

### PRIVATE SCHOOL: AURORA WALDORF SCHOOL West Falls, New York

Aurora Waldorf School aims to feed the minds, bodies, and souls of its 220 students—and thanks in part to stellar, from-scratch meals, it's doing just that. In the spring of 2010, the school began selling all-natural soups by the quart for busy parents to serve their families at home. The modest profit was put toward jump-starting a school lunch program last fall (previously, all their students—in preschool through high school—packed their lunches), with meals made from fresh, whole ingredients that are as local and organic as possible. “Now parents don’t have to worry about packing lunches and know their children are still eating healthful foods,” says Lisabeth Abt Pieters, the school’s marketing and development director and co-founder of the school’s lunch program.

In addition to serving not-so-standard fare like macaroni and cheese with pureed butternut squash and sausage escarole soup, there’s something else unique about Aurora Waldorf’s lunch program: There’s just one hot lunch entrée per day (with a separate option available for kids with special dietary needs), and nearly everyone eats at the same time. “It helps build community. Having a conversation about the food is something easy that everyone can partake in, which builds enthusiasm,” says Pieters.

The school recently launched a guest chef series: Regional chefs are challenged to prepare a local, organic meal on a limited budget for the entire school. “We tried it last spring with a vegetarian sushi chef, and all the kids loved it,” says Pieters. This



school year, they’ll have 10 different chefs, including a soul food chef, a vegan chef, and a gluten-free chef.

And the humble soups that started it all? At \$7.50 a quart, it’s still the biggest source of revenue for the Aurora Waldorf lunch program. “Wednesday is still soup day, and it’s always popular. We usually sell 30 or 40 quarts every week!” Pieters says.

**MOST POPULAR LUNCH:** Brown rice bowls with roasted root veggies

**RECENT HEALTHY UPDATE:** Pasta primavera with local vegetables and pineapple chicken curry

**STUDENTS’ REACTION IN ONE WORD:** Joy!

**WHAT PARENTS CAN DO:** If you don’t like the food your child’s school serves, stop paying for it. Then, connect with other parents who feel the same way—and let the school know. “If no one’s buying the junk food or frozen pizza, schools will be forced to do something different, because in the end it’s about their bottom line,” says Pieters.

Marygrace Taylor is KIWI’s staff writer.

## WHAT MAKES A CRUSADERS-WORTHY LUNCH PROGRAM?

Here are some of the criteria we looked for in winning programs—they’re also good places to start for improving your school’s food.

### INCLUSION OF WHOLE GRAINS

Whole grains offer more protein, nutrients, and fiber than their refined counterparts.

**Suggest these swaps:** Serve pizza on 100 percent whole wheat crust; swap refined pasta for whole wheat; trade white rice for brown.

### LOW SUGAR CONTENT

The added sugar in foods like jelly and ketchup pack in extra calories—but zero extra nutrition.

**Suggest these swaps:** Serve low-sugar drinks like plain milk or 100 percent fruit juice instead of flavored milk or juice blends; fresh fruit instead of canned.

### EMPHASIS ON PRODUCE

Kids should get 1.5 cups of fruit and 2 cups of veggies each day, but most eat far less.

**Suggest these swaps:** Sub roasted vegetables like sweet potatoes for French fries; offer raw veggies for dipping in hummus instead of pretzels and dip.

### USE OF NATURAL AND ORGANIC PRODUCTS

Natural and organic foods are free of the artificial preservatives and pesticides associated with a range of health problems.

**Suggest these swaps:** Natural and organic foods can be more expensive than conventional ones, so first switch out the foods on the Environmental Working Group’s Dirty Dozen list, [ewg.org](http://ewg.org). Learn more about lunches at [myhealthyschool.com](http://myhealthyschool.com).