

Cleminson Elementary School

The cafeteria at Cleminson Elementary School in El Monte, California, is no ordinary cafeteria. Nowhere else can ordinary students eat “x-ray vision carrots” or an “ironman spinach salad.”



Cleminson Principal Lillian Prince takes great pride in the health and well being of her students, and goes to great lengths to make sure the students at her school embrace the healthier choices that the staff provides. “We’re really sales people,” she said. “We’re selling a product, and how well we sell the product equals how well the children do.” Cleminson, in fact, is one of two schools in the country that the Alliance for a Healthier Generation recognized with a Gold National Recognition Award in 2012. Cleminson is also one of the top-scoring schools in its district, academically.

“We get the big picture,” said Mary Jones, the Wellness Coordinator for El Monte School District. “We understand that there is a direct connection between student wellness and academic achievement.”

At Cleminson, physical activity and nutrition are incorporated throughout the entire curriculum and the entire school day. Celebrity chefs demonstrate nourishing recipes to the kids and teachers lead a minute of exercise in every class (the focus of a recent KABC-TV segment). The school also offers programs in soccer, football, other team sports, a large selection of books on

health and wellness in the school library, and plenty of physical education offerings to help keep the kids on track.

“What it does,” described Prince, “is give us one more little ingredient that we put into the recipe so that we can help the children. If we’re going to educate the children and keep them engaged, we need to keep adding to the recipe.”

“The other day we had 32 first graders seated on the rug and the teacher was reading a story about Johnny Appleseed, talking to the kids about the new words that they could add to their vocabulary,” Prince recalled. She explained that the teacher, at the same time, was also peeling an apple for the applesauce that the class made later in the day. “These things give a little spark to our curriculum.”

Cleminson, Prince pointed out, takes full advantage of the many resources that are provided by El Monte City School District and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. That level of support—the guest chefs, new recipes for school lunches, parent education classes—has helped the other schools in the district as well. Out of the 14 schools in the district, 12 have earned gold, silver or bronze recognition from the Alliance.

District Director of Nutrition Services Robert Lewis credits this success to District Superintendent Jeff Seymour. “He challenged his schools to apply for these awards. The first year we had two silvers, the next year seven bronze, and then it took off. Principals are now in a friendly competition! Once you get that you can’t shut it down.”

