

First Lady Michelle Obama hosts Chefs Move to Schools event on White House Lawn

June 04, 2010

Michelle Obama hosted a “Chefs Move to Schools” event at the White House earlier today, to promote her new initiative to partner professional chefs with local schools to improve student nutrition. Nearly 1000 chefs attended the event. Chef Todd Gray of Equinox restaurant, and Assistant Principal, Norah Rabiah of Murch Elementary in Washington, DC, spoke about the successful chef/school partnership that is taking place at Rabiah’s school.



Chef Gray stated that when chefs adopt a school, they become “not just a member, but a leader [of their communities].” Gray believes that chefs have instant credibility with school children, when dressed in their chefs “whites.” He emphasized the role that chefs can play in changing the way children look at school in general by making cooking and a school garden accessible to kids.

Norah Rabiah, Assistant Principal of Murch Elementary, then addressed the crowd with details about the current partnership, emphasizing the connection between the school garden and the classroom, while offering concrete examples of these connections.

Murch Elementary's first graders have been able to grasp concepts of ancient cultures, such as the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incans through the use of the school garden. The children planted the “3 sisters,” corn, squash, and beans, and used them to relate to those cultural groups.

The fourth grade students were able to learn about decomposition without just reading about it in a textbook. They now have compost bins where they compost their lunch and snack leftovers, and see decomposition first hand. Even the art classes have gotten involved in the garden, using it as the subject of art work, as well as the installation of artwork – the class has painted decorations for the garden.

Rabiah encouraged other schools to reach out and create this sort of partnership and start a school garden. In her words, schools should, “let the kids get their hands dirty.”

Michelle Obama took her turn at the podium to address the chefs, stating “food is at the core of what makes life wonderful.” She tempered that with such statistics as “nearly 1/3 of US kids are overweight or obese,” and “\$150 billion [is spent every year] treating... conditions [related to obesity].”

The First Lady highlighted her current “Let’s Move!” Campaign, which has as its goal, “to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation.” She touched on three main steps needed to reach that goal: 1 – Better information for parents to make healthy choices for their kids. 2 – Better access to quality, affordable foods, and 3 – Getting kids physically active.

Michelle Obama then turned her focus to school lunches (and breakfasts), where, she stated a lot of their kids get the bulk of their daily calories. She spoke about her concern that people think that food is not an important part of education, and how the foods children eat affect the way they are able to learn. She stated that healthy school food for children is “not a luxury.”

She urged members of the Senate to reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act that will be before them in a few weeks. The First Lady expressed her understanding that the solution can’t come “from Washington alone. “It’s going to take all of us... to give our children the healthy future they deserve.” The First Lady then called on the chefs to commit their time to schools, and to contribute their “visibility and enthusiasm.”

Let’s hope the chefs take her up on the challenge. Chefs and schools can sign up for the “Chefs Move to Schools” program on the USDA website. If any chefs out there want to volunteer to cook for my wife's home school, we're personally accepting applications, as well.