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Emerson Elementary School food service workers Nancy Vengels(left) and Debbie Aufschlag prepare strawberry smoothies during the Bristol Township School District's Food Services Workshop with Chef Cyndie Story at Truman High School in Bristol Township Monday. - Matt Stanley/Staff Photographer

School menus

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Bucks County Courier Times

Recipes include fiesta chicken soup, broccoli frittata, black bean and corn salsa and sauteed vegetables with lemon garlic sauce.

What does it take to get students to eat fresh fruits and vegetables?

Bristol Township School District cafeteria workers and kitchen managers brainstormed ways Monday to entice kids to eat healthy foods during a workshop hosted by nationally known schools chef Cyndie Story.

The hands-on seminar included tips on how to create tempting fresh fruit dishes and healthy vegetable-based appetizers, salads and entrees like oriental chicken salad, sauteed vegetables with lemon garlic sauce and pear vinaigrette salad.

The Kentucky-based registered dietitian goes to schools around the country to show cafeteria workers how to use fresh fruits and vegetables in their meal offerings. Bristol Township's Healthy Kids initiative sponsored Monday's workshop in the Harry S Truman High School kitchen.

The district's Healthy Kids anti-obesity program was created in 2008 with a \$300,000, two-year grant from Tufts University to help fight a roughly 30 percent obesity rate among Bristol Township elementary school students.

People are defined as overweight if they have a body mass index between 25 and 29.9, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. People with BMIs of 30 or more are considered obese, which can lead to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and other health ailments, the CDC reports.

The Healthy Kids program includes activities geared toward promoting active lifestyles for kids and opportunities to show them the healthy foods they should eat (such as fresh veggies and fruits) as opposed to carbohydrate- and fat-laden items (such as deep-fried foods, sugary drinks and candy bars).

"School is a small slice of a student's diet," the chef said. The goal is to get kids to let their parents know they're interested in eating more fruits and vegetables and fewer processed foods that have lots of extra calories and little nutritional value, she said.

"Hopefully, this will translate into parents making better decisions in the grocery stores," the chef said as she watched the cafeteria workers team up to create appetizers and entrees from recipes she provided.

Logistics will play a big role in what recipes can and can't be used, said Susan DeRosier, the kitchen manager for Benjamin Franklin Freshman Academy and Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. Her team created a time-intensive broccoli frittata and a quickly prepared black bean and corn salsa.

The bean and salsa dish is high in nutrients because it was created with unprocessed ingredients, the chef said. The dish would be less time-consuming than the frittata, a crust-less quiche, and could be used alongside a main dish of chicken fajitas, DeRosier said.

The workshop provided some valuable tips about how to spice up school meals, said Ralph Waldo Emerson Elementary School cafeteria worker Debbie Aufschlag.

"It's nice to see fresh food on the [cafeteria] line and I think the students will take it," she said.

Find out more

Go to www.yahoo.com and click onto the groups section to access the "Bristol Township Healthy Kids" page for more information about the Bristol Township School District's anti-obesity initiative.

What's your body mass index?

Divide your weight in pounds by your height in inches and divide that again by your height in inches and multiply by 703 to get your BMI.

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