



Learnings from the Field



New London Public Schools

New London, CT

District Enrollment:

3900

Production Model: Self-

Operated

District F/R: 92%

School Year Implemented:

2018

District ADP: 77%

No. of Grants Awarded: 3

Winthrop STEM Elementary Magnet School

Age Group: K-5

School Size: Medium (301-900)

School Environment: Urban

School F/R: 100%

School ADP: 82%

Nathan Hale Arts Magnet Elementary School

Age Group: K-5

School Size: Medium (301-900)

School Environment: Urban

School F/R: 100%

School ADP: 74%

Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School

Age Group: 6-8

School Size: Medium (301-900)

School Environment: Urban

School F/R: 100%

School ADP: 85%

Project Description

At all of the New London Public Schools benefiting from the Project Produce grant, scratch recipes were tested utilizing fresh produce as much as possible. Recipes were then offered as part of taste tests to the students throughout the cafeteria. Additionally, garden and nutrition lessons were performed throughout the classrooms. The lessons focused more on nutrition, and the importance of understanding where food comes from as well as exposing the students to different foods. The tie back to the cafeteria was to encourage the students to try that hot entree of the day in addition to the vegetable preparation. By having a familiar face that they recognize from their lessons in the cafeteria promoting the food, the students were more likely to try the new foods.



Most of the lessons that were conducted with this grant had a tasting component. Whether that was tasting locally sourced fruits or vegetables or a cafeteria offered taste test. “I promoted the health benefits of these foods through in classroom topics and informational posters and propaganda in the cafeteria. I had the students learn about eating the entire rainbow and during lunch we picked out all of the different colored fruits and vegetables that were found on their lunch trays. We practiced mindful tasting in the classroom and focused on exactly what we liked and disliked about our foods. Then during lunch, I reminded them to really think about and try all of their foods. We talked about the different parts of the plants and tried to see if we could eat all

six during lunch that day,” says Brandee Kitzmiller, a Service member of FoodCorps who works with New London Public Schools .

As a result of the Project Produce grant, New London Public Schools have had some menu changes. A number of different recipes that were tested such as the Chicken Souvlaki w/ Greek Vegetable Salad, Vegetable Lo-Mein w/ Chicken Skewer, Chicken Pot Pie, Curry Chicken, Fish Sandwich, Hummus, Soft Shell Beef Tacos, Untidy Joseph (Sloppy Joe), Kale Caesar Salad, Roasted Broccoli, Black Beans, and Spaghetti Squash. “We found that if students were able to try the foods before they went through the lunch line, they were more likely to select it as their entree. We were able to incorporate a number of fresh vegetables into the recipes, in addition to finding uses for our government direct commodity products,” according to Brandee Kitzmiller.



New London Public Schools also participated in a farmer meeting to develop relationships with other local farmers and enter into forward contracts with them. A result of that partnership was the inclusion of local lettuce for salads,

local kale, onions, potatoes, carrots, and sweet potatoes. Food Service Director at New London, Samantha Wilson, says they learned a lot about the various challenges farmers are facing and we were able to shed light on the priorities of school food operations when sourcing foods locally.

Successes

- Completion of new recipes
- Students asking for seconds and thirds of veggies
- Increase in fruit and vegetable consumption

Challenges

- Short lunch period made taste-tests rushed
- Adapting to individual student preferences

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

