



## Buffalo: Engaging Cafeteria Staff in Food & Fun

Students ages 11 to 13 participated in a variety of experiential healthy eating activities, including a weekly salad bar in the school cafeteria, Food & Fun after-school workshops and special projects such as designing a "healthwalk" between the school and neighborhood, painting a healthy eating mural in the school and producing a healthy eating video. Students also exercised their creativity to develop a project slogan:

*"You are what you eat—don't be a Twinkie!"*

Every part of the project engaged partners who provided the expertise and resources that were necessary to help the project achieve its goals. The Food & Fun workshops, conducted by the Massachusetts Avenue Project,\* used a mentoring model in which older youth served as primary educators and special projects were co-led by professionals from the Buffalo community. These activities provided Bennett-Park Montessori students with positive role models to reinforce what they learned through the program and to encourage healthy eating behaviors.

The cafeteria staff played another essential role in creating the healthy school environment at Bennett-Park Montessori. In early conversations with cafeteria staff, the partnership discovered that staff members understandably wanted to feel as if they were an integral part of the project. The partnership responded, asking for input and participation in implementing the weekly salad bar, responding to the staff's requests to brighten up the cafeteria with student art, providing *Healthy Eating by Design* logo t-shirts for cafeteria staff to wear when the salad bar was offered and publicly recognizing the cafeteria staff as part of the partnership at media and promotional events.

With these efforts, the cafeteria staff became champions for the project, encouraging students to make healthy food choices in the cafeteria. According to a first-grader—who filled her plate with broccoli, cucumbers, sunflower seeds, cheese, a fresh apple, a roll and low-fat milk:

*"They said to enjoy the food and take whatever you want!"*

It was this type of collaborative effort that helped the Buffalo Healthy Eating by Design project achieve the accomplishments it did, many of which will be sustained. For example, the Buffalo School District took ownership of the salad bar and now offers it

once a week to all Bennett-Park Montessori students. Additionally, the Food & Fun workshops are now included on the Bennett-Park Montessori after-school program roster, and the Massachusetts Avenue Project is poised to provide similar programs at other schools in the city. The future for larger-scale replication resulting from the Buffalo Healthy Eating by Design project is promising, as parents and staff from other schools have approached the partnership to learn how they can implement similar projects for their children.

*Excerpted from Lessons from the Field: Promoting Healthy Eating in Schools.* Chapel Hill, N.C.: Active Living by Design, 2008.

\*The [Massachusetts Avenue Project](#), which "nurtures the growth of a diverse and equitable community food system to promote local economic opportunities, access to affordable and nutritious food, and social-change education" was a project partner.