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City Grows Salad Bar School Offerings

Whole Foods donates \$300,000 to equip 57 new veggie bars

By Kristen Meriwether

Epoch Times Staff Last Updated: August 29, 2012 Created: August 24, 2012

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A salad bar in a Chicago elementary school. On Thursday, Mayor Bloomberg announced the addition of 57 new salad bars for New York City public schools. (Tim Boyle/Getty Images)

NEW YORK—More New York City public school children will soon have access to hearty fruit and vegetables, with the expansion of the city's Salad Bar Initiative.

Whole Foods, which opened its seventh store in New York City Thursday on East 57th Street, donated the cost of installing 57 salad bars, around \$300,000, through its Whole Kids Foundation.

"This is a gift that is going to keep on giving for years to come as thousands of our students learn to make healthier nutritional choices in their lives," Mayor Michael Bloomberg said.

As part of the Bloomberg's Task Force on Obesity, the city has pushed for the addition of salad bars in schools, enabling children to make healthier food choices. The city's goal is to put salad bars in all 1,200 school buildings by 2015.

Currently, there are salad bars in roughly three-quarters of the city's schools, according to the mayor's office. The salad bar is included in the \$1.50 lunch, reduced-priced lunch, or free lunch programs.

Healthier Children

Giving students better access to fresh fruit and vegetables is one way Bloomberg is trying to fight childhood obesity, a rate he said has decreased 5.5 percent in the past five years (for kindergarteners through eighth grade) thanks to the city's efforts to educate children about healthy eating.

"Kids do make better choices around their meals if they do have access to a salad bar. They tend to eat more fruits and vegetables and will eat a bigger variety," Diane Harris, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lead for the Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools initiative said.

As Nona Evans, executive director of Whole Kids Foundation, pointed out, children eat approximately 4,000 meals at school during their school career, and having access to fresh fruits and vegetables is key to kids making healthier choices.

Award-winning dietician Carol M. Meerschaert was excited to hear about the latest measures being taken in the city's public schools, but said she believes offering healthy choices is only one step.

"I think like everything, it is a tool, and it is how you use that tool," Meerschaert said. "If a child ends up taking three pieces of lettuce, and a whole bunch of macaroni salad, and dumps a bunch of blue cheese

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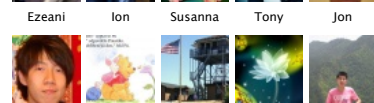
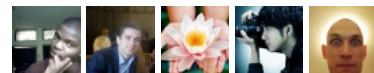
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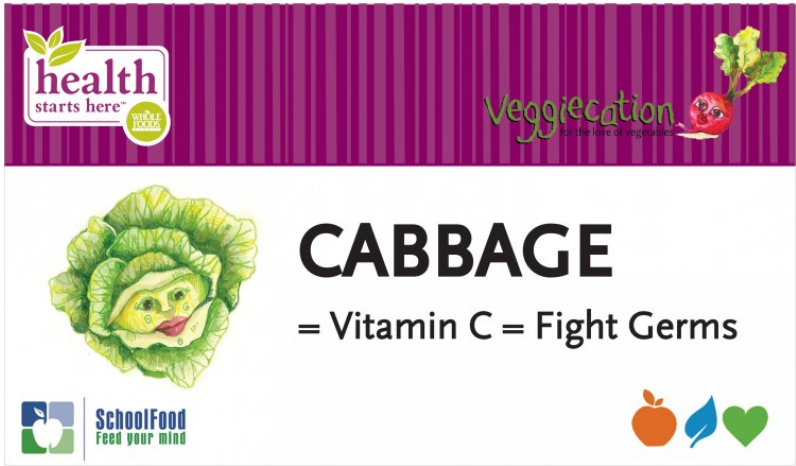
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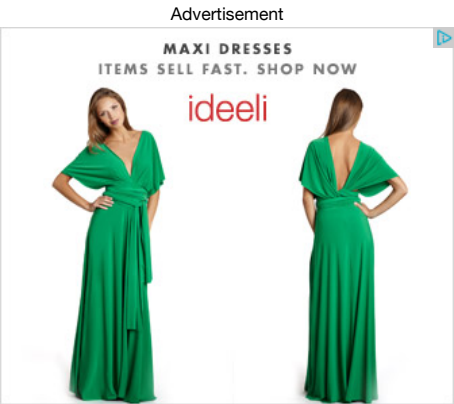
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Signs designed by New Jersey based Veggiecation, will be displayed at the 57 new salad bars in New York City public schools, which were donated Thursday by Whole Foods Market. (Images courtesy of Veggiecation).

...dressing on it, they might as well have just had some French fries.”



Meerschaert cautioned against giving children the option of lots of mayonnaise-based pasta salads and dressings, deep fried croutons, or bacon bits, and instead offering them fruits and vegetables they may not have seen or tried before at home.

“It is always helpful to increase people’s food repertoire, especially in a school environment,” Meerschaert said. She said the opportunity for peer learning, especially in the younger grades, was higher because children are more likely to look at what their friends are eating—and if it looks interesting, they might try it as well.

The schools will have signs on the new salad bars, provided by New Jersey-based Veggiecation, which will help educate the children about what they are eating.

“You can’t go wrong with fruits and vegetables,” Meerschaert said. “I tell people when in doubt, eat a vegetable. It is low in fat, low in calories, every bite is packed with nutrition.”

A Department of Education spokesperson said it would evaluate which schools would benefit most from the new salad bars this fall before placing an order and having the equipment manufactured.

The new salad bars will be ordered this fall and installed sometime next year. The city’s goal is to have salad bars in all city public schools by 2015.

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