

New Look of School Milk at Dexter Community Schools

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The New Look of School Milk (NLSM) is an innovative partnership between United Dairy Industry of Michigan (UDIM) and Michigan school districts' foodservice departments. The partnerships are targeted at improving the appeal of milk by offering it in easy-to-open 8-ounce plastic bottles that are served ice-cold in a refrigerated unit in at least two flavors. The NLSM was tested nationally in a study initiated by the National Dairy Council in partnership with the American School Food Service Association (now the National School Nutrition Association). The year-long study involved 100,000 students and showed dramatic increases in school milk sales and milk consumption www.nutrition-explorations.org/sfs/schoolmilk_pilottest.asp.

Dexter Community Schools has been offering milk in a variety of flavors in 8-ounce plastic bottles since January 2007, even before the NLSM partnerships were formed. Each week the school sells an average of 11,650 units of milk through the school meal programs, with chocolate representing more than two-thirds of that total. Milk sales in the school have seen an increase of 1,100 units per week since they switched to plastic bottles. The cafeteria at Dexter's Creekside school for grades 5 and 6 is a great example of the student response to milk in plastic bottles.



Sixth grade student Andrew Milkey, right, started the plastic milk bottle recycling program at Creekside. Helping with the program this past year was fifth grade classmate Abby Mesaros, left.

"Kids love milk in plastic containers," Deb Mardeusz, Kitchen Manager at Creekside says. "They can open it and hang onto it easier and they love the flavors, especially vanilla!"

"It all goes back to taste and milk tastes better in plastic." Sara Simmerman, Director of Food and Nutrition for Dexter Community Schools, says. "Before plastic bottles we had a lot of waste, now the students are drinking more milk. You can provide kids with all kinds of healthy options, but it doesn't count if they don't drink it."

While success can be defined by revenue, average daily participation, or the adoption and implementation of a local wellness policy, these are no match for the smiles on children's faces when you ask them what they think about their school milk being served in a plastic bottle. When a group of fifth grade students was interviewed, this is what they said: "Milk tastes better in plastic" (Ben Grover), "The plastic containers are easier to open" (Nicole Reisman), "We don't have to drink the paper anymore that use to come off the carton" (Drew Glapa), "I don't have to remember to get a straw" (Emma Justice), "I like it because we can recycle" (Rachel Milkey and Zach Hartman).

Some districts have viewed recycling as a barrier to implementing plastic bottles of milk at school. Dexter instead chose to embrace recycling as an educational opportunity that extends beyond the classroom and into the school cafeteria. Sixth grade student Andrew Milkey started the plastic milk bottle recycling program at Creekside. While his name is purely coincidental, his dedication and vision toward recycling plastic bottles at school are not.

"We recycle a lot at home," Andrew says. "So when the school switched to plastic, I did some research and asked if the plastic container was recyclable." The rest, as they say, is history. Andrew is fairly modest about his efforts and gives his fellow classmates credit, saying "All students pitch in to help."

Helping with the program this past year was fifth grade classmate Abby Mesaros. Abby cheerfully reports that "this is the right thing to do instead of using cardboard and throwing it out."

"Recycling is a way of life here at Creekside and

students teaching students is so much more effective,” says Sara Simmerman. In addition to the Food and Nutrition staff, this earth-friendly approach is supported by teachers, Principal Mary Marshall and Para Professionals/parents Diana Gignac and Trina Cox who help the students coordinate the recycling program during lunch. With the addition of recycling bins provided by UDIM, Sara looks to expand the recycling program district wide.

Milk in plastic bottles is also offered during the newly implemented School Breakfast Program at Creekside and the district Snack and Beverage Program.

“It is successful and profitable,” Mary Marshall says of the School Breakfast Program. “Everyone is busy and we tend to cut out essentials – like breakfast. It’s great that the school can fill in the gap. We even offer coffee to parents who drop off their kids for breakfast.”

On average, 90 percent of the district’s K-6 students participate in the Snack and Beverage Program. Teachers work with parents at the beginning of the school year to help create a healthy snack schedule.



Kids at Dexter schools enjoy the various choices that come with single serve milk in plastic containers on the school’s lunch line.

NLSM Partnerships Deliver Results in Michigan

“Our school meal participation increased 11 percent when we offered milk in 8-ounce plastic containers.”

– Diane Tomakowski, Food Service Director at Whitmore Lake Public Schools,

“The students in our district prefer milk in plastic bottles. We increased milk consumption by 400 milks per day.”

– Terri Sincock, Food Service Director at Hartland Consolidated Schools

“The kids absolutely love the milk in plastic containers.”

– Faith Kaufmann, Food Service Director at Reading Community School

These snacks are then donated to each classroom for the entire school year. Students then go into the cafeteria to get milk and bring it back to their first hour classroom where their healthy snack is waiting.

“Teachers love this program and it is a success because teachers, administrators, and food and nutrition staff work together as a team,” says Margee Faber, Assistant Director of Food and Nutrition.

In the winter hot chocolate was offered as part of the program and more than one-third of the students took the warmed one percent chocolate milk to start their day. The Snack and Beverage Program was started by former Dexter Community Schools Foodservice Director Catherine Durocher and this year, has brought Creekside \$25,000 in revenue and \$80,000 in revenue for the district.

The efforts in the cafeteria are supported in the classroom with consistent health messages. Marsha Meyerhoff, Lifetime Fitness and Health Teacher and member of the District Wellness Committee, compliments the effort of Sara and her team. “The Food and Nutrition leaders are amazing. They are constantly looking to improve the program, such

as offering students mixed greens and baked potatoes.” At Creekside, Marsha has more than 600 kids go through her class during the year. Through lessons in the Michigan Model Health Education curriculum, they learn about the importance of breakfast, hydration, healthy snacks, label reading and the nutritional value of beverages such as milk.

“Work it and it works for you,” says Sara Simmerman. Sara and the Food and Nutrition program and staff at Dexter Community Schools make up a team of committed individuals that is working day-by-day to create school environments that offer healthy choices and consistent health messages that will change behaviors and benefit students for a lifetime.

Michigan schools that implement the United Dairy Industry of Michigan’s New Look of School Milk (NLSM) program are eligible to receive a 2007 Equipment Grant. This grant offers participating schools financial assistance to purchase milk cooler equipment for district’s meal lines. For more information on The New Look of School Milk Equipment Grants, call 1-800-241-MILK (6455).