



home > city hall > press releases

"Chef in the Classroom" Promotes Healthy Living

Moms and dads are joining their elementary school children in the classroom this summer, where the curriculum focuses on healthy eating, exercising and enjoying an active lifestyle.

The weekly sessions at Val Verde Elementary School continue the City's award-winning Live Well Perris healthy-eating, active-living campaign, which includes a component known as "Chef in the Classroom."

Perris staff member Marisela Magana conducts the morning sessions at the elementary school, which have drawn between 40 and 80 parents and students.

During one recent session, Magana prepared a black bean-and-mango salad while explaining the importance of reading package labels while shopping, limiting fat, salt and sugar intake, incorporating fish and lean meats into shopping routines and meal planning. It's all about "building a healthy plate," she said.

"Food is our friend," Magana said. "It feeds your muscles and brain."



Perris City employee Marisela Magana and Val Verde Unified School District student Evelyn Bernal, 11, prepared black bean and mango salad during a recent class that informed parents and children about the benefits of healthy eating.

Since part of the outreach program includes audience participation, Magana called Evelyn Bernal, 11, to the front of the group, where she helped prepare the bean and mango salad. The recipe called for mixing chili powder, cumin, cilantro, lime juice, onion and red bell pepper with the main ingredients to create a tart and somewhat spicy snack.

Evelyn said her family includes healthy food choices like bananas, carrots and lettuce into its menu.

"You have to try to eat healthy every day," she said.

She said she also regularly swims and walks with her mom to stay in shape.

Linda Sepulveda and her daughter, Sophia, 9, like the information provided during each session and said Magana does an excellent job in making the necessary points about diet and exercise. The class sessions are free as Live Well Perris is sponsored through grant funding.

The Live Well Program has garnered praise from Southern California officials for its community-engagement activities like "Chef in the Classroom" and has also won national, state and regional awards.



Linda Sepulveda and her daughter, Sophia, 9, enjoyed the healthy snack after taking part in the class about healthy eating.

"It's great to involve kids," Linda Sepulveda said. "It's beneficial and it makes kids feel important. It seems so many kids stay inside and play video games. Cooking healthy is very important. So is exercise."

Mother and daughter job, bicycle, swim, do pushup and squats—the latter during commercials while watching television.

Val Verde Unified School District employee Iliana Dodge, who is working with the City on the "Chef in the Classroom" program, said the cooking and eating tips will come in handy during the summer when kids are off from school and once they return to classes.

"The City and the school district have the vision to help the community by providing helpful resources to families," Dodge said.

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