



Will a Vegan Public School Open Next Fall in Florida?

By Tami Fertig
April 30 2019

[King Charter School](#) in Pinellas County, Florida, set to open next fall, could become the country's first plant-based public school—notwithstanding one major hurdle. In order to qualify for funding through the USDA's National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, the school would need to offer optional dairy milk to its students.

The [nutrition standards for school meals](#), which the USDA last updated in 2012, do not allow for nondairy milk or other calcium- and protein-rich plant foods to take the place of dairy, despite a growing body of evidence that milk does not [prevent stress fractures](#) or [promote bone health](#) in children and young adults.

"It's important to realize that most people around the world do not tolerate dairy products, and many cultures don't include them in their traditional diet patterns—other foods provide these nutrients in their diets," says Sharon Palmer, RDN, author of [The Plant-Powered Diet](#). She also notes, "Research does show that vegan diet patterns, which include no dairy products, are linked with multiple health benefits."

The King Charter School board says that a team of nutritionists will help design the school menu to include plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other components of a whole-food, plant-based diet, which has been shown to prevent chronic diseases.

The Florida charter is not alone in its mission: A [2018 report](#) from nonprofit group Friends of the Earth highlighted a growing movement of school districts serving more plant-based meals. King Charter board member Maria Solanki hopes not only to join them, building King Charter with funds raised via a [GoFundMe campaign](#), but to eventually expand and open locations throughout the country, with or without federal aid.

To learn more about the whole-food, plant-based way of eating, check out our [Plant-Based Primer](#).