



Learnings from the Field

Diamond Lake School District

Mundelein, IL

District Enrollment:

1,100

Production Model: Contracted

Food Service Management

Company

District F/R: 64%

School Year Implemented:

2016-2017

District ADP: 55%

No. of Grants Awarded: 1

West Oak Middle School

Age Group: 6-8

School Size: Medium (301-900)

School Environment: Suburban

School F/R: 65%

School ADP: 95%

Project Description

As a food ambassador for Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution, Lindsey Shifley brought personal passion to the Project Produce Grant programming at West Oak Middle School. Each month Ms. Shifley hosted "Chef's Tasting Table" events in the cafeteria. At the events students received a fruit or vegetable sample that Ms. Shifley, along with other volunteers, had sourced and prepped. The students would either taste the fresh produce raw, or in a simple recipe that did little to change the flavor. When possible, Ms. Shifley held tastings that aligned with holidays or other cultural events. For example, during St. Patrick's Day, she prepared Shamrock Spinach Smoothies. After the samples were passed out, Ms. Shifley would give a brief nutrition lesson on what the students were eating to help them better understand the benefits of fresh produce.

Since the school cafeteria is not a scratch kitchen and she is not employed by the food service management company, Ms. Shifley received permission from the company to prep food in the school kitchen. She quickly realized the

opportunity to pursue a common mission of feeding students healthy fresh food. She developed a strong relationship with the food service management company with “positivity and an air of inclusion. We realized that we’re all in this together,” she explained.



When building relationships inside the school, Ms. Shifley explained that West Oak’s nurse, Sue Kruckman, was her greatest wellness advocate and collaborator. She was a strong partner in advocating for the programming and making it a reality. Having a strong advocate on the health services side of things helped bring the benefits of the program full circle.

Overall, the “Chef’s Tasting Table” events were a huge success. Ms. Shifley

recalls that students were generally more enthusiastic about eating lunch after the program. She noticed there was less food waste in the cafeteria, and the older students who had previously been less enthused about eating a balanced lunch developed better eating habits. “There has to be some kind of fun food education around getting the kids to try new foods,” Ms. Shifley explained. “I’m helping the kids fall in love with food and eat and look at school food as something that’s not gross. I didn’t expect that to come of this grant.” The program was such a success that the district has decided to fund its continuation. The grant has even led to talks about the possibility of converting the cafeteria into a scratch cook operation!

Successes

- The school decided to fund the program after the closure of the Project Produce Grant.
- Less cafeteria food waste as a result of students being more enthusiastic about lunchtime.
- Positive community partnerships were formed with local purveyors, volunteers, the food service management company, and school faculty.

Challenges

- Coordinating the food prep with the food service management company that was doing no scratch cooking in the kitchen.
- Sourcing and prepping the right amount of food for the tastings.

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

