

First Lady: Healthy Foods Belong in Schools

DARLENE SUPERVILLE, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Michelle Obama said Friday that 54 junior cooks who won a contest to make healthier yet tasty meals show the nation's schools can also turn out nutritious food that kids will actually eat.

One kid chef from each state, the District of Columbia and three U.S. territories were invited to the White House for a kids' "state dinner" hosted by the first lady.

"The truth is, is that if 8-, 9- and 10-year-old kids can cook and happily eat a healthy, tasty meal, then there is absolutely no reason why we can't get nutritious food into every school in this country that kids will actually enjoy," the first lady said.

She used the third annual event to wade into a dispute she's currently in with the School Nutrition Association over new standards for school lunches.

The association says rules requiring school meals to include more fruit, vegetables and whole grains, as well as less sodium, sugar and fat are too strict. It has been lobbying Congress to relax the rules, and a bill awaiting a vote in the Republican-controlled House would do just that.

Mrs. Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack oppose softening the rules and say most schools are meeting the standards.

The first lady said the 8- to 12-year-olds who earned a ticket to dinner all know that what they eat affects how they feel and how they do in school. "You all represent 54 reasons why we know that we can do so much better by our kids when it comes to eating healthy," said Mrs. Obama, who is working to reduce U.S. childhood obesity rates.

She sought to enlist the kids and their parents in the cause, urging the chefs to share what they've learned about healthy eating and cooking with classmates and teachers and encouraging parents to speak up at PTA and school board meetings.

While the kids' "dinner" technically was a lunch, as President Barack Obama noted when he dropped in unannounced, it had all the trappings of a more formal state dinner.

Each youngster's name was announced as he or she arrived, and butlers served samples of nine winning recipes — including "Grillin' Out Veggie Style" Black Bean Burger, Mike's Chicken and Vegetable Dumpling Cups, and Tropical Strawberry Banana Secret Smoothie — on White House china.

More than 1,500 recipes were submitted. A panel of judges that included chef Sam

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Kass, executive director of the first lady's campaign against childhood obesity, and Tanya Steel, a contributor to Epicurious foodmagazine who created the contest, chose the winners.

Epicurious and the Agriculture and Education departments sponsor the competition.

One interestingly named recipe that was not served was the "Barack-oli and Mich-room Obama-lette," a broccoli and mushroom omelet from 11-year-old Elena Hirsch of Michigan. Elena said her family likes to try new vegetable combinations in its omelets and decided to develop one for the Obamas using vegetables that represent each member. Other ingredients are "carMALIAized onions" and "Butternut SquASHA," for Obama daughters Malia and Sasha.

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