

Dishing up healthy school lunches

Kiddos catering links schools with restaurants

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Bouncy hot dogs. Rock-hard grilled cheese. Mysterious meat. Those are school lunches of the past.

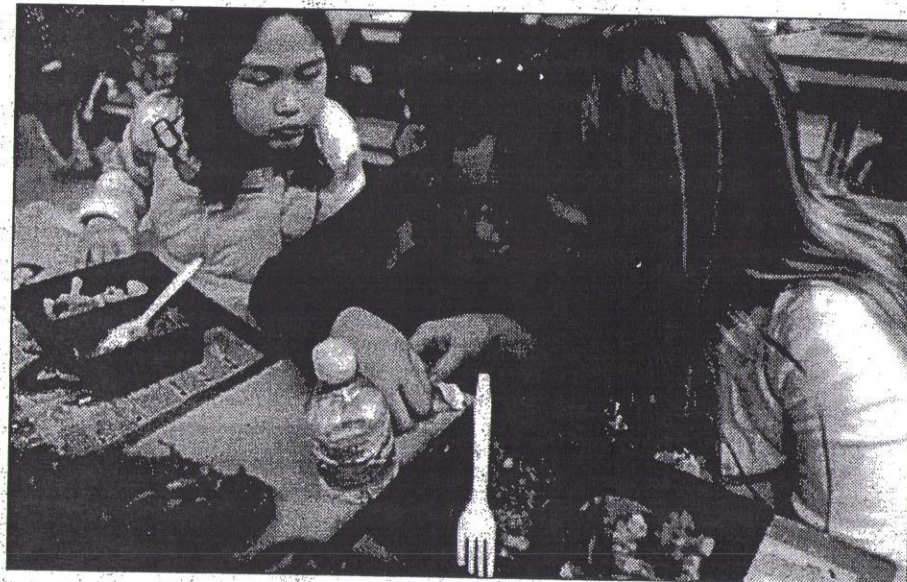
Today's hot lunch is a whole different experience for children.

At Sprague School in Lincolnshire, for instance, students recently enjoyed a lunch of chicken fried rice with a fortune cookie, served on a placement featuring the Chinese Zodiac.

Limiting trans fat

The school is debunking the myth that kids will turn up their noses at healthy fare.

"The chicken fried rice is from Won Ton Express and has no trans fat, and the kids love it," said Michelle Adams, with Kiddos Catering, one of several vendors working with Sprague to



MICHELLE LOHMANN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Second graders (left to right,) Joy Wang, 7, Saki Ogawa, 8, and Caroline Riley, 8, enjoy a catered lunch at Laura Sprague School in Lincolnshire arranged by Kiddos Catering. Kiddos is branching out from its previous endeavor, providing concessions at local youth sports games.

cater healthy lunches. "We thought it would be fun for them to figure out their Zodiac sign."

Adams also will bring in healthy quesidillas with a side salad from Wrap City Cafe in Deerfield.

"We are a food broker," Adams said. "We bring restaurants to the school. They tell us what they want, and we bring them the se-

lections. It's an advantage to schools because they don't have to fax orders to five different restaurants. They don't have to hassle with it. We do it all."

Adams said Kiddos is planning to work with other schools and is launching a Web site.

Sprague Principal Christine Adler has made it her mission to serve up tasty

treats that also meet healthy guidelines.

"This is something important to me as I read about obesity," Adler said. "And I've struggled with it all my life."

The school surveyed parents and even did a tasting featuring prospective vendors.

"Parents were really in favor of a more well-round-

ed lunch menu and were willing to pay a little more for it," Adler said.

Frozen yogurt has replaced Oreos. Students also now enjoy low-fat cheese pizza from La Rosa's Italian Restaurant in Lincolnshire, subs from Subway in Northfield, fruit cups, salads and baked chips.

According to guidelines at Sprague, vendors have to provide a balanced mix of proteins, starches and fruits and vegetables.

No more than 30 percent of calories can come from fat and no more than 10 percent from saturated fat.

There can be no trans fats and only a limited amount of high-fructose corn syrup. The meals are all nut-free.

"Christy is amazingly proactive for the kids about this," said Drew Olbur, owner of Wiener Take All in Buffalo Grove, who has created a special pasta dish for Sprague. "It's a challenge, but it forces us to be creative. I'm proud of it."

Olbur said he has served a low-fat hot dog and turkey burgers.

"We're famous for our chicken pita," he said. "And the kids like the chicken gyros."

Adams said she is working with several restaurants.

"We try to work with people who have a good product and who are willing to give back to the school," she said.

Cream of the crop

Another vendor is Lloyd Kolesky, owner of Subway in Northfield. Adler said all of the vendors have been great to work with.

"These vendors have so customized things for us," she said. "The vegetables are cut small. They give them a low-fat salad dressing dip. The grapes are taken off the vine so it's easy to eat."

"Kids today are now getting the cream of the crop when it comes to lunch," Adams said. "PTOs and school lunch organizers at local schools are providing the finest in lunch cuisine to our kids. The kids are loving it and so are local restaurants."