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Integrity Academy Wins National School Lunch Award

Doctors Group Presents Private School with the Golden Carrot Award to Celebrate Plant-Based Menu

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine—a national doctors group—awards Integrity Academy in Austin a runner-up prize in the 2016 Golden Carrot Awards. The private school will receive a \$750 cash prize in recognition of its exceptionally healthful plant-based lunch menu and outstanding health promotion initiatives.

Integrity Academy serves its learners aged 3-13 a fully vegan, organic, and made-from-scratch menu packed with fresh, whole foods. Lunches are served family style, with students and teachers eating together daily. Each meal starts with soup and a green salad, followed by a hot plate with grains, legumes, and vegetables topped with a seed-based sauce.

A typical meal includes red lentil vegetable soup and garden greens with pumpkin seeds, followed by soft vegetable tacos with guacamole and cilantro. Another consists of butternut squash soup and salad with almond mint dressing, followed by brown rice and kidney beans with sautéed vegetables.

Establishing good nutrition habits during elementary school can dramatically reduce students' chances for developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and other diet-related diseases later in life. Today, just 1 in 5 American children eat the recommended five daily servings of fruits and vegetables, while most children's diets exceed upper limits for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. In Texas, childhood obesity already affects [19.1 percent](#) of children.

"Integrity Academy is setting up its students for success both today and in the future by serving nutrient-packed, plant-based meals for lunch," says Physicians Committee senior dietitian Karen Smith, R.D. "Not only are these foods helping students stay focused and energized in the classroom, but they're also reducing long-term risk for chronic diseases."

To get students excited about eating healthy lunches, the school integrates nutrition education into the curriculum. Integrity Academy students participate in afternoon nutrition classes, where they learn to cook their own healthy snacks. Typical snacks include fruit rainbows, banana "sushi," and blueberry smoothies. The school also regularly hosts guest lecturers to educate parents and the general public about nutrition.

"It's great to not have to pack a lunch, but this isn't your regular cafeteria food. The lunches are healthier and more delicious than anything I could pack!" notes one Integrity Academy Parent. Another parent recalls visiting the school's cafeteria and finding her young son engaged in a "kale eating contest" with his friends.

The Physicians Committee established the Golden Carrot Award in 2004 to recognize schools who go above and beyond to serve healthful lunches. The national doctors group looks for programs that encourage kids to eat fresh fruits and vegetables and that offer vegetarian, low-fat, whole-grain, and nondairy options.

For an interview with Integrity Academy's Executive Director Ali Ronder, M.Ed. or Karen Smith, R.D., please contact Laura Anderson at landerson@pcrm.org or 202-527-7396.

To learn more about the Golden Carrot Awards, please visit HealthySchoolLunches.org.