



Learnings from the Field



Conway Public Schools

Conway, AR

District Enrollment:

10281

Production Model: Self-
Operated

District F/R: 50.28%

School Year Implemented:
2018-2019

District ADP: 59.23%

No. of Grants Awarded: 2

Florence Mattison Elementary

Age Group: K-5

School Size: Medium (301-900)

School Environment: Suburban

School F/R: 75%

School ADP: 79%

Ida Burns Elementary

Age Group: K-5

School Size: Medium (301-900)

School Environment: Suburban

School F/R: 73%

School ADP: 78%

Project Description

The Food Service Program for Conway Public Schools strives to make sure students are fed and nourished in order to learn. In addition to making sure the students are fed, Food Service Coordinator Maegan Brown wants to

make sure students know where their food comes from and how it nourishes their bodies. Thus, a few years ago Conway implemented a Farm to School Program at the district with a goal to increase student education and exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables. Through the Farm to School Program, Coordinator Brown has seen students thrive in garden lessons and become excited to see the fruits of their labor when produce is ready to harvest. However, Conway was still looking for an additional component to help expose students to more fresh fruits and vegetables. The answer came through the Project Produce Grant. Two Conway elementary schools received grant funds to implement four taste tests during the fall semester. Food Service Coordinator Brown recalls, “This was the perfect opportunity to encourage produce consumption while adding an educational component presented each month by our FoodCorps Service Members. We called our series of taste tests ‘Growing the Distance’ to educate students about food grown in their school gardens, in the state of Arkansas, and around the world. As each taste test occurred, students showed an increased eagerness and readiness to try the new foods we had prepared for them. On every occasion, the majority of students loved what they tasted and were asking for more.”

Conway Public Schools Food Service is fortunate to have two FoodCorps Service Members who serve at both schools that implemented the Project Produce taste tests. The FoodCorps Service Member at Florence Mattison incorporated nutrition education components throughout the semester to complement the taste tests. The first taste test, which utilized school garden basil, provided an opportunity to educate students on how to plant and harvest produce. Specifically, students planted seeds in the raised garden beds and some even got to harvest the fresh basil. They also learned about herbs and how they naturally season the foods we eat, and that basil is a "flavor buddy" to tomatoes. The second taste test, which featured ratatouille using some local produce, included education on the different types of

vegetables used in the recipe and their nutritional composition. Students also got to learn about Green Acres Farm, a local farm they purchased the basil and bell peppers from. “The Project Produce Grant complemented our existing efforts, and as a result, we are continuing to meet our goal of increasing student education and exposure to fresh fruits and vegetables,” says Brown.

As a result of the taste test success, Conway added the tomato basil salad to their weekly salad rotation schedule and a fresh fruit cup with kiwi. Both the tomato basil salad and kiwi were student favorites. According to Food Service Coordinator Brown, at both schools, students have been talking about the salad ever since the taste test occurred.

Successes

- Ability to utilize school garden produce
- Student acceptability of the recipes presented for each taste test
- Adding new menu options as a result of Project Produce taste tests

Challenges

- Local produce availability due to weather
- Extra labor needed to prepare and facilitate taste tests

For resources related to Project Produce, visit www.thelunchbox.org.

