

Cooking Matters

Centauri Middle School, North Conejos School District

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As a rural community, North Conejos School District understands the importance of increasing student and family awareness on available community resources. One way Centauri Middle School (CMS) accomplished this was by partnering with Cooking Matters, a program that “provides resources to help parents and caregivers develop their skills when shopping for and cooking healthy foods on a budget.” The goal was to increase student and family knowledge of their community resources, as well as utilize the community resources to meet the needs of students. Many don’t know how to cook for themselves from scratch but have expressed a desire to learn; Cooking Matters teaches meal planning, budgeting, cooking from scratch, and basic cooking skills that benefit members of the school and community.

The school counselor, in partnership with CMS' PTO, surveyed students about what clubs they wanted to see developed at CMS. Many asked for a cooking club. Familiar with Cooking Matters, the school counselor reached out to see if they would come to the middle school and gear the program to the students.

CMS hosted the cooking club with Cooking Matters in the cafeteria once a week for four weeks. Participants from the elementary, middle, and high schools all participated. Cooking Matters staff brought a variety of grocery items with certain cooking skills planned for the students to learn. The students were put in groups and worked with each other on cutting/knife skills, cooking over an open flame, learning about nutrition, and eating the rainbow, to name a few. Students not only learned cooking skills, but also the benefits of budgeting and how to use common household staples to make a meal. The students enjoyed time with friends and family in a relaxed environment while also learning skills they will use for their lifetimes. The students kept the recipes to use at home and began to build their own recipe book.



Families filled out an evaluation form after each class for the instructor to have, though the school did not have a major part in the evaluation. The school counselor and the instructor of the Cooking Matters class kept in contact throughout the week to reflect on each class. At the end of the four weeks, the instructor and the school counselor discussed future implementation and a few ways to implement the program that would allow for more students to join. Ideas included holding the class during the school day, offering Cooking Matters in multiple buildings so the class can cater to the different age levels more appropriately, and offering the class at different times of the year to catch students when they aren’t busy with after school activities - all of which is good advice for anyone looking to replicate the practice.