

OPRF to serve up healthy lunches for D97

Partnership is based on Evanston model

By TERRY DEAN

At least two District 97 schools will have lunches prepared by Oak Park and River Forest High School next school year, part of a pilot program to provide healthier food to students in the district.

"I saw this as an opportunity to enter into an agreement and a collaborative effort with the high school," said Dist. 97 Supt. Constance Collins.

Collins will formally announce the program and participating schools at tonight's Dist. 97 Board of Education meeting. OPRF, which cooks all of its own meals, will prepare, deliver and distribute hot meals to the schools. At least one middle school and possibly two elementary schools will take part.

Collins said parents in Dist. 97 and the PTO Council have been pushing for healthier choices on school menus. The healthier menu next year will have more fruits, vegetables and whole grain offerings, Collins said.

Preferred Meal Systems, Inc., a private vendor providing meals to schools in Illinois, will continue to prepare meals for other schools, Collins said.

Supt./Principal Susan Bridge confirmed that "we do have the capacity to provide food services for some of her schools."

The actual amount Dist. 97 will pay the high school will be worked out by next year, said Bridge.

Micheline Piekarski, director of Food and Nutrition Services for OPRF, said the schools would receive bulk meals, delivered by her staff and served by Dist. 97 lunch staff.

The high school will also be responsible for providing plates and utensils, and collecting them after lunch periods.

"The complete product will come from my

'Courageous Conversation' at Beye

Beye Elementary School will host a "Courageous Conversations" dinner tonight in the Beye Commons from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The dinner and discussion will focus on the school's achievement gap, along with issues relating to race, class and school climate. Beye, 230 N. Cuyler Ave., hosted a forum on the school's achievement gap in January, and a lecture by Nile Gossett in February on student achievement. Babysitting for parents will be provided. For more information, call 524-3070.

kitchen," said Piekarski.

The pilot program mirrors a similar model undertaken by Dist. 202 Evanston Township High School, which prepares meals for all elementary schools in its district. Evanston H.S. took part in a forum on healthy lunches at OPRF in March, sponsored by Oak Park's Seven Generations Ahead. Administrators and officials from districts 97 and 200 visited Evanston in April to look at its food program. Collins said the idea for the program was inspired in part by Evanston's model.

Piekarski said she has wanted to establish such a partnership in the past.

"It's a win-win for both districts," she said. "It gives us a little extra business, and it gives the students in Dist. 97 more choices for healthier foods. I'm looking forward to this collaboration."

Collins said though the district's meals met Federal Food and Drug Administration guidelines, parents still wanted alternatives.

"The high school said they could provide some of the healthier choices that the parents wanted."

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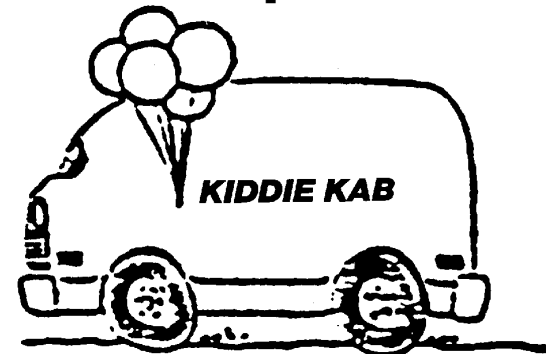
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