

# Event helps students develop taste for healthy food

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**By Scott Weybright**

Children are taught from an early age not to play with their food.

Baltimore Highlands Elementary School flipped that rule last week as students and parents were encouraged to build monster faces out of fruits and vegetables.

Creations such as spinach faces with banana eyes were part of the school's first FRESHTival, an April 26 event to encourage kids and adults to eat more fruits and vegetables and think about healthy eating habits.



Alexis Lancaster, a fourth grader at Baltimore Highlands Elementary School, eats a piece of celery at the Frestival April 26.

The event included a vegetable juggler in the school's auditorium and a variety of food-related activities and samples in the cafeteria.

Volunteers distributed yogurt in small paper cups with fresh fruit toppings, including strawberries and peaches.

Apples were given away at a small farmer's market in the middle of the cafeteria.

Maryland- grown fruits and vegetables, such as eggplant, cucumbers, potatoes and green beans, were also on display and recipes for salsa and other snacks were handed out.

At another station, kids created their own monster faces with carrot sticks, mushrooms and banana slices and used ranch dressing as the glue to hold it all together.

More than 250 students and relatives attended the event, according to assistant principal John Merrill.

"It's the biggest turnout for an after-school event we've had this year," said Merrill, dressed in a spinach costume for the event.

Jasmine Coleman said her favorite attraction was the yogurt station for one main reason: her favorite fruit.

"I liked it because of the strawberries," the third-grader said.

Coleman's mother, Esther McNeill, said she was glad the school hosted the event and appreciated the tips for making and eating healthier food.

She said she also enjoyed the sample of a special salsa that contained all five food groups.

2

Baltimore Highlands is part of a research project with the University of Maryland's Baltimore County Food Stamp Nutrition Education System.

The school at 4200 Annapolis Road is a pilot school for a program to integrate healthy eating into other aspects of the curriculum, according to Haylee Staruk, a nutrition educator and project leader.

Staruk, who dressed in a tomato costume for the evening, said she has been working primarily with fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and students at the school.

Earlier this year, the fourth grade sampled dehydrated food during a science unit on outer space.

"We just integrated it into what they were already learning," Staruk said.

Baltimore Highlands principal Rosemarie Kincannon said the school has had teachers take a course in integrating healthy eating into regular classes.

Kincannon, who dressed in a carrot costume for the event, said the students "are learning how to make good food choices.

"Instead of waking up and having Twinkies for breakfast, they can have something healthy," said Kincannon, who is in her eighth year at the school.

This summer, Kincannon said the school plans to host at least three farmers' markets where parents will be able to come to the school and purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

Brandie Mondshour has two children attending Baltimore Highlands.

She said her nine-year-old son, Thomas Shriner, does not like fruits or vegetables, but she was able to get him to try the yogurt with fruit during last week's event.

"We do yogurt all the time. It's just he would never try (the fruit) before," Mondshour said. "So now he'll have more of an incentive to try it because he likes it."

George Dietz, whose daughter Brianna is a fifth-grader at the school, said he enjoyed the event.

"I think it's fantastic," he said. "It's something different and teaches about healthy eating."

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