



Cooking Up Change:

Students cook up healthier school food with President Obama's Chef Sam Kass

Washington, D.C. - Six students from Chicago's Richards Career Academy today prepared a special healthy lunch with White House Chef Sam Kass in honor of the Healthy Schools Campaign's [Cooking Up Change](#) program, a nationwide effort and model to bring better food into America's schools.

The Healthy Schools Campaign, a Chicago-based nonprofit dedicated to advocating for more money for better food in public schools, challenged high school students in Chicago to create a school meal that exceeds the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's nutrition standards for the National School Lunch program while using ingredients available through the school food service.

Six remarkable high school students from Chicago's Richards Career Academy won the contest to create a meal that was both healthy and delicious. These individuals are: **Alvaro Aquilar, Marquice Kent, Rafael Ruiz, Jose Tena, Mike Martinez and Emmanuel Sandoval**. And the payoff could not be bigger. The students showcased their hard work with **White House Chef Sam Kass** while school lunchrooms across America served the meal. Members of Congress were also offered a chance to sample the meal at the Congressional Longworth cafeteria.

Students prepared their winning recipe with Chef Kass at Martha's Table, a nonprofit community center for at-risk children. Their winning recipe is simple, healthy and delicious:

- Stuffed pepper with chicken
- Carrot quesadilla
- Fresh fruit salsa salad

Copies of the recipes can be downloaded at www.healthyschoolscampaign.org. An estimated 40,000 school children in selected public schools located in Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, New York, Oakland and Washington D.C. were offered the chance to taste the winning recipe created by students for students.

Chef Kass said he was impressed by the students' commitment to deliver a creative meal that also celebrated their Hispanic heritage and passion for cooking.

"As chefs, we know that fresh, healthy food not only tastes better, it's better for you. It is clear that the President and Mrs. Obama have made high quality, fresh food a priority for the First Family. To ensure that all children have access to nutritious and tasty food, the President supports improvements to the school food program," said Kass.

Congress is expected to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act this year. Nutrition advocates say it's critical that Congress invest more dollars for better food. They say that existing funding levels are woefully inadequate to cover the total costs of school lunches today.

"This was a remarkable opportunity to celebrate the hard work of these students and highlight the important issue of serving high quality school meals to our kids. It's also an opportunity to emphasize the need to make the financial investments that America's school lunch program desperately needs to ensure that all kids have access to nutritious, fresh food," said Rochelle Davis, executive director of the Healthy Schools Campaign. "We are fortunate to have a First Family in the White House that understands healthy schools meals are essential ingredients for student health and learning."

Davis said momentum is building around this important issue through the efforts of food service directors who are working with limited resources to provide students with healthier food. Current federal reimbursement rates only cover 88 percent of the cost for student meals, according to the School Nutrition Association. Louise Esaian, logistics officer for Chicago Public Schools, is responsible for serving 61 million meals per year to a student population, of which 83 percent qualify for the federal food program. She said that the need for adequate funding is critical to ensure that improvements like incorporating whole grain or fresh regional fruits and vegetables are sustainable.

"We are proud of the improvements that we have made in the last few years. We know we need to do more, but without adequate funding, bringing the school meal into alignment with the 2005 dietary standards is not possible," she said.

Advocates like the Healthy Schools Campaign and their supporters, Chartwells-Thompson Hospitality, Applegate Farms and the Chicago Community Trust, recognize the need to create a school culture that promotes health and wellness in our nation's schools. Programs like Cooking Up Change, which involve parents, principals, teachers, school nurses and students, ensure that students are receptive to healthy food options. The [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#), a funder of the Healthy Schools Campaign and a leader in the good food movement, is helping drive the national conversation to ensure students get the fresh, healthy foods they need to learn and grow.

"Since so many poor children depend on school meal programs as a primary source of nutrition, it is important that we ensure that healthy school food becomes the norm," said Gail Christopher, vice president for programs at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. "Good school food is a fundamental requirement for a child's health and educational success."

Jesse Ruiz, chair of Illinois' Board of Education, said that the need to promote student health is important to student learning.

"As educators, we know that students' health is a critical part of their being successful at school. While in school, students need to be properly nourished to learn, and they need to practice healthy lifestyles so that our goal of creating productive citizens of tomorrow can be realized," said Ruiz.

Better food advocates are calling for a number of improvements to the measure, including:

- Increased funding for school meal programs
- Adopting nutritional standards for all food available to students at school
- Improving the quality and variety of foods made available through the commodities program.
- Streamlining the administration of the school food program so that school districts can reduce administrative costs

Helpful background links:

Healthy Schools Campaign - www.healthyschoolscampaign.org

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Food & Fitness - www.wkkf.org/faf

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Food and Society - <http://foodandsociety.org>

School Nutrition Association - <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/>

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Contact:

Sue Evans

206.792.0408 – Work

253.592.1590 – Cell

sevens@pyramidcommunications.com

Chris Nelson

206.940.1605 – Cell

cnelson@pyramidcommunications.com