

# Trumbull County

## The Students are Customers at Warren City School's Cafeteria

### Summary

Well-nourished children make better learners. Many studies show a direct link between nutritional intake and academic performance. For example, increased participation in breakfast alone improved daily attendance, reduced tardiness, improved test scores, and was associated with better classroom participation. The Trumbull County Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program has been a catalyst for change for fresh food access in schools and communities.



### Challenge

Poor nutrition is the norm in many Warren City homes. Children and parents expect the same types of foods in the schools as at home, usually processed and few fruits and vegetables. Daily participation was down in the cafeteria with less than 30% (350) of high school students eating school lunches. Obesity is on the increase with 38.5 % of the third graders' BMI above the 85th percentile. School nurses reported an increased number of students with type 2 diabetes. If something is not done to avert the problem of poor nutrition, grade scores will continue to drop, diabetes and asthma rates will increase and chronic disease will be on the rise. Changing societal norms is difficult especially in low-income communities where healthy foods are not readily accessible or affordable.

### Solution

Trumbull County CHC program formed a coalition of local and state school food service advocates to identify strategies to make school meals more nutritious yet appealing to the students and staff. Annual school food service conferences have been held to help food service staff make improvements in food preparation and marketing. In addition, Warren City schools hired a chef to train staff on how to prepare fresh vegetables and modify recipes to meet the current USDA school meal patterns. The school partnered with the Community Victory Garden and Ohio State University-Extension for additional fresh produce and contracted with Lake to River Food Co-op to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables.

### Your Involvement is Key

**Parents:** Insist that your schools provide nutritious food in all school venues.

**Coaches:** Get the best performance out of your athlete by advocating healthy pre-game meals.

**Teachers:** Well-nourished brains perform better. Advocate for breakfast and lunch participation.

**Administrators:** Work with local producers to engage them in the school food buying process.

**Community Members:** Lead by example. Offer foods at all community venues including after school programs, sports, summer camps and faith-based events.



## Results

After the food service conference, participants networked with other successful lunch programs to help implement their own initiatives. As a result 85% (11,000) of high school students are eating lunch, a 50% increase. The al a-carte line that offered many unhealthy options was eliminated. New chef salads meet the USDA nutrition standards, and the lunch period was extended to a full 30 minutes to allow time for students to eat their healthy meals.

The Community Victory Garden supplied more than 1,000 pounds of fresh produce from their salsa garden for the school. *The Tribune Chronicle*, a local newspaper, published a positive story praising the cafeteria for using the garden as a source of food for it's school lunches.

“I don't buy into the notion that, ‘they won't eat this (in regards to the new healthy foods).”

- Lauren Postlethwait, Warren City Schools Food Service Director

## Future Directions

The short-term goal is to continue to supplement school lunches with locally grown produce. The long-term goal is for Warren City Schools to develop policies for healthy school celebrations, fund-raisers and pre-sports meals.

The Creating Healthy Communities program will help school districts to accomplish that goal by providing training and technical assistance on the local level.



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