

## Wellington develops healthy eating options for students

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Wellington School students don't have lunch in the "cafeteria."

Instead, they are reminded the area is a "dining room" -- a necessary distinction for a school cafe that offers organic options, local grown veggies and menus complete with nutrition information.

Although the school is not required to follow state and national lunch standards because it is private, Wellington joins other schools in revamping students' access to certain foods in response to Senate Bill 210.

But school staff didn't have to make many tweaks because Food Services Director Rhonda Kimsey said she has always had a focus on nutrition and health when preparing menu items.

"These kids choose the healthier options, with the exception of the pizza, chicken tenders and burgers because that's kind of the way life is out there right now and it's the way they've grown up, so this is really a response to expectations from parents," she said.

The newest additions to this school year's menu are cage-free eggs and, thanks to the NutriKids program, students and parents can find nutrition facts online before making choices in the dining room.

By entering each regular menu item into the NutriKids system, Kimsey said she learned some surprising information about some student-favorite dishes. So she had to make some tweaks.

"One of the biggest things we've changed is the fettuccine Alfredo," Kimsey said of the homemade favorite that she learned was laden with calories and fat.

"We went away from the heavy cream and now we use the half and half."

Kimsey said the school has been able to keep on the cusp of rising healthy and local eating trends in part because of Aladdin Food Management Services. The West Virginia-based company has been working with Wellington for six years to create nutritious menus.

In addition to educating staff on how to prepare students to make healthy choices, Aladdin workers also offer continuous support throughout the year with on-call dieticians that can assess anything from a menu item that will be served to hundreds to a single student struggling to find balance.

"It provides an educational tool that they would be able to have throughout life," said Ellen Fisher, Aladdin's dietitian to the school, about the healthy eating services she provides.

"It teaches them to not only make healthy choices while they're in school, but teaching them to make these decisions forever."

Lower School students begin learning about healthy eating as early as first grade, when they are encouraged to create a colorful plate from the fresh salad bar, Kimsey said. Older students have learned about moderation and making choices that will fuel the body through fliers passed out in the lunch room and dessert options dropping off the menu on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Wellington parent Nani Carroll educates her kids at home about eating right. But she said the school has been a big advocate in getting them to try new things and teaching them to leave behind others.

As coordinator of the Lunch Bunch that allows Lower School parents to join their students in the dining room, Carroll said she always looks forward to the fresh and plentifully stocked salad bar, new soup choice each day, two entree options and the make-your-own sandwich station.

But even if she'd never had lunch at Wellington, Carroll said she'd definitely hear about it from her two sons, David, 12, and Mark, 9.

The two have very different eating habits -- one is vegetarian while the other is a proud carnivore -- and both rave about the Wellington menu on a daily basis, she said.

"I think it helps to have the students take ownership of what they're choosing to eat or not eat," Carroll said.

"The dining room provides such an array of different types of foods that the children really have the opportunity to chose what they put it their bodies and that's a great learning experience."

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--Ellen Fisher