

New Year ~ New and Improved Nutritional Outlook

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Dear ABCDLatino friends, I wish you all a happy New Year. In this 2018, I'd like to share a bit about Agri-Business Child Development's (ABCD) renewed focus on **nutrition** as a vital area of high quality, comprehensive early childhood education.

By now you might know that ABCD serves a great number of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and their families in its centers located across New York State. ABCD's mission is lovingly related to the well-being of agriculture and the strength of the migrant work force.

We understand the hard work and the dedication of the families we serve. They have a symbiotic relationship to the land and the growing seasons. In respecting that hard work and with the knowledge that nutrition is important for the growth and learning of ABCD children, ABCD staff work every day to learn about and perfect the nutritional services offered to ABCD children and families.

ABCD's mission is as closely related to supporting agriculture as it is to preparing ABCD families to achieve a healthier, successful future. Every ABCD classrooms follows strict federal, state and local regulations with the added bonus of always respecting the products grown in the fields our families help grow.

ABCD's teachers hold early childhood education degrees and credentials that have prepared them to understand the impact of nutrition and brain development, physical wellbeing and educational

success. We are lucky to have the support of a Statewide ABCD Health and Nutrition Specialist who is continuously learning about the best, most sophisticated and latest research in regards to nutrition.

ABCD children learn early on to respect the food they eat and to respect the work their parents do. ABCD children learn to eat a variety of fresh, New York grown food. They have little plots of land in their respective centers to experiment in the planting and growing of diverse vegetables and fruits they plant, water, grow, collect and eat.

ABCD cooks are experts in their fields, masters of their “well-oiled” kitchens. As the saying goes, “the heart of each center is in its kitchen”. Menus are planned in conjunction with NYS certified nutritionists and ABCD parents and staff. Meals reflect the culture of the children served. On any given day children might have tortillas and beans as well as wontons or pierogis. We are nothing if not multicultural and respectful of all foods and cultures. Variety is celebrated!

Children eat around their little tables with their teachers in a family style. The teachers follow age appropriate guidance as they encourage those who are ready to pour their own milk, try new textures, flavors and colors. The children talk with each other, share sensations and feelings and experience a healthy relationship with the fresh foods they are discovering.

As an ABCD teacher, with the added experience of having being a migrant farmworker myself, I admire the openness children have to eating well and healthy. I know firsthand how hard life is when working in the fields. All that hard work pays off when you see a child savor the fruit of your labor.

I am always in awe of children’s potential. I am proud of their willingness to experiment and learn. The earlier children try a variety of

foods, the more open they are to trying more. The earlier they start eating healthy, the less chance of obesity, diabetes, tooth decay and low body esteem later on.

If you look around you'll see, food brings people together. ABCD parent meetings are happening places where people meet and talk and get to share their voice. Integration is facilitated by the sharing of foods. Health is promoted by the sharing of new and improved healthy recipes cooked mindfully and with love. I thank ABCD often, mostly as I eat lunch with the children as every meal reminds me of the various cultures that live in harmony together under the center's roof.

My great grandmother, Doña Mary, made tortillas in a "comal" by the skirts of a famous Mexican volcano called Iztaccihuatl, or the "sleeping woman". Who would have thought that generations later I'll be eating freshly made tortillas from a perfectly modern stove in the kitchen of an ABCD center in Kingston, NY, by the skirts of the Hudson River.