

A Different Kind of School Lunch in Wisconsin



from *PURE FACTS* October 2002

A different kind of school lunch

Students in one midwestern community are enjoying fresh, delicious food plus a big change in their learning environment.

Walk down the hallways of the Appleton, Wisconsin, Central Alternative High School and you will see students focused on their education, interacting successfully with each other and with their teachers. Notice the calmness and purposefulness that sets these teens apart from others.

You will notice that the hallways are different in another respect. They aren't lined with soft drink and junk food machines. Then check out the cafeteria. There is no smell of grease. Burgers, fries and burritos have been replaced with salads, meats prepared with old fashioned recipes, and whole grain breads. Fresh fruits and vegetables are offered and the students drink water.

Grades are up, truancy is no longer a problem, arguments are rare, and teachers are able to spend their time teaching. What's going on in Appleton Wisconsin?



In 1997 [Natural Ovens](#) of Manitowoc, WI initiated a five-year project to bring healthy food into area schools. The goal was to show that fresh, nutritious food can make a real difference in the student's behavior, learning and health.

Just prior to the beginning of the program, Greg Bretthauer was offered the job of dean of students at the school. What he saw were teens who were "rude, obnoxious, and ill mannered" and he turned the job down. Because the school had so many problems with discipline and weapons violations a police officer was recruited to be on the staff. He found a school that was out of control.

Today Greg is the dean of students in an atmosphere that is vastly different from what he saw in 1997.

appear to have been a problem in Appleton, where the food is not only natural, it is prepared with care; Natural Ovens made sure of this by hiring and training the cooks for the school.

Like children on the Feingold Program, once these teens have made the connection between food, behavior and learning, they tend to prefer to enjoy the benefits. One student said, "I really like the food. It tastes good, it's hot, it's fresh."

One girl commented, "Now that I concentrate I think it is easier to get along with people 'cause now I'm paying attention to what they have to say and not just worrying about what I have to say to them." Another student said, "If you're going for a big test you want to eat great."

The on-campus policeman, Dan Tauber, is able to be a role model now, instead of a disciplinarian. Students are interested in how he eats to keep in such good physical shape, and have noticed their athletic abilities have a lot to do with their diet.

"Returning students are now the advocates for the program. The kids encourage each other," according to Mary Bruyette. "They set the example for the new kids. It works great."

Many of the changes are being phased in to Appleton's middle and elementary schools. Candy machines are gone and pop machines are being replaced with juice machines or water coolers. There is a district-wide commitment to healthier eating and lifestyle in general.

Even in schools where more modest changes have been made, there are some real differences. Gary Van Lankvelt, principal of the Einstein Middle School, has seen "more calmness and less bouncy activity. Students seem to be more alert and focused."

Madison Middle School's principal, Fred Ginnochio says the students are buying the healthier a la carte items and more are using the salad bar. He has found when the kids are in the halls "we have not had one incident all year that I have had to get involved in with shoving, a fight, aggressive behavior."

"I've taught here almost 30 years. I see the kids this year as calmer, easier to talk to. They just seem more rational. I had thought about retiring this year and basically I've decided to teach another year -- I'm having too much fun!"

- Dennis Abrahm,
middle school science teacher

"One child arrested would cost the schools more."

- Dr. Barbara Reed Stitt,
Natural Ovens President

Natural Ovens underwrote the cost for their 5 year study that will eventually impact 200 Wisconsin schools. The price to turn the problem around was \$20,000 a year. Natural Ovens President, Dr. Barbara Reed Stitt, noted that "one child arrested would cost the schools more."

Dr. Scullen believes, "if it results in a happier kid, improved learning, and ultimately a better community then it's a cost we cannot avoid. It's something we must do."

Says Dan Tauber "Let's invest in the kids now, financially, with food versus invest in them later, financially, with 'how do we correct the problems we have because they are not eating healthy?'"

"Nutrition for students should be part of the general operating budget" according to Mary Bruyette. "We're concerned about everything else. We're concerned about new band uniforms. We're concerned about the football team. We're concerned about text books. Why not be concerned about nutrition? That seems to me the basis in many cases for creating a positive learning environment."

LuAnn Coenen says "I can't buy the argument that it's too costly for schools to provide good nutrition for their students. I found that one cost will reduce another. I don't have the vandalism. I don't have the litter. I don't have the need for high security." "We've got to stop using our most precious commodity -- our kids -- to make extra money."

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