

Parkdale Nutrition Initiative

By: Valeria Cori-Manocchio

Cook a healthy meal for a child and they will eat well. Teach a child to cook a healthy meal and they will live well.

With the help of the Green Apple Grant from Super C, the National Bank Grant and a partnership with Maxi, Parkdale Elementary School has implemented a school-wide nutrition initiative to engage students, faculty and community in healthy eating habits.

Educating students about nutrition and healthy living was a priority for many Parkdale staff members. Ms. Jackie Dare's kindergarten class learnt about exotic fruits from various countries while Ms. Mary Tsoupanarias' third grade class reinvented traditional ice cream with healthier alternatives like bananas, fresh berries and agave. Mr. Ante Roas' class learned about making nutrition choices with snacks while preparing fruit smoothies, kale chips and fruit salads.

Grade 5 students participated in a weekly cooking session called 'Qu'est ce qu'on mange,' where French teacher, Mme. Stephanie Dalcourt, taught kitchen basics such as chopping vegetables, measuring out ingredients and following recipes. Their new skills turned ordinary ingredients into delicious, healthy meals like vegetarian couscous, which were donated to local families in need.

Throughout this initiative, teachers demonstrated just how multicultural nutrition can be; Ms. Mary Kanellopoulos' grade 1 class shopped and prepared different rice-based recipes reflecting three different countries' culinary flavours and cultures.

Students also integrated food and nutrition into a family affair. Ms. Jennifer Poupart's third grade class ran a Pop Up restaurant with a kid-friendly, healthy menu.

After preparing and cooking the menu items, the class had the opportunity to serve their parents and siblings.

Other school-wide activities included a fruit bowl at the main office to encourage healthy snacking and posters tracking how many fruits and vegetables classes consumed over the school year.

Finally, Parkdale took nutrition beyond the classroom with the afterschool Cooking Club and the garden project. Fifth grade students spent Friday afternoons in May cooking and preparing larger serving of food to take home their families and donate to community members in need.

Nutrition was transported outdoors with the garden project. When the weather permitted, seedlings grown in classrooms were planted by students, parents and garden volunteers in a fenced plot of land within the school playground to grow over the summer. The garden consists of a variety of plants, from spinach, kale and arugula for a salad bar, to herbs like coriander and basil as well as other organically grown vegetables including zucchini, green beans and tomatoes.

Parent, student and teacher volunteers will tend to the garden during the summer months, picking the vegetables and watering the plants when needed. The school is planning a harvest party this upcoming September to showcase and prepare a meal from the vegetables grown in the garden.

Additionally, Parkdale's nutrition initiative shed light on other community resources including COCLA, located at 1357 St. Louis where grade 6 students donated fresh produce, and the Centre Bon Courage at 155 Car Benoit, Saint-Laurent.

