

Culinary Club

Eagle County School District

Eagle, CO

To refresh and reinvigorate YouthPower365 (YP365) Middle School Afterschool Explorers programming, staff conducted a student survey to understand interests. Cooking was an overwhelming favorite student interest, and the concept of Culinary Club was created.

The Culinary Club coordinator position drew the interest of a local executive chef, Santosh Koradi. He envisioned the engagement of middle school students in the culinary arts to involve their families; consider affordable, healthier eating practices; grow confidence; build community; and introduce students to a future career. He guided the curriculum development, as well as weekly lesson plans and meals. The YouthPower365 staff connected with the local food pantry, The Community Market, to provide many of the ingredients.



Culinary Club meets once a week at each of Eagle County's four middle schools for two hours after school. The program models and teaches safe cooking skills to allow the students to prepare the weekly recipe. In some cases, the students have provided ideas for recipes that they would like to cook. Other times, family members attend as a "guest chef" and teach the class a recipe important to their family. Students learn about other cultures and family traditions, as well as find pride in sharing their own culture and traditions. Each semester ends in a Family Dinner, where students cook a 3-course meal to demonstrate their learnings, and families are invited to join together in community and celebration.

In the Spring of 2024, families of the students enrolled in each Culinary Club were invited to an offsite community organization to learn to cook a new recipe. Most ingredients were provided by The Community Market, and each family left with a bag of groceries. One of the middle school counselors noted, "Students are able to directly link the skills they learn with their real world and showed a strong sense of pride in their accomplishments at the first Family Dinner event."

At the beginning and end of the school year, students in Culinary Club were given the [Survey of Academic & Youth Outcomes – Youth Survey](#) to assess overall program experience, future expectations, sense of competence, and program impacts. Additionally, the program underwent an [Assessment of Program Practices Tool](#) observation to assess the effectiveness of student outcomes in the areas of learning and skill building, program organization and structure, and supportive social environment. Teachers and staff who organize and facilitate the program, as well as families of enrolled students, were also surveyed and met with at the end of the school year. Changes were made for the next school year based on these surveys and in-person meetings.

Challenges included low student participation at certain times of the school year due to other after school sports and activities. Managing student behaviors was also a challenge at times, but often turned into an opportunity to strengthen relationships with families.

To replicate the Culinary Club, consider the assets within your community. Communicate the initial idea and engage culinary expertise for implementation as well as a connection to further learning and possible careers.