

Richfield students line up to eat healthier

A new “course” in school lunch attracts students to healthier eating

October, 2016 – It is not a course as in “meal” but a new course of action that is attracting students to line up for healthier eating in the Richfield High School cafeteria. This is a big success because providing healthier foods is a challenge for schools as students often don’t choose to eat the healthier foods. Richfield High School found that a marketing strategy allowing *students* to co-create the new course of action for the school cafeteria inspired the students to make healthier choices. It turns out the new course of action did even more good than that.



Students asked for vibrant colors in the new cafeteria. This student said, “I am more focused on food I eat with the food pictures in the cafeteria.”

Students give input to course of action for cafeteria transformation

“It is now a destination and I can’t wait to eat there,” said Richfield High School senior, Larry Lopez. Larry was a key player in the school’s cafeteria transformation that included décor and special use of signs. He participated in two focus groups for the marketing research portion of the project in May of 2016 and said he was very vocal in both.

Larry said about the first focus group, “I enjoyed the way it was handled.” Community Blueprint, a social marketing firm that partnered with Richfield Schools on the project, gathered

opinions and vision for the cafeteria, including colors and what it would look like. Then they used the students’ input to create three design ideas with healthy eating messages for the cafeteria.

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Richfield High School Senior, Larry Lopez

One month later, Community Blueprint presented the three design ideas to students in a second focus group, and students selected their favorite. Larry said, “They did a nice job using designs with vibrant colors the students wanted.” He also said students liked the new school cafeteria name, *70th Street Café*.

“I didn’t like eating in the cafeteria before. It was very noisy with all the students. Now it is different. It is not just coming to lunch but also somewhere to be with friends,” Larry said. He explained his friends used to eat in the library, but he encouraged them to try the cafeteria. Now he and his friends always eat in the cafeteria because it is someplace where they can eat *and* have a conversation.

Larry saw the TV screens with menu choices at the cafeteria entrances as a factor contributing to noise reduction. “With the new changes there

is more organization and not as much telling us what to do. TV screens help students see what choices they have with a full description. Some students didn't know about the choices before."

Larry said he usually doesn't enjoy hot lunch. He is more likely to go to the express line because there is more variety, including salads and wraps, so he eats more vegetables. There are fresh fruits there too. He said his friends do the same. He also said, "I am more focused on food I eat with the food pictures in the cafeteria. Before I did not eat vegetables. I eat more now that I look at the pictures and think about what I want, and I eat more greens from the express line." Larry explained, "Young people are visual learners. They learn from the images and it influences what they want to eat."



The express line offers more variety, including salads, wraps and fresh fruit. TV screens at each line describe lunch choices and display healthy eating messages.

More students show up for lunch in the school cafeteria now

Richfield High School Food Service Senior Clerk, Courtney LaDuke, said, "This is the first time in the 17 years I have worked here that the number of students served in one day has exceeded 700. The meal count first reached 712 and more recently 722." She said this occurred even though students can go off campus for lunch if they have approval. Ms. Laduke also said she notices that the students seem to have more pride in the cafeteria.

Grant supported Richfield Public Schools' plan for healthier eating

Bloomington's Division of Public Health received the University of Minnesota Extension SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education) Community Partnership grant for part of this project. The Public Health Division also used SHIP (Statewide Health Improvement Program) support to supplement the grant.

The Public Health Division asked Richfield Public Schools Food and Nutrition Director, Pam Haupt, to partner on the project as many School District families are eligible for educational benefits.

Ms. Haupt said, "Obtaining funds for the marketing project is part of a five-year comprehensive plan to capture funding streams. My goal is to execute a good plan with outcomes that meet everyone's expectations." With this grant, the Public Health Division supported Ms. Haupt's efforts to refresh the cafeteria and create an updated environment with images of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Healthier eating opens the door to future benefits

There is evidence that giving students the chance to make their cafeteria more inviting can make a difference in healthier eating. At Richfield High School, greater school lunch participation and better school cafeteria behavior were early surprise outcomes in just the two months school has been in session.

These outcomes speak well of the possibility for potential future benefits, such as better health and academic achievement for students, including for Larry Lopez. Larry said he has enjoyed working on the project and glad he could see the results as a Richfield High School senior. His participation has served him well as he plans to further his studies in marketing and public relations after high school.

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