

AMERICAN VOICES

# One Bite at a Time

This middle school principal is part of the growing movement to get healthy food in schools. BY CINDY HATCHER

**NAME** Carland Washington

**AGE** 36

**OCCUPATION** Principal

**In the two years** Carland Washington has overseen West Prep Academy middle school in New York City, he's witnessed a changing view on how his students experience healthier food.

"Children are growing up in urban America and the only place they see relatively fresh produce is at their local deli. We're re-educating them to know that you get just as full eating healthy food," he says.

West Prep Academy partners with Wellness in the Schools, a program that pairs a chef with cafeteria staff and students. Each month focuses on a different produce item. When they studied beans, for example, the kids learned to make

vegetable chili and hummus. "It's really broadened their horizons," Washington says. "We were chopping red peppers and one kid thought they were tomatoes. It's revealing that some of the students couldn't identify the basics we take for granted."

Washington's concerns extend beyond the boundaries of his own school. He hopes to encourage other communities to reimagine how they promote food choices and prioritize learning about health. "Home economics and nutrition classes are just as important as math and sports," he says. "We've got to educate the whole child—bring healthy food into the classroom, let the kids play and experiment and taste so they can engage and understand its uses and purpose."

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### LEARN MORE

There's likely an organization in your community working to improve food choices in public schools.

Here are three great places to start.

**WELLNESS IN THE SCHOOLS**  
([wellnessintheschools.org](http://wellnessintheschools.org))

Encourages healthier eating, increased physical activity, and nutrition learning in 75 public schools around the country.

**SEED LIFE SKILLS**  
([seedlifekills.org](http://seedlifekills.org))

Championed by chef Hugh Acheson, it's home ec for the modern kid, teaching real life skills and valuable lessons about food and finances.

**FOODCORPS**  
([foodcorps.org](http://foodcorps.org))

A nationwide network of farm-to-cafeteria table programs that show kids how to grow, cook, and appreciate their own take on healthful foods.



In the U.S., more than one in three children under 18 are overweight or obese.

Source: CDC

PHOTOGRAPHY: JUSTIN WALKER