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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

> Color My Tray Promotes Vegetable Consumption

Kindergarten students at Hickman Mills C-1 School District, in Kansas City, Mo., are eating more vegetables than ever, thanks to a new program created by Grennan Sims, R.D., dietitian and nutrition education coordinator.

Sims used a \$5,000 grant from the state's Office of Minority Health to enhance an existing classroom program. The program, Color My Tray, has resulted in a 15% increase in vegetable consumption among the kindergarteners at Ingels Elementary School. "We had been participating in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program for the last couple of years," Sims explains. "We decided to see if we could enhance that program."

Under the existing program, tubs of various produce are delivered to classrooms twice a week for students to try, with teachers providing an educational overview of the item. The grant allowed Sims to augment that program at one elementary school as a pilot.

"We thought the Choose MyPlate concept was great and we wanted to take a play on that," Sims says. "We came up with Color My Tray because we wanted kids to literally color their trays with fruits and vegetables."

Several changes were made to upgrade the existing program. For example, Sims created a "passport" and told students they were going on a "healthy journey." An "I Tried It" stamp was made so that teachers could stamp the passport every time a student tried a particular item.

"We also asked kids to color a picture of their school lunch tray at the beginning of the 12 weeks and then to color a picture of their tray at the end of the 12 weeks," Sims adds. "Our hope was that the pictures would go from browns and yellows to greens and reds and purples and blues, and that is what we saw." One reason for that was that the department partnered with local chefs to help develop new recipes using the various fruits and vegetables.

To measure the program's effectiveness, Sims weighed each bin being sent to a classroom and then weighed the collected waste. The difference was the amount of produce consumed. "Over the 12 weeks, vegetable consumption increased by 15%," she says. "Fruit consumption stayed basically the same, but our kids have always been really good fruit eaters."



Kindergarteners learned the importance of eating fruits and vegetables with Color My Tray.