

Harlem school gets high marks for health

NEW YORK (AP) - Sixth-grader Essence Holmes ate her chicken and rice but shoved the medley of zucchini, red pepper and broccoli to the side of her plate.

"I don't eat vegetables," she said firmly. "They're nasty."

That is one of the challenges facing Promise Academy, a charter school in Harlem that is trying to fight the rising tide of childhood obesity by serving food that is nutritious, low-fat and, when possible, locally grown.

Lunch might be turkey chili with brown rice and braised red cabbage. The milk, from upstate New York, is free of hormones and antibiotics. The juice is 100 percent fruit juice, and just one serving is permitted. Dessert is an apple.

As educators around the country struggle to provide healthful school lunches — and to get junk-food-happy children to eat them — Promise Academy is taking an unusually aggressive stance.

It not only bans sugary snacks but offers healthy cooking classes for parents and sponsors a monthly farmer's market where a voucher buys a big bag of

Hudson Valley carrots or winter squash.

"I think it's what we have to do at every school in America right now," said Ann Cooper, who is the director of food services for public schools in Berkeley, Calif., and helped set up Promise Academy's food program. "The level of quality of the produce, the level of quality of the cooking, the minimal use of processed food, and the use of locally grown food as much as possible is where every school in America should be."

The food program is only one distinctive feature of Promise Academy, where the school year and the school day both have been lengthened to prepare children from low-income families for good colleges and good jobs.

The school started in 2004 with 100 kindergartners and 100 sixth-graders. It's plan is to expand by two new grades each year until it runs from kindergarten through 12th grade.

The lunchtime scene is more upscale dining than rowdy school cafeteria. By now, the students are all used to no dessert except fruit, so there is little grumbling about not being able to eat candy bars.

The whole facility is shiny

and new, and the kitchen is spotless. To promote good manners and respect, the children eat at round tables with tablecloths, and all are neatly dressed in school uniforms.

The academy is a project of the Harlem Children's Zone, a nonprofit organization that runs a range of programs including parenting classes, preschool, asthma screening and job training with the aim of bettering the lives of people who live in a 60-block swath of central Harlem.

Geoffrey Canada, the organization's president, said children resisted the academy's food at first, and some parents complained that their children were starving.

"Getting young people to just try things and keep an open mind about it, I think, is the challenge," he said.

"Because we don't allow outside food in, it allows young people to get naturally hungry... Kids don't want apples if they can have candy bars. But an apple when there is no other sweet thing around absolutely tastes good."

The Black community served by the Harlem Children's Zone's programs has struggled with obesity and its attendant ills of diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. A 2002 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found 78 percent of Black women ages 20 to 74 were overweight, with more than 50 percent qualifying as obese.

"When I was growing up in the Bronx, being fat was unusual for a child," Canada said. "People made fun of you. Now, about 45 percent of our kids are overweight. One looks no fatter than the next."

Students at the academy are weighed at the beginning and end of the year, and Canada hopes to build a database that will let researchers measure how successful the school has been at keeping its charges fit and trim. He said it's too soon to tell if the school has made any headway.

On a recent day at the school, students lined up with trays for the entree, then hit the salad bar, where the choices included romaine lettuce, shredded carrots, grape tomatoes and curried chicken salad.

The kitchen staff of six is headed by Chef Andrew Benson, 27, a veteran of restaurants, soup kitchens and public schools, who talks about healthy eating with a missionary zeal.

He has special plans for the kitchen's deep fat fryer, which he doesn't use: "We're

actually going to go about trying to put it on eBay," he said.

The academy spends about \$5.87 per student on breakfast, lunch and snacks, twice what many public schools spend. Almost all the students qualify for federally subsidized free lunch, and grants help support the food program.

Some students appreciate the effort.

Sixth-grader Falilou Barry wouldn't eat red cabbage the last time it was served because "it looked purple." But next time, he said, "I'm hoping to taste it."

Tiffany Vargas, a seventh-grader, said she has learned to like foods including zucchini, vegetable lasagna and, yes, cabbage.

"There's a lot of things you don't like," she said, "but it's better to try than to just say forget about it."

Fibroids

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fibroid and causing it to wither.

In endometrial ablation, electrodes, lasers, microwaves or balloons filled with water are used to remove the lining of the uterus, destroying fibroids.

Focused ultrasound surgery — the treatment recently approved by the FDA — uses an MRI scanner to locate the fibroids along with a device, called ExAblate 2000 System, that destroys them by means of high-frequency sound waves.

Fibroid remedies can have adverse effects. Of the various surgeries, only myomectomy is recommended for women who hope to have children. Endometrial ablation, another form of surgery, ends the menstrual cycle in roughly half of cases. Some fibroid drugs can trigger early menopause. And hysterectomy — the only way to remove all uterine tissue and thus the only way to remove all fibroids — can numb sexual sensation.

"As we seek to improve fibroid treatments, we need to find ways to minimize any impact on a woman's fertility or sexual functioning," said Lisa Martinez, director of the Cincinnati-based Women's Sexual Health Foundation.

While health advocates wait for better treatments — and while they wait for a vote on the Uterine Fibroid Research and Education Act that could come this legislative session — they encourage women with two or more fibroid symptoms to seek medical care. At the very least, they advocate for "watchful waiting" or checking the growth's size annually.

"Though less than 1 percent of fibroids become cancerous, you need follow-up care to rule out this possibility," said McLucas.

Four years after having her hysterectomy, Karlene King agrees. "Had I listened to my body and sought help more quickly, I may not have needed invasive treatment," she said. "But since fibroids never go away on their own, you can never sit back and assume that they will simply get better with time."

Molly M. Ginty writes for Womens eNews.

Your Horoscope Says... Jan. 19-Jan. 25

ARIES

An afterglow surrounds you during the week, and you may not feel like getting immediately into work-mode this week. It's okay to go with your feelings; the world will wait for a little while. Treasure happy moments.

Soul Affirmation: Facing down challenges makes me feel good about myself.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 25, 31

TAURUS

Keep an eye on your budget this week, but also indulge your creative senses with the visual and the tactile. You might find yourself wanting to "feel" something new in your hands. Just the feeling may be enough; you don't necessarily have to spend money to satisfy your artistic urge this week.

Soul Affirmation: Happiness is my only goal this week.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 15, 22

GEMINI

After last week's energy, you might want to play things a bit more low-key this week. You'll do yourself a favor if you stick close to home and relax. Your energy could use a little refreshment. Meditation, listening to music, even doing some household chores, will recharge your batteries.

Soul Affirmation: Before goodness can come, I must expect goodness.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 32, 51

CANCER

Find motivation within yourself to complete a task that has been hanging around too long. You will want to play later in the week, and you'll feel happier then with a clear mind. Remember that you're the boss of your emotions.

Soul Affirmation: My imagination

is the source of my happiness.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 27, 55

LEO

A quiet week will work wonders for you. Make an effort to slow your pace, both physically and mentally this week. Use your imagination to think of quiet ways to entertain yourself.

Soul Affirmation: Knowing I can do it is the biggest preparation for getting it done.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 9, 20

VIRGO

While you may have much work facing you in the beginning of the week, a steady, patient attitude will help you accomplish a great deal this week. Be good to yourself and take things nice and slow. You'll finish what you need to.

Soul Affirmation: The sunlight of my spirit shines in the land beyond the horizon.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 16, 40

LIBRA

You are in the middle of a dream coming true. Watch for signs that your wishes are about to be granted. You'll be very happy with what happens. A road trip might be in the offing; grab a friend and go Dutch-treat. Mutual generosity in all things will make your week perfect.

Soul Affirmation: Love is easier than breathing.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 45, 48

SCORPIO

Overall, the vibrations surrounding you this week are very good, very good indeed. Go with the best, and refuse to allow any minor inconvenience to spoil your sunny mood. You are going to have a lovely week.

Soul Affirmation: He who doesn't ask will remain a fool forever.

Lucky Numbers: 13, 19, 22

SAGITTARIUS

Remember that you look marvelous! Be prepared for lots of compliments this week, and plan to accept them gracefully. You may be planning a time period trip; it's going to be a nice getaway.

Soul Affirmation: Communication is a skeleton key that opens many doors.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 50, 52

CAPRICORN

A party or gathering with friends from the past gives you the opportunity to strut your stuff a bit. You've made tremendous strides and accomplished much in your life, so be pleased with yourself this week. Pass some of your wisdom along to others.

Soul Affirmation: All that I need is within me.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 42, 47

AQUARIUS

You should know by now that trying to be in two places at once is very taxing to your nerves! Slow down a bit and trust that you'll get what needs to be done accomplished. Give yourself a head start on all road trips so that you have time to enjoy the view.

Soul Affirmation: Seeing my past clearly this week gives me a clear vision of my future.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 30, 40

PISCES

Remember that you are in control of your emotions this week. Things will look brighter as soon as you let yourself feel like the glowing spirit that you are. Co-create your reality this week by using positive emotions to remind yourself of how wonderful you are.

Soul Affirmation: My acceptance of myself is the best gift to myself.

Lucky Numbers: 35, 56, 12