimed at getting students to eat fruits and vegetables.

said.

Diker said getting students to at least try a new fruit or vegetable is half the battle.

She got students to remember to get their milk by adding a new flavor, vanilla.

Kids know what they want.

Strawberries are a wildly popular fruit with kids. She upped the order for strawberries at Norton by two cases from last week.

It's a start toward her goal of getting at least one fruit and one vegetable in every tray.