

Greenwich students learn why they should pick fresh fruit over juice and other healthy eating tips



Jessica Simms, Staff writer

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GREENWICH — Julian Curtiss Elementary School fifth graders eagerly raised their hands during a nutrition program Tuesday, excited to answer questions about what foods they consider to be "fresh" and whether they prefer juice over water.

"It depends on the juice," one student said, while another pointed out that drinking orange juice, for example, will give a person the same vitamins as if they ate an orange.

Mother-son duo Lauren Berger and Ben Finkel asked the students these questions during their presentation of the program, "REAL Food is Fuel," which educates elementary school students about making healthy food choices and properly reading nutrition labels.



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After the students shared their thoughts on juice, Finkel and Berger explained to the students just how much sugar is in a glass of juice.



"Juice, even if it is advertised as all natural and no sugar added will still have a ton of sugar in it, almost as much as soda sometimes," Finkel told the students.

"Every glass of orange juice needs about four oranges in that one glass," Finkel said. "So you're taking the sugars from all four oranges that you would've been eating and putting them into one glass, which is why there is so much sugar."

Berger and her friend Marla Felton launched their company, REAL Cookies, in 2021 when they were trying to create a cookie that everyone in their families could enjoy — those with and without dietary restrictions.



“We couldn’t find desserts that met the needs of everyone that actually tasted good and we ate every single thing that was out there, so during the pandemic, we started working on recipes,” Berger said.

Their products are gluten-free, grain-free, dairy-free, plant-based and kosher. Berger added that the cookies are sweetened with maple syrup.

Last year, Berger and Felton led the "REAL Food is Fuel" program together at Julian Curtiss. However, this year Felton couldn't make it, so Berger's son Finkel, who attended Julian Curtiss, took Felton's place as one of the program leaders.

“I am really happy that I could come and give back in a sense,” Finkel said.



Berger and Finkel kicked off their program by teaching the students how to read nutrition labels, the importance is of knowing where food comes from and how food companies utilize specific colors in packaging. Then, the students walked to a nearby Whole Foods to see how these skills can be used in a real life setting.



“We just wanted to increase their overall awareness about nutrition labels and that the government requires companies to put them on their products,” Berger said. “Even if it is a fresh fruit, you still have to know where it comes from, to think about what is the carbon footprint that it takes to get an orange from Chile to Connecticut and how many buses or airplanes it has been on and how does it ripen. It just gets you thinking about our food system.”

As a Yale University football quarterback, Finkel said the tools that they taught the students on Tuesday are those that he uses on a daily basis.



“I really hope that the kids keep (the tools they learned) in the back of their mind, even if they’re not thinking at this moment like ‘Oh I should eat healthy. I should eat this,’ ” Finkel said. “It’s all about balance, but just to get them thinking about ‘Maybe I should check the nutritional label. I wonder what is in this’ and ‘Is this good? Is this bad?’ That is something that I do now, especially with football.”

