

# CARDIFF: Local schools focus on healthy eating

By [STACY BRANDT - sbrandt@nctimes.com](mailto:sbrandt@nctimes.com) North County Times - The Californian | Posted: Saturday, December 25, 2010 11:00 pm |



*Sydney Templin, 7, middle, eats a handmade veggie-infused bean burrito for lunch earlier this month at Cardiff Elementary School. Classmates Sierra Schumann, left, and Mariana Alcazar, right, enjoy lunch as well. (Photo by Jamie Scott Lytle - Staff Photographer)*

Cafeteria workers at Cardiff's two elementary schools have started sneaking pureed vegetables into familiar lunches as part of an effort to encourage students to pick more healthy foods.

Of course, parents and some of the kids know about the hidden veggies, but students said they still enjoy the lunchtime favorites such as macaroni and cheese, tacos and burritos.

Other changes started this year at Cardiff and Ada Harris elementary schools, with the help of a local nonprofit, include using more organic ingredients, cooking from scratch more often, using more whole grains and offering more vegetarian meals.

A group of children who had just finished eating turkey tacos with pureed carrots recently said they liked the new menu, which the schools began serving a few months ago.

"It's very good for you, and it helps you grow and be healthier and stronger," said Nathan McMinn, a third-grader at Cardiff Elementary. Nathan said the healthy meals have given him more energy to play and exercise. Plus, they taste good, the group said.

Lettuce was a surprising favorite among the students at Cardiff Elementary, perhaps because the students grew the vegetable last month in the school's garden as part of the schools Grow Your Lunch program. All of the school's students will get a chance to work in the garden as they grow the leafy green throughout the school year, said Devon Azzam, who oversees the garden program.

The healthier meals and garden program were both paid for with money donated by the Rob Machado Foundation, an environmentally focused organization started by Machado, a local professional surfer who attended the district as a child.

The foundation has been working with the two-school Cardiff School District for the past three years, picking a new focus each year: organic gardening in 2008-09, recycling in 2009-10, and healthy food this year.

The money from the foundation paid for a new industrial food processor to puree the vegetables and to bring in consultants to work with the employees who prepare lunches.

The healthier food will not only give the kids more energy but could also help them concentrate in class, said Cardiff Elementary Principal Julie Parker.

"The research shows that there's a strong correlation between what you eat and how your brain functions," she said.

The changes may sound expensive, but Parker said the new menus don't cost more than the old ones because employees and organizers have worked to find deals whenever possible. There's also a hope that the changes will encourage more parents to pay for school lunches, Parker said.

"The better quality of lunch we serve, the more parents and students will buy it," she said.

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