

# The Golden Carrot Award Winners

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The Golden Carrot Awards go to food service professionals who approach child nutrition in an innovative way that encourages children to eat more healthfully. The winning programs feature low-fat meals; encourage kids to eat lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; provide vegetarian or vegan menu items; respect cultural diversity; offer non-dairy alternatives, and foster community partnerships.

Winners include foodservice directors in Berkeley (CA), East Hampton (NY), Fairfax (VA), and Los Angeles. Several districts and individual schools also received special mentions for innovative programs.

## First Place Award

**The prize:** \$1000 to the innovative foodservice professional; \$2500 to the school foodservice program.

### **Berkeley Unified School District**

Berkeley, CA

**Karen Candito, Director of Nutrition Services**

Phone 510-644-6200

[kcandito@berkeley.k12.ca.us](mailto:kcandito@berkeley.k12.ca.us)



Helping children adopt a healthy lifestyle really does take a village, according to Karen Candito of Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD). As the nutrition services director for a 16-school district, Candito believes that “promoting healthy eating and balanced lifestyles is our highest obligation to students nationwide.” She has worked with the BUSD to develop this vision by joining forces with the school board, the superintendent, principals, teachers, food service workers, parents, community members, local businesses, and unions.

The result is a diverse, healthy, and incredibly innovative school food service program that incorporates everything from fresh farm-to-school produce and gardening programs to an international food court and integrated nutrition education.

A range of programs have been critical to Candito’s success:

- In 2002, the International Market Place was introduced to all middle schools. This program offers culturally diverse and healthy food choices that meet the USDA standard for low-fat fare and limit unhealthy ingredients such as hydrogenated oils and dyes. Healthy entrées include pasta with marinara sauce, vegetarian burritos, and veggie stir fry.
- A produce bar offers more than twenty-five choices of fresh fruit and vegetables each day.
- More recently, the Berkeley High School Food Court began offering healthy meals such as rice bowls topped with vegetables, salads, pastas and veggie burgers—all freshly prepared on-site. Students also receive fresh farm-to-school produce daily. Sugary foods, sodas, and fried foods have been eliminated, and free bottled water is provided at every meal.
- No irradiated foods are used in any of the schools.
- The elementary school children also fare well, with daily choices of at least one low-fat vegetarian option, as well as fresh farm-to-school produce at least three times a week. For those seeking non-dairy beverage options, fruit juice is available.
- Candito has also worked with local establishments such as Whole Foods to make healthier foods available on the lunch line, as well as with food manufacturers to develop healthier products in packaging that is both

recyclable and available in appropriate sizes.

BUSD has also incorporated nutrition education and hands-on experience into the curriculum:

- Organic gardens abound in nearly every schoolyard, and nutrition education is given in all cooking classes and in some classrooms.
- At the Martin Luther King Middle School, a joint effort was undertaken with a local restaurateur to create an Edible Garden and Edible Kitchen. This helped integrate organic gardening, composting, harvesting, and cooking into the classroom.

## Three Second Place Award Winners

**The prize:** \$500.

### **Los Angeles Leadership Academy**

District Funded Charter School Los Angeles, CA

**Gloria Boccato, Director of Food Services**

Phone: 213-381-8484

GloriaBoccato@sbcglobal.net

The Los Angeles Leadership Academy is a social-justice based charter middle school serving 195 students in grades 6-8. The school opened in 2002 and will continue to add students and grades over the next three years.

Located in inner-city Los Angeles, the school serves one of the city's most diverse districts. The population is 75 percent Latino, 14 percent African American, and 9 percent Asian American. The school's mission is to prepare urban secondary students to succeed in college and on chosen career paths, to live fulfilling, self-directed lives, and to become effective leaders in the community.

Gloria Boccato, the director of food services, plays a direct role in this mission by serving the freshest, highest quality and most nutritious foods possible to students, who are faced with numerous social stresses and the challenge to develop physically and emotionally.

Boccato has set high nutritional standards—and it shows in the three meals she and her staff serve each day:

- All menus consist of fresh vegetables and do not include sugar, refined flour, or sodas. Boccato uses only whole grains, such as brown rice. Hydrogenated oils are not used. The food is never prepackaged, and the Los Angeles Leadership Academy may be the only school in the district that prepares food fresh daily.
- Children are discouraged from bringing outside foods into the classroom, and they do not have access to vending machines.
- Boccato has implemented a Farm-to-School program that allows her to provide fresh fruit and vegetables daily while supporting local low-income farmers. Early mornings also find Boccato patrolling local markets, where she purchases the fresh fruits and vegetables that appear on the daily salad bar, which has substantially increased the number of students who eat fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Every day, the school's menu offers at least one non-dairy vegetarian item, such as veggie chili. Vegetarian soups are prepared several times per week. Students may also select healthy, tasty options from the salad bar, such as tofu or beans, in addition to many different fruits and vegetables.
- For those students who do not drink milk, juice is available.

Boccato understands that developing healthy eating habits in children requires more than just providing healthful foods. She and her staff also offer nutrition education and help students engage with the community:

- She has organized field trips to local farms to connect children with their agricultural heritage.
- Several Ethnic Food Days are also organized each year. For these events, a chef comes to the school to teach kids about healthy ethnic cooking.

- The school has implemented a program to teach and train students' parents about food handling, safety and preparation. Some parents are then employed the school's food service, where they receive a living wage, benefits, and a life-long skill.
- Boccato has also pioneered a partnership with the Nutrition Network, which has provided a grant for nutrition education and hands-on learning to students. As part of the program, 70 nutrition classes are offered each year. Students learn about cooking, coffee can gardening, understanding food labels, and safe food handling. Many of the classes are offered in Spanish and involve the student's parents.

### **Ross School**

Private School in East Hampton, NY

**Beth Collins, Executive Chef**

Phone: 631-907-5418

bcollins@ross.org

The Ross School, a private school in East Hampton, serves about 1,500 fresh, wholesome, flavorful, healthy meals each day to its students and staff. Executive Chef Beth Collins describes her mantra for food procurement and preparation as “regional, organic, seasonal, and sustainable.”

Her goal: to work towards the Ross School's mission to promote life-long health and well-being. And that she does. A joint study by the Harvard Medical School and the Centers for Disease Control found that Ross students eat substantially better than typical American kids. They eat twice the fruits and vegetables while consuming less fat, sugar, and salt, and more fiber and antioxidants. And 75 percent of parents have been inspired to change the way they cook at home.

Here are some highlights:

- On a typical fall day, children select from such mouthwatering options as sautéed broccoli raab, spaghetti squash, rice, an eggplant, tomato, olive caponata, peanut butter noodles, braised tofu, cauliflower and potato chapatis with raita, miso soup, assorted salads, and a sandwich bar.
- All the food is made from scratch, utilizing local, organic, and in-season produce. During the high season, Collins and her staff process hundreds of pounds of produce for use in the off season.
- Collins has set up Farm-to-School relationships with local growers.
- With the help of the students she maintains twelve 4- by 8-foot gardens that also contribute food for the meals and provide a place for quiet reflection.
- Numerous vegan options are available daily, as is soymilk for those who would prefer not to drink cow's milk for health or other reasons.

Ross considers nutrition education to be very important:

- As Ross students learn about cultural history, they learn about how different foods have moved around the world and what various cultures eat. They often prepare special foods with the food service team to replicate foods from other cultures and time periods.
- Students at all grade levels receive six to eight nutrition education classes per year, and the 10th graders take a four-week course on nutrition that culminates with students researching, preparing, and critiquing a nutritious meal with the Ross chefs.
- In addition, nutrition education takes place in the dining room daily as food service staff educate students about new foods being served. Colorful photos of farms and the foods they grow decorate the dining room walls.

### **Fairfax County Public Schools**

Fairfax, VA

**Penny E. McConnell, Director Food and Nutrition Services**

Phone: 703-813-4811

penny.mcconnel@fcps.edu

One of the largest school districts in the country, Fairfax County serves 140,000 meal equivalents a day to a multi-cultural clientele that speaks over 100 languages. The food service staff in Fairfax describe director Penny McConnell as a “role model who talks nutrition, serves nutrition, and teaches nutrition.”

In her 36 years of dedication to the health and well-being of students in Fairfax County, McConnell has insisted that nutrition and health promotion take precedence over the bottom line. The Food and Nutrition Services Program she manages is called the “Energy Zone.” In addition to providing food for the students, the program produces a website, offers informational material for parents and students through school newsletters, and teaches nutrition to students.

When menus are created, the staff pays attention students’ therapeutic, cultural, religious, and personal needs and preferences:

- Students are regularly offered vegetarian and vegan menu options.
- McConnell requests frequent feedback from her clientele in the form of student taste parties and customer report cards.
- At the request of students, she offers “Nutrifax” nutrition messages in the dining rooms.

The “Energy Zone” places high value on nutrition education. One of McConnell’s recent promotions focused on the importance of consuming calcium-rich foods. Students are offered calcium-fortified juices and soymilk upon request, as well as the typical cow’s milk options. Students and parents are taught about the full range of calcium-containing foods, including green leafy vegetables, fortified cereals, and non-dairy milks.

In addition to basic classroom nutrition instruction, McConnell has developed innovative educational programs:

- In the dining room, “Give Me Five! Colors That Jive!” promotes the importance of eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- “The Energy Zone Fitness Challenge” educates staff, teachers, families, and students about the importance of walking 10,000 steps a day.
- “Fairfax Kids Cooking” teaches young students simple cooking skills, safe food handling, and nutrition basics.

## Golden Carrot “Special Mentions” for Innovative Programs

### **Albemarle County Schools (Charlottesville VA)**

Christina Pesenberger, Albemarle County Schools Food Service Director

434-295-0566; cpitsenb@albemarle.org

Vicki King, Albemarle County Food Service Nutritionist

434-295-0566; vking@albemarle.org

Deborah Murphy, Hollymead Elementary School

434-973-8301; dmk01@adelpia.net

Albemarle deserves recognition for community partnerships, respecting cultural diversity, and employing creative methods for increasing vegan and vegetarian options in the school lunch room that involve the whole student community. A few highlights:

- A pilot food education/nutrition research project is being implemented for Hollymead Elementary School for the school year 2004-2005.
- The district received funding from Whole Foods Markets for a three-day training program for teachers, food service professionals, and community volunteers.
- The district introduces “Food is Elementary Curriculum” in a series of lessons over 28 weeks. In it, children are introduced to new foods in the classroom in an interactive manner. Children taste, prepare, write about,

and talk about new foods. Lessons are organized according to places in the world and serve as an opportunity to learn about food, culture, geography, math, and more.

- Tests will be utilized to assess nutrition knowledge and retention of that knowledge.
- The focus is on using foods supplied via the USDA commodities program.
- All new foods will be plant-based, will include USDA commodity foods, and will contain an abundance of low-fat, nutrient-dense, health-promoting whole foods.
- At least eight new vegetarian entrees will be introduced in the cafeteria to the students in the study (the entire 4th grade) and to a control group of their peers.
- A volunteer will record what the intervention and control students choose.

### **Santa Monica/Malibu Unified School District (CA)**

Dona Richwine, Nutrition Specialist  
310-450-8328, ext.259

Also to Rodney Taylor, former Food Service Director (now at Riverside Unified School District)

The district deserves recognition for being an early innovator in using gardening and farmers market salad bars to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

- The salad bar is offered at all schools every day. The district considers this the main vegetarian option. It is used to introduce new vegetable items regularly: this month, the students are being introduced to jicama. In place since the early 1990s, the salad bar is a popular option: 25 percent of the students in the district choose the salad bar as lunch daily.
- Richwine also coordinates trips to the farmers market for students, during which they receive a demonstration of seasonal produce. Last year, 600 kids participated.
- Richwine offers in-class nutritional instruction. Based on the 5-a-Day program, these classes includes food-preparation techniques to facilitate learning and change behavior. Last year, 1,300 students participated.
- School Garden Project: Teachers can elect to have classroom gardens and receive support from the Farmers Market Salad Bar Program. Workshops, seedlings, tools, and other supports are offered. In return, classes donate a portion of their harvests to the salad bar. In the first year of the project, 10 harvests were donated to the salad bar.

### **South Oregon Education Service/Talent Transition site (Southern OR)**

Mary Foster, Teacher/ Community Outreach Coordinator/Food Service Provider  
541-482-5283  
abdiaziz10@charter.net

This shelter home and program for youth with disabilities is recognized for innovative community partnerships and the use of student energy and financial resources to improve foods eaten by children in non-traditional school settings.

While teaching students aged 10 to 17 in a shelter home, Foster revamped the food service system. Students were receiving foods from an establishment on trays that had been assembled in the county jail by inmates. The students instead began preparing salads, salsas, and soups daily from foods grown in an enabling garden and greenhouse at the same site as the shelter classroom. Foster says that “when the kids came to school they were like rabbits—eating all the fresh fruits and veggies they could get their hands on.”

- A 22-bed garden project encourages elders, shelter children, and developmentally disabled children to grow, cook, and eat fresh produce. Some beds are raised for easy access, and there is a children’s garden.
- The students grew the food, cooked it, learned about food ways of others, and shared the food they prepared with others. The shelter children operate a soup kitchen for the poor one day a week.

- Shelter kids grow plants for local migrant families and learned about traditional plants and foods from the elders.

Foster now has a new job where she teaches and works with students with severe disabilities. She is bringing her commitment to gardening and healthy eating to these students as well. The students now cook and eat communally; they also shop from local farm markets and grow produce in the garden and greenhouse. In addition to eating more healthfully, they learn about composting and receive vocational training in horticulture and cooking.

### **Clark County School District (Las Vegas NV)**

Dan McPartlin, Director of Food Services  
702-799-8123, ext. 210  
damcpartlin@interact.ccsd.net

Clark County is an excellent example of a school district that provides featured hot vegan and vegetarian menu items. It has also instituted policies that encourage the consumption of lower fat meals. Dan McPartlin is a pro-active food service director who has created healthier nutrition policies.

- With 275 schools offering daily food service, this is the fifth largest district in the nation.
- Dan McPartlin developed new nutrition policies. No soda or foods not meeting nutrition guidelines are served in any venue in any school. The policy also limits the amount of fat, sugar, and sodium allowed in menu items.
- McPartlin himself created and developed the policy. This is unusual: Often such policies are motivated by a parent group or advocacy organization.
- McPartlin has incorporated featured hot vegan and vegetarian menu options on some days for students to choose from.
- Free fruit is offered to every child who consumes a meal (this is in addition to the fruit offered as part of the meal).

### **Hempfield School District (Landisville PA)**

Carol Gilbert, Director, Child Nutrition Department  
717-898-5566  
carol\_gilbert@hempfield.k12.pa.us

The district deserves recognition for the Produce Pentathlon, an innovative program to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. District officials challenged themselves to get students to eat produce that was being served daily.

The resulting program has several features. The district partnered with a local supplier. Students take a pledge and fill out a pledge form. Schools within the district compete with each other and use point-of-purchase education to encourage students to take the fruit and vegetable options.

The district also introduces new healthy featured fruit and vegetable items monthly. For example, one month featured strawberries, so three or four new menu items featuring strawberries were offered.

### **Marblehead Community Charter Public School (Marblehead MA)**

William Idell, Director of Nutrition Services  
781-631-0777  
bidell@marbleheadcharter.com

The school deserves recognition for innovative and creative food offerings that lower fat intake and increase fruit and

vegetable intake. The school has also offers in-class cooking instruction and has built a climbing wall.

- William Idell, gourmet chef and director of nutrition services, offers vegan and vegetarian items daily through veggie burger, baked potato bar, or salad bar.
- A salad bar is offered to everyone daily.
- No soda is available. Only juices without added sugar and water are offered.
- Creative gourmet offerings include vegetable ratatouille, steamed broccoli with roasted garlic and lemon zest, roasted butternut squash, spinach salad, and Tuscan carrot salad.
- One cooking class was offered in the past, with a semester-long class this year
- A variety of methods are used to decrease fat in foods served to students and staff.
- Fresh fruit bowls are available all day for free.
- The school started the 'Jump up and Go' program with a grant from the Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts. To encourage children to eat well and move often, organizers built an indoor climbing wall and offer cooking classes focused on healthy Mediterranean food.