



Photo by Terry Dean

**EAT YOUR VEGGIES:** Dr. Philippa Norman speaking at the Healthy Lunch Forum.

# More lunch choices mean healthier kids

## OPFR forum offers advice for healthy alternatives

By TERRY DEAN

The old saying “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” was a convenient way to get more people to eat healthy—particularly children. But in recent years, apples and bananas gave way to Snickers bars, Twinkies and soda pop for many youths.

So what’s the solution? Offering more choices in healthier foods—

and not just a one-time offering—was one of the solutions offered at last Wednesday’s Healthy Lunch Forum at Oak Park and River Forest High School.

Oak Park-based Seven Generations Ahead hosted the forum on March 1. A panel of health experts discussed child nutrition issues with school officials from both districts 97 and 200. A theme last Wednesday was that what children eat impacts their learning as well as their health.

Fruits and vegetables, and whole grains and nuts, for instance, increase the nutritional requirements headed to the brain,

said Dr. Philippa Norman, a traditional and nutritional health practitioner.

Fruits and vegetables, she said, are considered “Power House” groups for providing many nutrients while such items as walnuts are good sources for proteins. Whole grains are the most nutritious foods, said Norman, but fewer kids under the age of 16 are eating such foods.

“Fifty percent of elementary students don’t eat even one piece of fruit all day,” she said. “The research shows that kids for the first time really have a high-fat diet [and] they’re not exercising for a number of reasons.”

Kids spending more time playing video games and watching television are two factors, she said. Today’s youth are also facing increased health risks, panelists pointed out.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since 1980 the percentage of young people who are overweight more than tripled. Among youth ages 6 to 19, 16 percent, or more than 9 million, are considered overweight. Such numbers put kids at risk for such illnesses as asthma and diabetes.

“Obesity and diabetes have reached epidemic proportions in our country,” said Gary Cuneen, executive director of Seven Generations Ahead. “More and more programs across the country are beginning to talk about this.”

State and local school boards have already begun to abstract vending machines of junk food while increasing nutritional offerings throughout school buildings, Cuneen said.

Looking at the lunch menus of both districts’ websites, District 200 received high marks for its lunch menu from panelist Anupama Joshi, director of the National Farm to School Program for the Center for Food and Justice in California.

She said schools need to dispel the myth that kids won’t eat fruits and vegetables. If schools provide kids with choices, they’ll take advantage of it, she said.

“When school districts are trying to make changes, you can’t offer it to kids only one time. You also have to educate kids and offer it several times before the kids will eat it.”

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### D97 seeks wellness policy input

Oak Park Dist. 97 is seeking community members to participate in drafting its wellness policy for the elementary and middle schools. The Wellness Council will hold an initial meeting on Tuesday, March 14, in the Holmes Elementary School auditorium at 508 N. Kenilworth from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Volunteers should be residents of Dist. 97 or a Dist. 97 staff member. Those looking to sit on the council must be present at the March 14, meeting. For more information, contact Carol Theesfeld, coordinator for Elementary Teaching and Learning at 708/383-7808 or [ctheesfeld@op97.org](mailto:ctheesfeld@op97.org).