



Kids First Wellness Advocates Series
All Ages Learn About Food Choices
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Communications

North Providence - For many of the North Providence High School students in the Honor Society, it had probably been a while since they had sat at small sized tables and chairs, using crayons to draw pictures of their favorite foods. But when this group of energetic and devoted seniors entered Mrs. Szumita's Kindergarten classroom at Whelan Elementary this spring, they managed to conduct an informative and entertaining morning nutrition lesson for all 20 of the K students. The high schoolers instinctively knew how to engage and keep the attention of a wiggly audience of 5 year olds, alternating between group discussion on the rug and group activities back at desks.

"So what do you think are some healthy breakfast foods?" asked one of the high school students who lead the preceding lesson on food groups and the food pyramid. Several hands immediately shot up in the air.



"Pancakes!" said one.

"Cereal!" said another.

"Waffles!" said a third.

"Egg and cheese on a croissant!" declared one boy proudly. The adults in the room paused for a surprised moment, eyebrows raised. The boy nodded his head vigorously, defending his answer. "That's what I eat all the time to get these big muscles", he declared, showing off his elementary-school-sized biceps.

The high school instructors managed to take this comment and turn it towards a discussion about the role of protein in the body and the kinds of high protein foods you need to eat to build big muscles. This led into a discussion about what were "good brain foods" and what favorite foods the students enjoyed at lunch and dinner. Then the high schoolers asked the kindergartners to return to their desks to draw pictures of their favorite healthy snacks.



As the Kindergartners busied themselves with artwork, the teens circulated among the tables and chairs, offering encouraging comments and further education about watermelons, yogurt, cheese or strawberries. Afterwards, they collected all the drawings and shared them with the class, talking about the differences between healthy snacks and favorite treats.

Towards the end of the hour-long lesson, the group was entertained by a surprise visit from The Ms. RI Apple - who made a grand and memorable entrance into the classroom - and then everyone enjoyed a healthy snack of yogurt and RI apples provided by the Whelan Elementary cafeteria staff.

When asked why they had picked nutrition as a subject to share with the younger students as part of their National Honor Society service learning

segment, the high school students said they wanted to talk about something fun and interesting with the Kindergartners that would help them learn more about staying healthy.



“Everyone loves to talk about food”, one of the seniors said. “It’s a really easy subject to talk about with any age and it gives us a chance to teach younger kids a bit more about choosing things that are good for them to eat. When you get to be our age, most of your bones and body are already all grown, but we get to show these kids just how important it is to eat right when you are little and still growing.”

Judging from the foods and snacks Ms. Szumita’s class drew and talked about, this is a group of Kindergartners that know (and enjoy) healthy foods. That’s great news, but even better that they have a few big kids around to help remind them.