

# Coventry schools celebrate Wellness Week 2011

## Healthy new menu items help kids be health conscious

JESSICA SELBY  
jsselby@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — It may not have been pizza covered in oozing cheese and red sauce or chicken nuggets caked in thick bread crumbs, but the kids still went wild for it.

Students at Blackrock Elementary School in Coventry were served a new food item last week as part of a taste testing trial run of new menu items created for Wellness Week 2011.

Aramark, the school's food service provider, was observing Wellness Week 2011, March 21st through the 25th, with the introduction of several new menu items. Each of the items, while still given a kid friendly name, like Twisted Tortilla Twirls and Power Macaroni and Cheese, are intended to maintain a level of appeal to the students while simultaneously providing a healthier food option.

At the taste testing the students were offered samples of the Twisted Tortilla Twirls, a whole grain tortilla wrapped around a mixture of chicken, cheese and sweet potatoes. Almost every student that sampled the new item, which by wellness standards was considered a healthier choice, said that they loved it.

Skyla Lytle, a third grade student at the school that sampled the new item said that she would give it a "big two thumbs up."

"I love it," she said. "I think it tastes awesome; probably the best lunch ever...I can't wait to get them next week."

Isabella Kirk, who is also a third grader at the school, didn't take as favorably to the new item at first, but said that she did still "like" the new item and "would order" it if it was offered as a menu selection.

The item, which was described as a made-from-scratch item, is part of the new campaign that Aramark is moving towards.

"This is a more vegetable based item," said Marisa Anand, a chef for Kids First that was helping Aramark to kick off their Wellness Week Campaign by preparing the Twirls at Blackrock for the food service staff there. "This is all part of the trend that food service providers for schools, like Aramark, are working towards; removing all of those processed food choices and replacing them with more balanced healthier made-from-scratch selections."

While these items are clearly healthier options for the students, Anand explained that they are not always so easy for the food service providers to shell out. The majority of elementary school kitchens are only equipped with reheating devices and not fully functioning ovens so the majority of menu options are prepared at the high school and shipped over to the elementary schools.

Because of the requirement of making up close to 1,000 individual tortilla wraps for each elementary school, because each student would receive two wraps a piece in order to meet the daily requirements by the health and wellness standards, this task could be considered too great of a challenge to maintain the selection as a permanent menu choice. The whole purpose of the taste testing last

week, though, Anand said, was to do a run through to see what those challenges were and try to create remedies for addressing them.

The overall outcome, however, according to Anand and the food service providers at the school, was overwhelmingly positive.

"We have had some awesome feedback," said Kelly Swanson, Communications Associate for Kids First. "The kids were not required to sample the new item, but I would say that three out of every four kids are and almost all of the ones that are sampling it say that they really love it."

"At the last lunch, there was a mob scene around Melanic," she said. "The kids were asking if they could have seconds and when it would appear on the menu."

The item will be served this week on Wednesday and another new healthy option, Power Mac N Cheese, will be served on Friday.

Anand said that a regional chef for Kids First had been working on developing the new recipes for Wellness Week. In addition to those items already mentioned, the students would also be enjoying a totally taco salad boat, which was described as a bowl-shaped taco shell filled with lettuce, tomato, cheese and beef and bean chili. The dish was to be served with black bean and corn salsa.

The students were also going to be trying a new type of pasta and red sauce which was "enriched with pureed vegetables." The dish came with whole grain garlic bread made with locally grown garlic.



Jessica Selby•Daily Times

Top left: Twisted Tortilla Twirls. Top right: Marisa Anand, a chef for Kids First that was helping Aramark to kick off their Wellness Week Campaign by preparing the Twirls at Blackrock for the food service staff there. Bottom left: Students at Blackrock Elementary wait anxiously to try the healthy foods. Bottom right: Ashley Koch and Abigail Smith sample the tortilla twists.